

# Exploring Translation Strategies and Methods in the English Translation of Guangxi Tourism Texts under the Relevance Theory

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**Abstract:** With the acceleration of economic globalization and the improvement of people's quality of life, tourism has emerged as a new trend, driving economic growth and facilitating cultural exchanges and friendships. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, with its unique landscape featuring picturesque mountains and seascapes, attracts tourists from both home and abroad. The English translation of its tourism texts serves as a vital window for foreign tourists to understand China. This study focuses on the English translation of Guangxi's tourism texts, analyzing the translation process and exploring strategies for addressing cultural differences to ensure accurate information conveyance and cross-cultural communication. The results indicate that Relevance Theory exhibits significant advantages in the translation of communicative texts, particularly the principle of optimal relevance, which is crucial for enhancing the quality of English translations of tourism texts and achieving effective external publicity.

**Keywords:** Relevance Theory, Translation Methods, Translation Strategies, Tourism Texts.

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## 1. Research Background

As the trend of economic globalization intensifies and people's quality of life steadily improves, exchanges and interactions between nations and ethnic groups have significantly strengthened. Against this backdrop, tourism has gained popularity. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is home to the largest Zhuang ethnic population in China. Bordering Vietnam, Laos, and other Southern Asian countries, this region boasts unique karst topography, splendid cultural relics and historic sites, and rich ethnic customs. Guangxi has a long history, with numerous ancient cultural and revolutionary memorial sites, including ancient human remains, ancient architecture, ancient cultural ruins, ancient water conservancy projects, stone carvings, and tombstones. There are over 140 key protected cultural relics approved by the State Council and the Autonomous Region government. Historic and cultural cities like Guilin, Liuzhou, and Beihai are increasingly favored and noticed by international friends. In this context, the quality of tourism text translation becomes increasingly crucial, as it significantly impacts tourists' cognitive experience and emotional resonance. Therefore, it is essential to reasonably select translation strategies and methods to accurately convey the core communicative intention of tourism texts. However, the current state of English translation for Guangxi's tourism texts is far from satisfaction with widespread issues such as cultural misunderstandings, cultural defaults, logical confusion, and translation inconsistencies. For example, some translations literally render "龙" as "dragon," a choice highly prone to ambiguity and misunderstanding. In Chinese culture, the dragon symbolizes auspiciousness and power, whereas in Western culture, "dragon" is often perceived as a symbol of evil. Such cultural differences can easily lead to tourists' misinterpretation and confusion.

A literature search on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) reveals that research on the English translation of Guangxi tourism texts has primarily focused on theoretical

frameworks such as Functional Equivalence Theory and Skopos Theory. Although a small number of studies have explored the selection of translation strategies and methods from the perspective of Relevance Theory, research in this area remains generally insufficient. Given the strong communicative function of tourism texts, it is found that Relevance Theory demonstrates significant guiding value in the translation process of tourism texts, powerfully explaining the main translation methods and strategies employed for such texts. Specifically, translation techniques such as adding annotations for culture-loaded words can greatly enhance the readability of the translation, enabling readers to understand the meaning and artistic conception of the original text with minimal effort, thereby achieving optimal relevance. Therefore, this thesis aims to utilize Relevance Theory to delve into the selection of methods and strategies in tourism text translation, so as to improve translation.

## 2. Previous Studies on Tourism Translation

Research on tourism translation within China has reached a relatively mature stage, attracting in-depth exploration by numerous scholars. Among them, scholar Jin Huikang has conducted unique analyses from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, while scholar Kang Ning has carried out meticulous research at the discourse level. However, it is noteworthy that current domestic research on tourism texts predominantly focuses on English-Chinese translation, often from perspectives like cross-cultural communication or Skopos Theory, while research from the perspective of Relevance Theory remains relatively scarce. Regarding the choice of translation strategies, domestic research exhibits a polarized trend, leaning excessively towards either domestication or foreignization strategies, lacking the flexibility for detailed analysis based on specific contexts. This area still requires further optimization and refinement. Research on Chinese tourism texts outside China is primarily based on their own cultural background and cognitive

environment, often overlooking the uniqueness of foreign cultures and contexts. Furthermore, many tourist attractions fail to adequately consider the importance of bilingual materials when providing introductory information, undoubtedly increasing the difficulty for tourists in understanding.

In conclusion, research on tourism text translation in both domestic and international academia primarily focuses on cross-cultural and functional perspectives. However, several shortcomings still exist in this field. In view of this, this study intends to adopt the new perspective of Relevance Theory to deeply explore how to flexibly select translation strategies for different text types, aiming to achieve optimal relevance effects and further enhance the quality of translations.

### **3. Application of Relevance Theory in Guangxi Tourism Translation**

#### **3.1. Brief introduction to Relevance Theory**

Relevance Theory is an influential cognitive-pragmatic theory. Sperber and Wilson developed Relevance Theory based on the cognitive linguistic theory, starting from the Relevance maxim of the Cooperative Principle. They argue that discourse is an ostensive-inferential dynamic process of interpretation and cognition, an intra- or inter-lingual interpretive activity involving communicative acts with informative and communicative intentions [3].

Relevance Theory posits that successful communication between interlocutors depends primarily on two factors. First, the fundamental goal of the interlocutors is to achieve mutual manifestness. In other words, the speaker aims to ensure the hearer accurately understands the conveyed information. Second, communication is essentially a cognitive process, the core of which lies in the interlocutors achieving tacit coordination and understanding of intentions through a shared cognitive pattern-relevance. Different regions have distinct knowledge structures, inevitably leading to different inferential outcomes. Speakers must not only manifest an intention to convey certain information, but also manifest the intention to make that informative intention mutually manifest to the hearer during communication[9]. Specifically, the communicator conveys their intention by performing utterance acts, and the receiver relies on inferences drawn from these acts to interpret the communicative intention. In this process, seeking relevance becomes the core strategy for interpreting discourse information, involving explicit inference aimed at extracting meaning from utterances. In the dynamic process of communication, optimizing relevance means the hearer needs to deeply interpret and process the speaker's verbal information with minimal cognitive effort, and accurately locate the appropriate meaning of the utterance within their broadest cognitive environment. Relevance Theory further proposes that an individual's cognitive structure consists of logical knowledge, lexical information, and encyclopedic knowledge, gradually forming their unique cognitive environment through accumulated experience.

The introduction of Relevance Theory into China can be traced back to the late 1980s. In the 1990s, young scholars like Zhang Yafei and Qu Weiguo conducted more in-depth explorations of Relevance Theory. With the continuous advancement of research, this theory has shown vigorous vitality in the field of cross-cultural studies and has provided valuable guidance for the English translation of tourism texts.

The core proposition of Relevance Theory in translation is that the target text should establish sufficient relevance with the target readers, meaning it should provide them with adequate contextual effects. Translators need to fully consider the cognitive environment and cultural background of the target readers, and accordingly flexibly choose appropriate translation strategies and methods to accurately convey the communicative intention and implicit meaning of the source text. For example, when dealing with vocabulary rich in cultural connotations, translators can employ strategies such as amplification, omission, or adaptation to make the translation more aligned with the reading habits and cognitive patterns of the target readers, thereby achieving optimal relevance.

#### **3.2. Problems in Guangxi Tourism Translation**

##### **3.2.1. Inconsistent Translation**

According to the definition in the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, the term "translation" encompasses a wide range of content in tourism translation, including the translation of elements such as place names, personal names, poetry, and folklore. A prominent issue in the translation of Guangxi tourism texts is inconsistency. Specifically, the English translations of these texts often vary. For example, "灵渠" has been translated as "Lingqu Canal," "Ling Canal," "Lingqu," etc. The lack of uniformity in translated names challenges the establishment of a "faithfulness" standard in translation. It should be noted that the readers of these translated tourism texts are primarily foreigners, who rely on them to understand the information provided. However, translation inconsistencies can easily cause confusion and hinder effective communication.

##### **3.2.2. Cultural Misinterpretation**

Culture is the foundation and substance of tourism, and tourism is the carrier, disseminator, and promoter of culture. Influenced by differences in thinking patterns, behavioral norms, value orientations, and language transfer, significant differences exist between Chinese and Western cultures, leading to frequent cultural misinterpretations. For example, translating "龙象塔" located in the Qingxiu Mountain Scenic Area in Nanning as "Longxiang Tower." The word "Tower" in English typically refers to "a tall, narrow building or part of a building, especially of a church or castle," which may not correspond well with "龙象塔," a pagoda associated with Buddhism. Without explicit clarification, this translation can easily lead to misunderstanding.

##### **3.2.3. Cultural Default**

When translating tourism texts, it is essential to consider the socio-cultural differences between source language readers and target language readers. These readers live in different environments and possess different cultural background knowledge that is obvious to source language readers becomes a gap, a "default," for target language readers. Addressing this cultural default component is crucial for ensuring effective communication and understanding in translation. Translating tourist attractions is not merely about conveying information and cultural connotations to foreign tourists, but also, it aims to evoke their receptiveness and align their reactions and feelings with those of the source language readers to the original message. Translation is not only a process of decoding and encoding linguistic signs; it is also a means to facilitate communication between different

cultures and enhance mutual understanding among different ethnic groups. For instance, Gongcheng, a county of Guangxi, whose specialty "油茶" as "Youcha" without providing relevant background knowledge will undoubtedly lead to confusion, reducing readability and hindering the effective transmission of cultural information. When translating such culturally specific vocabulary, it is essential to provide necessary explanations and background knowledge as much as possible to ensure accurate comprehension by the target language readers.

### 3.3. Translation Strategies and Methods for Guangxi Tourism Texts from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

German scholar Gutt, in his work *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, combined the pragmatic principle of relevance with general principles of cognitive psychology, transplanted the core ideas of Relevance Theory into translation studies, and proposed Relevance Translation Theory, studying translation from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective [7]. In the process of translating tourism texts, "translators must base their work on their own aesthetic perception, engage in prudent and repeated aesthetic experiences, and select aesthetic reproduction methods compatible with the aesthetic composition of the original text." [5]. Therefore, we should carefully consider aesthetic approaches and forms of expression during translation. Strategy in translation refers to the collection of principles and plans adopted to achieve specific translation purposes. Translation strategies can be divided into domestication and foreignization [10].

#### 3.3.1. Translation Methods under the Domestication Strategy

##### (1) Imitation

Imitation refers to the translator not being confined by the minute details of the original meaning, nor restricted by its vocabulary and syntactic structure. Instead, the translator "takes the original as a model to follow" [1], presenting the gist or main idea of the original content through abridgement, omission, or expansion.

##### Example [1]

ST: 漓江有着不同的季节, 不同的气候, 自然有它不同的神韵。晴天的漓江, 青峰倒映特别迷人。可烟雨漓江, 赐给人们的却是另外一种美的享受; 细雨如纱, 飘飘沥沥; 云雾缭绕, 似在仙宫, 如入梦境[4]。

TT: The scenery here changes with weathers: In fine days, green mountains are reflected in crystal water while in a misty rain, a fairy texture covers the water with drifting mist and drizzle.

Analysis: Ancient Chinese literati highly valued artistic conception, believing that "viewing flowers through mist" provides infinite space for imagination, embodying romance. Chinese tourism texts naturally follow this tradition, emphasizing impressionism and the combination of the abstract and concrete. However, English differs from Chinese. Influenced by figures like Aristotle and Belinsky, English focuses on representing things as they should be realistic. Therefore, in English translation, it is necessary to transform the abstract into the concrete to align with the norms and standards of the target language's cultural environment. The underlined sentence is rich in artistic. According to Nord, if the original content adversely affects the 'appellative' function of the translation, the translator can abridge or omit certain

original information [2]. The translation employs the imitation method, abridging the original text and depicting the appearance of rain and mist from an intuitive visual perspective, transforming the abstract into the concrete. This achieves the informative intention of Relevance Theory. However, the essence of this sentence lies in the word "drifting." This adjective vividly expresses the image of drizzling rain and slowly spreading mist, which shows a dynamic scene. Target readers can easily visualize this scene upon reading it, appreciating the breathtaking beauty of the Li River. This achieves the communicative intention of Relevance Theory.

##### Example [2]:

ST: 重建后的“潮”雕外形是一个直径 20 米镂空的不锈钢球体, 代表着北海蜚声海外的南珠形象; 珠体附上七位各具神韵的美丽少女塑像, 犹如七个婀娜的仙女下凡。

TT: The new sculpture is a 20-meter-diameter hollowed-out stainless steel sphere, representing the image of the famous South Pearls. There are 7 statues in the image of young girls as fairies.

China has been known as the land of propriety and rites since ancient times, the cradle of Eastern civilization. Therefore, Chinese tourism texts highly value ornate language. However, "English descriptions of scenery are mostly realistic, not impressionistic, striving to reproduce nature in its original state"[6]. The phrases "各具神韵" and "婀娜多姿" in the original are descriptive terms intended to evoke aesthetic feelings in tourists. However, the translation omits these adjectives, objectively presenting the fact that there are seven statues of young girls on the sculpture. This approach starts from the target language receiver, adopting a transparent and fluent style to minimize the strangeness of the original text, achieving "cultural equivalence" between the source and target cultures [8]. The essence of the translation lies in not entirely deleting the descriptive content but retaining the metaphorical rhetoric. "As fairies" vividly presents the form of the sculpture. This avoids lengthy modifiers while giving tourists room for imagination, picturing fairies frolicking on the shallows, greatly arousing their interest. This achieves the communicative intention.

##### (2) Translation Methods under the Foreignization Strategy

Overemphasizing domestication severely hinders tourists' appreciation of the original culture, causing traces of the foreign culture to vanish. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt the foreignization strategy.

##### 1) Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to conveying the original meaning accurately and idiomatically without using figurative language, handling the textual information through appropriate transformations. To achieve successful communication between the source language author and the target language reader, the translator must first grasp the optimal relevance within the original work, infer the author's communicative intention from the informative context. Then, the translator reconstructs a new context in the target language to convey this optimal relevance to the target reader, enabling them to smoothly infer the author's communicative intention from the literal meaning of the translation and obtain sufficient contextual effects. [12]

##### Example [3]:

ST: 人们抛绣球, 跳板鞋舞, 抢花炮, 踩风车以及跳民间歌舞等, 别有一翻情趣[4]。

TT: Their folk traditions include the tossing an

embroidered silk ball to sweetheart of choice, sports events such as the Zhuang-style rugby and “windmill treading”, when teams of four to eight people take hold of the wooden blades of the windmill, rise the full four meters of its framework and push hard with their feet when they hit the ground to keep the windmill turning.

It is undeniable that some semantic content will inevitably be lost in translation, but the method of literal translation plus explanation can minimize the degree of cultural loss. Language is the carrier of culture, so sometimes it is necessary to enrich the content to compensate for informational gaps. Tourists visiting a place inevitably want to learn about local customs, making folk custom translation crucial. Yang Hongying and Huang Wenying pointed out that tourism translation should make readers receptive and strive to elicit reactions and feelings consistent with those of the source language readers regarding the original information [11]. The proper nouns appearing in the text are all unique Zhuang folk customs. If a domestication strategy were adopted, the traces of the foreign culture would vanish, and it would be difficult to achieve the communicative intention. However, literal translation only would cause comprehension difficulties, as it's hard to understand the intrinsic meaning of these customs without specific cultural background. Therefore, this text uses literal translation plus explanation. It explicitly states the purpose of tossing the embroidered ball. Readers can infer the scene of singing and dancing with minimal effort. This enhances readability, attracts tourists' interest, and simultaneously achieves both informative and communicative intentions.

Example [4]:

ST: 北海银滩国家旅游度假区位于主城区南部, 面积 8.66 平方公里, 是国务院 1992 年批复设立的 12 个国家旅游度假区之一, 拥有银滩、金海湾红树林、滨海国家湿地、银滩老码头风情街等景区景点, 先后接待过 20 多位党和国家领导人。

TT: Lying in the south of downtown Beihai, the 8.66 km<sup>2</sup> Beihai Silver Beach is one of the 12 national resorts established with the State Council's approval in 1992. More than 20 party leaders and state heads have visited the Silver Beach, Golden Bay Mangrove Forest, Beihai Coastal National Wetland Park, Old Wharf-style Commercial Street and other scenic attractions of the resort.

The scenic spot names in this text are translated literally. The brilliance of the translation lies in explicitly indicating the nature of each spot, such as "beach, forest, park, street," allowing tourists to intuitively grasp the necessary information, achieving the informative intention. But at the same time, this way of translation leaves confusion. In people's cognition, beaches are generally the same color regardless of borders, so why use "silver" to describe the beach? This involves the inferential process. Sperber and Wilson emphasized the crucial role of contextual context in the ostensive-inferential process. They believe contextual context is a necessary condition for relevance, and as contextual context strengthens, relevance becomes more powerful. Upon careful observation, tourists will find that sunlight reflecting off the fine sand produces a silvery glow, which is the origin of “silver”. This method strongly highlights the contextual effect, and tourists can easily correctly understand the discourse connotation, achieving the communicative intention.

Example [5]:

ST: (象鼻山) 左侧山体似象身, 局大雄伟; 右侧残余石梁酷似大象鼻子, 惟妙惟肖。

TT: (Elephant Trunk Hill) The mountain looks like an elephant's body, it's very tall and majestic. The right of residual scale like the elephant's nose, looks perfectly.

Although there are differences between Chinese and English languages and cultural backgrounds, when facing universally shared imagery, literal translation is an excellent choice in the translation process. This ensures tourist comprehension while maximizing the preservation of the original style. In tourism texts, names are often given based on the shape of scenic spots, making them very intuitive and vivid. This translation adopts the literal method, exquisitely and vividly conveying the shape of the mountain, clearly indicating to tourists that this spot is for appreciating a mountain resembling an elephant's trunk, achieving the informative intention. After skimming the sign and appreciating the site firsthand, tourists are bound to marvel at the uncanny craftsmanship of nature and be deeply captivated by the stunning scenery. This achieves the communicative intention.

### 3) Transliteration

Transliteration uses homophonic characters in Chinese to translate English words.

Example [6]:

ST: 山上有叠彩亭, 其左有明人所刻“江山会景处”五个大字。(Jia Wenbo, 2012: 144)

TT: On the top of the hill you'll find a gazebo named “Die cai Ting” (Folded Brocade Pavilion), with five Chinese characters craved in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) on the left cliff-face: “Jiang Shan Hui Jing Chu” (the place to enjoy the landscape where the mountain and the river meets).

Place name, personal names, and inscriptions are ubiquitous in tourism texts. It is effortless for readers in a Chinese context but exceptionally difficult for English readers to understand. However, adopting a domestication strategy would lose the source language's characteristics, while transliteration alone would appear obscure and hard to understand. Therefore, the method of transliteration plus explanation can be adopted. As above, when translating “江山会景处” (Jiang Shan Hui Jing Chu), the method of transliteration plus explanation effectively solves this problem. It first clearly indicates to readers that this is a gazebo for enjoying the scenery which achieves the informative intention of Relevance Theory and then informs readers that they can appreciate the breathtaking beauty of the fusion of mountains and rivers here, attracting tourists' attention and interest which achieve the communicative intention of Relevance Theory.

## 4. Conclusion

Tourism translation involves issues of aesthetic standards and cultural concepts. It requires pondering of the text's functional characteristics and translation strategies, as well as good awareness, correct theory, and proficient skills. Guided by Relevance Theory, it is found that different types of texts require different translation strategies. For example, when facing cultural default, it is advisable to adopt literal translation with annotations. This pursues modal authenticity while satisfying the target reader's understanding of the text and strives to preserve the modal characteristics of the source language to achieve modal transmission

The ultimate purpose of tourism texts is to achieve

communication and exchange. The linguistic environments, cognitive levels, expectations, and reactions of both sides must also be considered. The above discussion demonstrates that Relevance Theory plays a positive guiding role in directing the English translation of Guangxi tourism texts. To achieve the ostensive-inferential process, the communicative principle and cognitive principle must be followed. Only in this way can the translation be understood and accepted by tourists to the greatest extent, showcasing to foreign visitors the splendid culture, long history, unique landforms, and simple folk customs of Guangxi. This further implements and refines Guangxi's tourism industry "going global" strategy.

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