Interpretation Strategies Used by Iranian Tour Guides in Translating Cultural Specific Items: A Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the interpretation strategies used by tour guides to interpret cultural specific items in their interactions with tourists as well as other verbal and nonverbal behaviors on both tour guides and tourists parts. Accordingly, for this purpose, a qualitative approach was adopted as the method design. In this approach, the data were gathered from 50 tour guides and 20 tourists using questionnaires, interviews and observation as research instruments. The findings of the study revealed that, the most frequent interpretation strategies used by Iranian tour guides while encounter obstacles, were addition, localization, globalization, transformation and the least frequent ones were creation and omission. This relates such strategies with the main goal of tour guides which is providing tourists with proper cultural information using the most appropriate CSI strategies. As a conclusion, the majority of tour guides were competent enough in terms of linguistic abilities although some improvements are still required. Most tour guides were aware that linguistic abilities as well as interpretation strategies are crucial for conveying the genuine meaning of CSI items. According to tour guides, multilingualism was also one of the essential requirements for tour guiding. Tourists were also satisfied with Iranian tour guides in general. Numerous implications can be considered from this study. Tour guides and tourist can benefit from this study by becoming more aware of linguistic and cultural features and therefore have a better communication. More precisely, tour guides can benefit from training programs prepared thanks to this study.

Keywords: Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), Interpretation Strategies, Iranian Tour Guides, Translation

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a wide interest in studying the role of tour guides in translating and interpreting specific cultural items, particularly the language and its nonverbal aspects of action and interaction. This has a crucial impact on how a country is perceived

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in terms of culture and tourist destination. The tourist destination must be relevant and of significance for tourists and this is the service providers' role to bring about this relevance. Therefore, the role of host and local tour guides is undeniable in using the language and its cultural specific items correctly as well as other important matters such as actions or gestures which have critical impression on tourists' experience about that certain culture and destination.

According to European Federation of Guides Associations (2009), a tour guide is defined as a mediator and an active role player in tourism who guides tourists and visitors in the language familiar to them and interprets the cultural specific items of a particular area. In fact, tourist guides are front-line staff who are very much responsible for the overall impression and satisfaction with tour services offered by a destination.

During the past few decades, particularly, the post-sanction era, the tourist industry in Iran has witnessed a rapid and apparent growth in both supply and demand. The continuous increase in the number of tourist arrivals and the resulting growth in the number of tourist activities and facilities necessitate fostering solid education and training policies to cater for the current and potential needs and expectations of this ever growing sector (Magablih, 2008).

It has been generally acknowledged that obtaining useful knowledge about the tour guiding communication by conducting a research would largely contribute to the development of this sector in different ways. On the one hand, tourism represents a significantly high degree of culturally and linguistically diversified participants, namely, foreign tourists and local tour guides. Therefore, the communication in the sector would be demonstrated with numerous communication acts which would clearly be a source of communication challenges.

There have been numerous investigations into tourism industry and its relation to language in different parts of the world. However, less work has been done in Iranian settings regarding this phenomenon. Thus the purpose of this study was to investigate the interpretation strategies adopted by tour guides and the characteristics of tour guide communications.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to examine and assess the current state of tour guiding in Iran and the interpretation strategies adopted by tour guides in explaining the country's cultural aspects

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, with the increasing growth of tourism across the globe, various studies have been conducted to explore the role of tour guides and tourists in tour guiding communication discourse. There has been a huge interest in investigating the interpretation strategies used by tour guides in translating cultural specific items throughout the world. This section is mainly concerned with these disciplines: interpretation, discourse, and tourism. Interpretation does not occur in isolation, that is to say, there are also cultural elements present in the discourse within which

interpretation happens. Tourism or more specifically tour guiding is also investigated under the domain of discourse or the use of language. The importance and significance of cultural specific items in interpretation has been discussed in various studies (Abulhaija, Magablih, & Saleh, 2011; Ap & Wong, 2001; Shegaw, 2015; Wickens, 2005).

There have been diverse investigations into interpretation strategies used by tour guides in translating cultural specific items in different parts of the world. However, not much work has been done in Iranian settings concerning this matter. Therefore, the aim of this study is to discuss the interpretation strategies used by Iranian tour guides in translating cultural specific items. During the past few decades, the tourist industry in Iran has witnessed a rapid growth. The constant increase in the number of tourist arrivals and the resulting growth in the number of tourist activities also requires more attention to this matter than before.

Communication strategies as the name suggests, is any linguistic or non-linguistic behavior that those involved in an interaction utilize to establish a successful working communication. Faerch and Kasper (1983) defined communication strategies as "potentially conscious plans made by communicators for solving problems encounter in reaching a particular communicative goal" (p. 36). Communication strategies are mostly known as avoidance and compensatory ones.

Definitions about culture are abundant. Brown (2014) believes that culture is a way of life. He then describes culture as "the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It's the glue that binds a group of people together. Culture is our continent, our collective identity" (Brown, 2014, p. 175).

Culture is defined as a dynamic concept. As Matsumoto (2000) puts it, culture is a dynamic system which is consisted of explicit and implicit rules. Culture is formed by groups of people which usually includes set of beliefs and norms. These qualities that are prevalent within a certain group and are communicated through generations can also change within the course of time.

Several researchers believe that culture and language are an integrated system, that is, they cannot be disintegrated or separated into different parts (Shahsavandi, Ghonsooly & Kamyabi, 2010). Brogger (1992), also claims that "language and culture are inextricably interwoven and interdependent" (cited in Risager, 2007, p.132). He then asserts, "Culture is language and language is culture".

Regarding the importance of cultural specific items, the following quote is worthy of mentioning. "Finding the best equivalent for culture specific items (CSIs) is one of the main concerns for each translator" (Maasoum, 2011, p. 1767). Culture-specific items are defined as notions that are distinct of a certain culture. These notions can refer to different domains such as food, clothes, work, leisure, politics, law, and religion among others.

There are many factors that a tour guide must be aware of while interpreting. For instance, the religion as a sensitive topic should be taken into tour guides consideration.

Other problematic topics may include social customs or even types of food to name a few. As Baker (1992) describes, a source language term may illustrate a concept which is unfamiliar in the target culture and it can be abstract or concrete as well as, a religious belief, a social custom or even a type of food.

Gambier (2007) claims that these cultural specific items connote different aspects of life such as education, history, art, literature, law, place names, foods and drinks, sports and national leisure time activities. Tour guides as authentic conveyers of meaning must be aware of said aspect of the target life styles. Therefore, the importance of context, or more specifically, the target context, should be clear for tour guides. For instance, Valló (2000) and Vermes (2004) believe that cultural specific items are dependent on the context because any kinds of text may carry some cultural ideologies and it is the tour guide's job to make sure that in conveying these cultural items, no one would feel insulted or offended as any misinterpretation may lead to misunderstanding on the receiver's side.

According to Newmark (1981), translation and interpretation is a craft which is consisted of a try to substitute a written message or statement in a certain language by the same message or statement in another language. However, when dealing with cultural specific items, this often does not seem as easy as one may think because conveying some meaning or expressions are often strongly related to a specific cultural context (Terestyényi, 2011). Tourist guides are not an exception from this matter as they may encounter difficulties in translating items with specific cultural ideologies.

Seif and Deedari (2014) also studied the translation strategies of Culture specific items. After extracting and classifying CSIs, the translation strategies were determined in the three Persian TTs according to Davies' model (2003), and then every source item was compared in to its three target equivalents, which were in turn compared to one another, to determine their translation strategies. Finally, the frequency of the strategies was computed and the strategies were classified under Nord's binary translation typology (2005) in order to determine whether each TT belonged to documentary or instrumental type. It was concluded that preservation was the most frequent translation strategy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following specific research questions were proposed:

1. How do Iranian tour guides view the required tour guiding services (tour guiding discourses) for presenting and communicating the CSI items to foreign tourists?

2. What challenges do local tour guides of Isfahan experience in presenting and communicating the CSI items to foreign tourists?

3. What strategies do local tour guides of Isfahan use to overcome the challenges they experience in presenting and communicating the CSI items to foreign tourists?

METHOD

This study sought to investigate the context of the communication that takes place when local tour guides attempt to guide and present the CSI items to foreign tourists. As tour guiding is a social practice and it involves the use of language and nonverbal behavior to create meaning and shape tourists' experience about the host culture, discourse analysis that belongs to qualitative approach has been found appropriate to investigate the meaning of tour guiding communication.

According to Leedy & Ormrod (2001), qualitative approach is mainly used to answer questions about complex matters, with the aim of explaining and understanding a subject from the participants' perspective. The qualitative approach includes different techniques which attempt to describe, decode, and translate the data to get the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. For the current study, discourse analysis which is a qualitative method will be used to describe the complex nature of tour guiding communication from the participants' perspective and from the actual tour guiding communication.

To understand complex behaviors in different social contexts, qualitative approach is more suitable than quantitative one. According to Cresswell (2007), the use of qualitative research in the form of question and answer as follows: "When is it appropriate to use qualitative research? We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored" (p. 39). Therefore, the use of qualitative approach will be of great help to explore the nature of communication that takes place between local tour guides of Isfahan and foreign tourists.

Participants

Considering that several foreign tourists visit Isfahan, obtaining a random sample representative of tourists from different parts of the world coming to different cities of Iran was extremely difficult. Therefore, an accessible sampling method in which a certain group of people are chosen for study was adopted because the researcher had a relatively easy access to them.

The research sample included two groups, as mentioned. The first group consisted of 40 tour guides between the ages of 25 and 45, all of whom were native speakers of Persian and had at least 16 years of education. The second group consisted of 20 tourists who were from different nationalities, including German, French, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, etc. The following table, describes the biographical data of the participants.

Table 1. Biographical Data of the Participants

Groups	Tour Guides	Tourists
N	40	20
Age	25-45	30-85
Native language	Persian	Various Languages
Foreign language(s)	English, French, German	Various Languages

Instrumentation

The questionnaire used to collect the data for this study was researcher-made. It consisted of 15 questions which were based on the existing and related literature. The first seven questions were designed to inquire about the interpretation strategies used by tour guides to overcome translation obstacles. Questions eight to 15 were designed to inquire about different cultural and linguistic as well as interpretation issues that tour guides encounter during their interactions with tourists. The questions were Likert-type (summated rating scale) items. Participants were asked to rate each statement by their level of agreement: 6 = strongly agree, 5 = agree, 4 = partially agree, 3 = partially disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. Rating scales of items for each domain were summated for measurement.

To control the measurement error, validity and reliability were established for this study. Validity of an instrument refers to an instrument that accurately measures what it is supposed to measure. Content validity, which is concerned with the degree to which that instrument measures an intended content area, —is not a statistical property; it is a matter of expert judgment. Since the questionnaire was researcher-made, a panel of experts which consisted of three faculty members assured the validity of the questionnaire.

Reliability of an instrument refers to the degree to which scores obtained with an instrument are consistent measures of whatever the instrument measures. The reliability of the questionnaire was assured through the Cronbach's alpha formula and the reliability coefficient turned out to be 0.78

Interview was conducted with local tour guides as well as tourists to get rich data that could contribute to answer the research questions. The video recording helped capture behaviors displayed by participants during a communicative event that takes place at a particular place and time, but it could not reveal the different behaviors experienced by participants in different places and times.

Observation was used as method of data collection during the actual interaction between local tour guides and foreign tourists so as to explore the way local tour guides interpret and represent the destination, cultural specific items, the possible communication challenges and strategies employed by participants.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

Data collection involved the use of instruments to gain the required data from sample selected for the investigation. In the present study methods of data collection such as, questionnaires, observations and interviews, responses of people, actions and events were used to collect the required data.

The questionnaires were distributed to 40 tour guides during their visit of historical spots. The respondents were given an opportunity to ask the researcher questions in case they did not understand the questions correctly. The questionnaires were distributed in

a pamphlet format. An individual identification number was given to each participant. The researcher used these numbers to follow-up with non-respondents and in selecting interviewees. All respondents in observation, questionnaire and interview were informed that their participation is voluntary and their responses will be kept strictly confidential.

The questionnaire data were also fed into computer and the statistical calculation were run by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The inferential statistics were obtained by checking the frequency and percentage, and later t-tests were used to analyze the data. In addition, the reliability of data were checked through inter-rater and intra-rater reliability.

The interview data were transcribed and analysis and interpretation of interview data were conducted by content analysis. Common patterns were identified and investigated separately from the questionnaire data. And, then, the data were examined in regard to the research questions of the study for the purpose of explaining and extending data.

FINDINGS

The results of statistical analysis of questionnaires and the results of analysis of interviews are elaborated in this part. In order to have more precise results, a triangulation approach was adopted by using three instruments in conjunction with each other which were questionnaire, interview and observation.

The Tour Guides' Answers to the Questionnaire

The Tour Guides' Role and Interpretation Strategies Questionnaire was distributed among the 40 tour guides who took part in this study. In order to come up with the results for this questionnaire, the responses of the tour guides were analyzed. All (but two) mean scores in the questionnaire were above 3.50, which means that the tour guides agreed with all the statements therein, except for two items. In fact, through these two items, the tour guides disagreed that (a) when encountered with a cultural item which is difficult to translate, they simply disregard and omit it, and (b) if a cultural item does not exist, they try to replace it with their own version of that item.

As it was mentioned above, the surveyed tourists mostly agreed with the statements in the questionnaire. To find out whether their degree of agreement reached statistical significance or not, one-sample t test was conducted:

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of One-Sample t Test

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
15	4.34	.70	.18

Table 2 shows that the overall mean of the questionnaire items was 4.34, which is greater than 3.50. Table 3 shows whether the difference between 4.34 and 3.50 was statistically significant or not:

Table 3. One-Sample t Test Results

| | Test Value = 3.5 | | | | | |
| | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
					Lower	Upper
Means	4.63	14	.00	.84	.45	1.24

As Table 3 shows, the *p* value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) column appeared to be less than the significance level (*P* < .05), which means that the tour guides' agreement with the statements in the questionnaire reached statistical significance.

The Results of the Tour guides' Interview

The tour guides' views of the characteristics of tour guides were as following. Knowledge or awareness of specific religious events and practices, and general cultural concepts; knowledge of language which is the means of communication; awareness about tourists' cultural difference and proper ethical codes. This is to say that, the interviewees believed that to be a tour guide, one has to be aware of the particular discourse knowledge of even the least known cultural and religious aspects. Besides, language which is the means of communication is considered as an important part of the required tour guiding communication discourses. Being aware of cultural differences was also mentioned in the requirements of indispensable tour guiding discourses features according to the interviewees' belief.

For example, interviewee #1, viewed the required tour guiding discourse features mainly in terms of knowledge about the site or tourist attraction being visited. As he put it "Knowledge about the CSI items is crucial to be a tour guide because the tourists are educated and they ask tour guides everything, and it is humiliation for a tour guide to say I do not know about a certain subject when he is asked a question".

The fact that language proficiency is a main factor for tour guides was also mentioned by a tour guide. As the interviewee #4 mentioned "I usually have problems for some religious notions such as Etekaf or Qods day". And for handling the problems he used the addition strategy in that he tried to interpret these words and spent four or five minutes to explain each item.

Regarding the training aspect of the tour guides, interviewee #3 maintained "language proficiency is an indispensable part of tour guiding. Not only is the language proficiency essential but also having geographical, historical, cultural, communicative knowledge is important to attract more travelers".

This could be an indication that although knowledge of CSI items is an important requirement for a tour guide in order to play the role of service or information provider for tourists who are strangers and seeking information. However, in reality, some tourists come to realize or experience a cultural item that they did not know well before. In fact, in addition to foreign tourists, domestic tourists may not be aware of the things

concerning the CSI items. Thus, it is the tour guides who are responsible for providing all aspects of the destination-related and cultural information.

The Results of the Tourists' Interview

Tourists' comments are also an important aspect of the current research and they contribute to supplement the results of the questionnaire. Thus some related comments were analyzed. As with the tour guides, tourists had also the same most common problem which was the language. More precisely, they cannot digest the abstract concepts presented by tour guides regarding the historical monuments.

For instance, some tourists mentioned that they were not able to comprehend some religious notions and they had to google those items. "… when I was in Sri Lanka where Buddhism is a dominant religion and as a Japanese tourist I was somehow familiar with the religion, but the tour guide who had some linguistics problems could not convey the meaning properly therefore I had to google it afterwards in order to understand it". She further mentioned almost the same problem happened to her in Tehran where the tour guide tried to convince them to change their religious opinion which came unpleasant to her.

Not all the comments were negative. For example, a German tourist was satisfied with the way an Iranian tour guide conveyed the CSI items. He also mentioned he had another Iranian tour guide who was a professional due to the fact that he had been living in Canada for 5 years.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to address the research questions posed earlier. The main specific objective of this study was to investigate the way Iranian tour guides view the tour guiding practice and how they describe requirements to be a professional tour guide because discourse is partly the way people look at a given practice as reality. The other objective was to identify the major challenges of actual tour guiding practices, and explain ways of discoursive practices in presenting and communicating the historical places to foreign tourists. As tour guiding communication is composed of participants of socially, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Iranian tour guides may experience challenges in their attempt of representing and communicating the CSI items to the tourists.

Considering discourse as language beyond the sentence, Iranian tour guides were interviewed to express their views and beliefs about requirements to be a tour guide who is intended to be good at performing tour guiding practice. Accordingly, the findings of the analysis show that requirements for a tour guide who involve in the discourse of tour guiding communication are diverse. The requirements include knowledge about the tourist attractions, language ability, English proficiency, multilingualism, awareness on cultural differences and good set of ethics.

As far as the knowledge of destination and cultural items is concerned, awareness about religious events, rules and norms of the Iranian societies, and Islamic notions are found to be essential requirements to be an Iranian tour guide. In fact, because the destination in the context of this study is the city of Isfahan, tour guides needed to be aware of what, where and when the religious events take place.

Another major finding was the belief amongst most tour guides who claimed linguistic ability was the first and most important requirement. It was found that language ability in general and multilingual skill in particular is important requirement for a tour guide. In this respect, being a good guide is related to the number of languages used by a tour guide. While tour guides who are able to use many languages are positioned at the top and considered professional as well as reliable (Gee, 2011), those who speak few languages are positioned the middle, and those who speak only English are at the bottom of the hierarchy of the tour guiding practice. Such positioning of multilingual tour guides at the top of the hierarchy of being a good guide is in keeping with the notion of tour guide which is defined by World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA, 2003) as 'a person who provides the guiding service for tourists in the language of their choice'.

In general, it is possible to conclude that while Iranian tour guides are aware enough about the required tour guiding discourses which include knowledge of CSI items, language ability, cultural awareness and good ethical codes, their actual guiding performance in all these areas requires further improvement.

In analyzing the discourse of tour guiding communication, an attempt has also been made to discuss challenges that tour guides experience while presenting the CSI items. In this regard, linguistic and cultural issues have been found to be major challenges in the tour guiding practices.

In accordance with (Magablih, & Saleh, 2011), tour guides use different interpretation strategies to explain a variety of cultural items to foreign tourists. These strategies may differ from one guide to another in many respects. Interpretation strategies used in explaining cultural terms also vary. This relates mostly to the difficulty of translating such cultural elements to tourists who are normally unfamiliar with such terms.

Language proficiency is another challenge that limits the tour guides ability to convey a proper and exact meaning. In addition, cultural aspects and their relation with other elements of the tourism sector and discourse create a challenge on the part of tour guides.

In comparison with McDonnell (2001), as tourists and tour guides are from different cultural backgrounds, cultural differences have been viewed to be another challenge in tour guiding communication. The common communication problems that tour guides experienced in their job caused by cultural difference are seen in terms of some nonverbal actions which in some cases are against the norms of the host society or the norms of tourists' society.

Tour guides' lack of awareness about the cultural differences of tourists has also been found as another aspect of communication problems related to cultural differences. All

these imply that cultural awareness and orientation are important requirements for both tour guides and tourists for the success of intercultural encounter of tour guiding communication.

It goes without saying that trainings regarding interpretation strategies are always required for tour guides. As with Terestyényi (2011) and Prakash, Chowdhary, and Sunayana (2011), by studying factors present in the tour guiding communication and strategies used by tour guides one can specify required tour guide training programs.

In order to cope with communication challenges, Iranian tour guides have been found to employ various strategies. Addition, localization, globalization, and transformation were major strategies used by Iranian tour guides to overcome communication challenges. The least frequent ones were creation and omission.

Almost all tour guides interviewed agreed that providing tourists with the required information about the cultural norms of the destination would help tourists to be more interested, and this in turn could help tourists to have good relation with their tour guides. In general, tour guides have been found to be aware of interpretation strategies, and they have been observed while they were attempting to utilize those strategies in their actual tour guiding communication.

However, as tour guides admitted during the interview, further formal training for tour guides, especially, linguistics and interpretation training courses, were found to be crucial. These trainings were seen as a key requirement to support the tour guides' understanding and perceptions of interpretation strategies.

In Iran, in the recent years, tourism industry has been flourished and this requires the presence of professionally trained tour guides who are competent in terms of linguistic as well as cultural abilities. Furthermore, a tour guide must be aware of different interpretation strategies and able to utilize them in a timely fashion. Another vital characteristic of a tour guide as in interpreter is to use linguistic items which are not offensive to the tourists.

The results of the questionnaire and the interviews as well as the observation confirmed that the majority of Iranian tour guides use the following strategies to overcome cultural challenges. Addition, localization, globalization, transformation. The study relates such strategies with the main goal of tour guides which is providing tourists with proper cultural information using the most appropriate CSI strategies.

Concerning linguistics abilities, the majority of tour guides were competent enough although some improvements are still required. Most tour guides were aware that linguistic abilities as well as interpretation strategies are crucial for conveying the genuine meaning of CSI items. According to tour guides, multilingualism was also one of the essential requirements for tour guiding.

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