Interpretation Strategies Used by Jordanian Tourist Guides to Handle Cultural Specificity in Tourism Material

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Abstract

This study examines the translation strategies adopted by Jordanian tourist guides to overcome cultural obstacles in interpreting culture-specific terms into English during tourist trips. Data were collected through joining eleven guided group tours in Jordan and recording tourist guides' interpretation of culture-bound terms to English speaking Western tourists. The cultural material was classified into four categories: customs and traditions, food and drinks, costumes and miscellaneous. The results show that the strategies used by guides to overcome cultural obstacles are the following: Transliteration, paraphrasing, expansion, providing cultural equivalent, neutralization, literal translation, reduction and recognized translation. The study connects such strategies with the main goal of tourist guides to provide tourists with loads of information about local culture using as many strategies as possible. The study recommends establishing a uniformed list of cultural terms and their meanings to guarantee a quality interpretation on the part of tourist guides in an attempt to enhance the role of culture in promoting the image of Jordan as a tourist destination.

Key words: Jordan, Tourist Guide, strategy, Translation, Interpretation, Culture, and Tourism.

Introduction

Tourism has become as the largest global industry, at least regarding its paid-up capital and employment opportunities (Lickorish and Jenkins,2005). Both developing and developed countries are paying tourism increasing attention by seeking to capitalize on its diverse economic, social, cultural and environmental potentials and so bring more revenues to their economy.

There's a continuous need to match tourism demand and supply on the part of the administrators of tourist destinations. This requires managing the right number and quality of hotel rooms, airline seats, tourist guides...etc.

One of the most prominent practitioners of interpretation in the tourism industry is a tourist guide. He/she is a major participant in the communication process and an efficient link between tourism destinations and tourists. As a national 'ambassador', he/she is regarded as a best representative of a tourism destination and its culture.

The government and tourist guides are the managers of the tourist image of a tourist destination (Dahles, 2002). A tourist guide is a vital link between a country's heritage and visitors who come to explore it. More than a mere purveyor of information, the guide can play a significant role in influencing policy with regard to the complex issues raised by mass tourism. However, guiding is not just about giving people facts and figures about a destination. Scholars have long recognized this, and the role of guides in conveying information, offering explanations, and developing narratives has become a research theme in and of itself (Ap and Wong 2001; Cohen 1985; Dahles 2002; Holloway 1981; Pearce 1984).

Tourist guides are an essential interface between a host destination and its visitors. In fact, they are front-line employees who are very much responsible for the overall impression and satisfaction with the tour services offered by a destination along the value chain. Geva and Goldman (1991) for example, found that the performance of the tourist guide was an important attribute to the success of the tour, while Mossberg (1995) noted that the tourist guide was regarded an important element in selecting a charter tour. While some guides really take pride in representing their destinations and explaining their natural and cultural heritage, others are much more business-oriented (Bras 2000).

A tourist guide is a person who escorts visitors and interprets the natural and cultural heritage of an area in the language of their choice. Normally, he possesses a specific area qualification usually issued and/or recognized by the appropriate authority (Magablih, 1999).

During the past few decades, the tourism industry in Jordan has witnessed a rapid and apparent growth in both supply and demand. Today, tourism is the largest export industry and the second largest foreign currency earner in the kingdom (MOTA, 2010). 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).

Tourism education and training is rapidly growing in the Kingdom. Jordan is becoming a leading country in the region in guides' education and training (Magablih, et al., 2008). Although guides' education started as a two- week training course long back in Jordan, today, Jordan offers a four-year undergraduate course in tour guiding at three public universities to meet the ever increasing needs and expectations of the growing tourism industry through a pool of qualified candidates who have the needed knowledge and skills.

To achieve a reasonable quality of education for tourist guides, there has to be concentration on the necessary knowledge and skills (Pond, 1993). Knowledge empowers guides to become as an up-to- date encyclopedia that provides tourists with vital information about cultural, social, political, economical, environmental, and any other aspects regarding the host country. Communication, personal, professional and language skills are also important to promote the destination in a competitive manner through developing and promoting a constructive "guest"- "host" relationship (Fine,et al., 1985; Pearce, 1984; Magablih, 1999). If a guide is competent in the foreign

language he's interpreting into, he/she is not only able to provide tourists with correct information, but also able to convince, affect upon tourists, and thus achieve tourism goals, viz, leaving good impression on tourists, promoting for a variety of tourism products and attractions, thus supporting competitiveness and ensuring sustainable tourism development.

In Jordan, as in many countries, being a tourist guide is considered to be traditional and prestigious. Jordan has strict national legislation concerning the tour guiding profession. Only officially certified tourist guides, educated along national guidelines, may commercially guide tourists.

The number of tourist guides in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has mounted from 570 in the year 2002 to 873 guides in 2008, i.e. the number of guides has increased by 53%. They also constituted about 2% of the total manpower in the Jordanian tourism industry in 2008. English speaking guides constitute about 50% of Jordanian guides speaking other 24 languages. Female guides constitute a nominal percentage of the total number of guides in the Kingdom (MOTA, 2009).

This study concentrates on the aspect of language that the majority of guides interpret into, i.e. English language, tackling the strategies they adopt to overcome cultural obstacles during the process of interpretation, and arriving at strategies that best suit a tourism material and retain the expressive and emotive elements of a message. As the Jordanian society is the main dimension frequently asked about by tourists (Magablih, 2004), this study is limited to cultural aspects of Jordan.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine and assess the current state of tour guiding in Jordan and the interpretation strategies adopted by tourist guides in explaining the country's cultural products. More specifically, this paper's objectives are the following:

- To examine the current state of tour guiding practice in Jordan;
- To comprehend the main interpretation strategies of cultural terms; and
- To recommend strategies to raise the standard, recognition, and quality of services provided by tourist guides.

Literature Review

While there are various definitions of a tourist guide, an internationally accepted definition given by the International Association of Tour Managers and the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (EFTGA) is that a tourist guide is a person who guides groups or individual visitors from abroad or from the home country around the monuments, sites and museums of a city or region; to interpret in an inspiring and entertaining manner, in the language of the visitor's choice, the cultural and natural heritage (EFTGA,1998). The secret to success of being a tourist guide loves the subject and the people we present. That is, having passion for the subject you are presenting and taking interest in each guest. In essence, the work of a tourist guide does not only involve the transmission of information, but also presenting it in an interesting and sincere manner. Tourist guides have also been described by several authors as an information giver, a mentor, and mediator (Cohen, 1985;de Kadt, 1979; Nettekoven, 1979). The mediator and cultural broker functions, as suggested here, refers to the interpretive aspects of tour guiding which plays a vital role in enhancing visitors' experience and their understanding of a destination and its culture.

A guide is no longer a pathfinder, tending to the camp and reading trail markers; he/she educates and spiritually guides, helping tourists find meaning in what they see. Tourist guides have had to become more professionalized and highly trained, not only in the geography and history of the region where they are guiding, but also in sociological and psychological areas such as group dynamics, motivation, and cultural/ethnic background. Researchers have found that the quality of the guiding available is a key component in the touristic experience overall.

The concept of tourist guides as "mediators" of local culture fails to capture the political component of guiding. Some governments use tourism strategically in order to address issues of national significance (Dahles, 2002). Globalizing processes reinforce the particulars of locality by providing people with new frameworks through which to interpret their societies (Guneratne, 2001). In tourism studies, globalization and localization are often conceived of as a binary opposition. Guides are remarkable frontrunners of globalization. They fully participate in global popular culture and use new technologies in their private lives. While guiding, however, they skillfully represent the globalized life around them as a distinctive "local", adapted to the tastes of different groups of international tourists (Salazar, 2005). The World ideas of cultures existing in some primordial and static form are often reiterated in the context of tourism. Tourist guides are key actors in the process of folklorizing, ethnicizing, and exoticizing a destination (Salazar,, 2005). They are often the only local people with whom tourists interact for a considerable amount of time during their trip. Guides are thus entrusted with the public relations mission "to encapsulate the essence of place" (Pond, 1993) and to be a window onto the site, region, or even country or continent. Less attention has been devoted to studying the ways in which these globally circulating discourses are (re)produced and negotiated by local service providers such as tourist guides (Bruner, 2001; and Norton, 1996).

During their training, guides are instructed, both implicitly and explicitly, on how to use global discourses to represent and sell their natural and cultural heritage as authentically local. However, in their personal interaction with tourists, guides do not merely reproduce the narratives and practices they were taught at school; instead they themselves become creative storytellers (Salazar, 2006). Although language is probably the most important channel of expression, discourses may take a variety of forms—oral, written, pictorial, symbolic, or graphic—and include both linguistic and non-linguistic ways of producing meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). Discourses are tools of knowledge and power. Foucault (1972) conceptualizes discourse as a cultural domain of knowledge, an institutionalized complex of signs and practices that regulates how people live socially. Discourse, as a concrete expression of language—cultural relationships, can have both social impacts, bringing about or preventing social change, in addition to ideological impacts, inculcating, sustaining or even changing ideologies.

The replication and dissemination of discourse is a complex process. As it is being "(re)entextualized" (reproduced with an altered form) or "(re)contextualized" (reproduced identically), innumerable factors intervene, and the copy is very often distinct from the original (Bauman and Briggs 1990).

Schmidt (1979) mentioned that a tourist not only views the local sights from a coach, but also interprets the sights through the tourist guide's commentary. Researchers such as Holloway (1981) and Ryan and Dewar (1995) claimed that tourist guides' communication with tour groups can increase both group morale and social interaction. "It is the guide who sells the next tour" (Geva & Goldman, 1991). It is

suggested that tourist guides are responsible for tourist satisfaction with the service provided in destinations. Their performance can generate repeat and new business, and also affect the image of their tour companies and even the destinations themselves (Geva & Goldman, 1991; Mossberg, 1995; Pearce, 1982; Schmidt, 1979; Whipple & Thach, 1988; Wong, Ap, & Sandiford, 1998).

Guides help travelers understand the culture of the region visited and the way of life of its inhabitants (Cohen, 1985). They have a particular role on the one hand to promote the cultural and natural heritage whilst on the other hand to help ensure its sustainability by making visitors aware of its importance and vulnerability. With the ever growing globalization process and the fact that tourism is a major leader in this regard (Salazar,2005), there has been much controversy about national restrictions in guiding. Many countries attempt to eradicate obstacles for free moving service providers and clarify professional standards (http://eur-lex.europa.eu.). This creates a real challenge on the vital role of tourist guides as representatives of local cultures.

The relationship between tourism and culture is inseparable, especially, when addressing cultural tourism. Tourism provides both a lens onto and an energy for relationships with everyday life (Jack and Phipps, 2005).

Translation plays a significant role in the process of communication among different cultures. Toury (2000) defines translation as a "kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions." Translators transfer utterances, meanings and ideas from one language into another and from one culture into another. Thus, a translator is expected to be knowledgeable in both source and target cultures in order to act as an efficient medium between them. Translators need to utilize various strategies, such as neutralization, transliteration, providing cultural equivalent, etc... in order to reach their goal towards a successful translation.

In fact, culture is regarded as a major tourism product (Archer and Cooper,1998; Go, 1998; Burns and Holden, 1995) and the importance of culture in tourism lies in the idea of difference among cultures (Robinson,2001). Tourism, language and culture are strongly related. When people travel, they extend their communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries and enhance intercultural interaction (Jack and Phipps, 2005; Hatim and Mason ,1997; Newmark ,1988)

While there is plenty of literature available regarding translating cultural items, translation strategies, and translating tourist brochures, the issue of tourism material obtained from interpretation performed by tourist guides is still not well addressed, either by researchers in translation or by their counterparts in tourism. Nowadays, as tourism industry witnesses a growing interaction between different cultures facilitated by new technologies and improved means of transportation, tourism may be considered as a globalization feature (Salazar, 2005). Wickens (2005) recommends that the interest in the 'other' should be used as a marketing tool promoting the local culture, traditional hospitality and warm welcome. Lejervall (2006) concluded that translating should consider the purpose of the text, the target reader that it reads naturally in the target language and, above all, that it preserves the meaning of the source text. Hariyanto (2007) finds that translators utilize many translation strategies to overcome cultural gaps. Contextual factors that determine which translation procedure include the purpose of the text, motivation and cultural, technical and linguistic level of readership (Newmark, 1988). Ayoub (1994) suggested that it is very crucial and essential for the translator to be acquainted with the language and culture he is translating from and/or into. Tourist guides also practice "monolingual interpretation" through retransmitting different types of information derived from their cultural and professional experiences. This involves seeing cultural items, hearing voices related to local culture, such as the sound of the call for the prayer service, or tasting traditional food. Unlike other studies in translation, this study is unique in that the source text is intangible; it is rather mental or sensual. Also, it deals with the complicated task of a tourist guide to render prompt, clear, objective, comprehensive and integrative act of interpretation to tourists from different cultures in a way that promotes the host destination.

Materials and Method

The methodology used involves a hybrid qualitative and ethnographic approach (Hampton 2003; Hitchcock 2000). Background literature research was undertaken. Secondary sources such as websites, books, and articles were also consulted. Field data were obtained through informal and structured interviews with different industry players. The research focused on the role of tour guides in establishing tourism discourses when explaining various cultural products of Jordan as a tourism destination.

Part of this article is based on transcriptions of guides' narratives that were collected through joining eleven guided group excursions and recording the interpretation of culture-bound terms by guides to English speaking Western tourists. The guided tours formed the arena where the interaction between tourist guides and tourists could be examined. The information generated by participants' observation was supplemented by interviews with government representatives, respondents working in the industry and in tourism education, and other experts in Jordan. The research on which this paper is based was undertaken during the summer of 2008.

The collected cultural items were then classified into four categories: 1-Customs and Traditions. 2- Food and drinks. 3- Costumes. 4- Miscellaneous. The collected data were categorized in terms of the strategies used in translating cultural items. This was handled by means of analyzing the strategies in terms of acceptability, suitability and informativity, and investigating the cultural impact on the choice of such strategies. Their translations were judged by the researchers. This assessment is based on whether the translations are able to create equivalence, retain the same impact of the original material, and successfully overcome cultural obstacles.

Results and discussion

Customs and traditions

Transliteration and paraphrasing strategies are used to interpret the word."/jāha/ or /tulba/. The guides' interpretation is as follows: "It is basically having a lot of witnesses to marriage proposal to make more commitment to this." However, the witnesses should be of a reputed group of people to show not only commitment but also appreciation. Guides have to show that Jordanians respect and appreciate women as a cultural asset.

Another use of paraphrasing appears in interpreting the term $/\bar{g}asl\ al'\bar{a}r/$ by saying "to cleanse their honor". But, the researchers see that it is more about destignatizing disgrace association rather than purification. Guides have to be more specific in defining the term. Committing Crimes of Honor is something that is against the teachings of the two prevalent religions in Jordan, Islam and Christianity, and so

such crimes cannot be associated with purity. Therefore, Honor cannot be preserved through killing innocent people. Tourist guides need to expand their interpretation and incorporate some details. This may include the fact that in Jordan, like in many Arab countries, Crimes of Honor are committed in some limited communities to get rid of social accusations and stigma, and it is recently witnessing a more social and legal refusal.

In some instances, guides broach topics pertaining to Islamic customs, such as burying the dead. In this regard, they paraphrase the word /kafan/ in an attempt to render it as "a white cloth with which a dead person is covered". This word has an equivalent word in English; a guide should have used a "shroud" or a "winding sheet" instead of giving a long inarticulate interpretation.

Food and Drinks

The rendition given by guides for $mlabbas\ bill\bar{o}z$ is "Jordan Almonds". The translation strategy used here is reduction. This rendition is inaccurate since these sugarcoated almonds are not distinctively Jordanian; they are used in many other countries especially those located on the Mediterranean. Still, the researchers take into consideration tourism strategies adopted towards promoting cultural products through claiming their relevance to local cultures.

Regarding the item *al qahwal'arabīya*, guides use the strategy of expansion in a way that may be considered as more of interpretation and explanation than of translation. They tend to explain how Arabic coffee is prepared and served as follows: "Coffee mixed with water and cardamom boiled together. The coffee beans are roasted and crushed by something called *Mihbāš*- a wooden piece that is curved manually. It's without sugar. A little bit is poured in the cup. A host drinks the first sip to warm the cup because all the guests will be drinking from the same cup and to reassure the guest that nothing is wrong with the coffee. Then the host pours a little bit for the guest; if he wants more he doesn't have to say it because the host will pour another time unless the guest shakes the cup meaning that he's had enough." Here, the expansion yields a successful rendition in that it opens the door for explaining and expressing cultural practices related to this kind of coffee; it's not just about drinking coffee but also about socializing and feeling welcome and secured. It is regarded as a symbol for Arab hospitality and generosity and a core pillar of the genuine Bedouin culture in Jordan.

In restaurants, tourists are usually served a type of bread called / kubiz $t\bar{a}b\bar{u}n/$. Guides' rendition of this item is *pita bread*, though they are two different kinds of bread. The researchers recommend that guides use both transliteration and paraphrasing in interpreting this word as" $t\bar{a}b\bar{u}n$ bread cooked in a small oven made of stone and clay; inside it there are small pieces of smooth small stones called *rudaf* to be heated to help the dough cook right". This alternative rendition is more accurate and expressive.

Costumes

Taub is transliterated and given a neutral rendition as "a long dress." To be more specific, the researchers suggest that the word "loose" be added to the rendition. They also suggest that the word "garment" be used instead of the word "dress" in order to avoid misunderstanding since the word "dress" may carry a feminine connotation. Guides could expand their interpretation to explain the origin and justification of this

traditional dress. It is available in different colors and designs that reflect the different sub-cultures and regions in Jordan.

For the word <code>hatta</code> guides use transliteration: <code>/hatta/</code>, neutralization: "The cloth", and expansion: "It comes with different colors and patterns (such as red and white or black and white). They vary in price according to the material (such as cotton, silk, linen). There are different ways of wearing them..." Here, it is worth noting that guides show "the cloth" he talks about to tourists. The rendition of <code>/hatta/</code> as "cloth" is generally unacceptable, but if we consider the context in which the demonstration of this cloth is involved, besides providing detailed information about <code>/hatta/</code> through expansion then the whole rendition becomes acceptable. Guides may expand their interpretation to bring tourists' attention to the handmade <code>/hatta/</code> prepared by rural women living in areas characterized by poverty and unemployment, where simple and low paid jobs mean a lot.

The $/\dot{q}al/$ is also demonstrated along with the $/\dot{p}atta/$ as they are both worn together and constitute a collocation. Guides tend to provide a neutral term which is "the head gear" and paraphrase the meaning as "the band or the coil that comes on the top". The researchers suggest that guides avoid giving more than one translation alternative, and they also believe that the function of the $/\dot{q}al/$ in holding the $/\dot{p}atta/$ in place should be mentioned.

Miscellaneous

When a sound from a minaret is heard, and tourists start asking what this sound is the guide answers by saying: "It is a call for the prayer service." The word $\langle ad\bar{a}n \rangle$ is rendered by paraphrasing. Paraphrasing in this case is necessary since the $\langle ad\bar{a}n \rangle$ is unfamiliar to many Westerners, thus it needs to be defined. Guides may expand their interpretation through explaining that this call for prayer is repeated five times daily on definite times in the Kingdom to remind Muslims in urban and rural areas of the uniformed time and the need to join their Muslim brothers in mosques.

The mostly adopted translation strategies by guides are transliteration and paraphrasing. The researchers related the use of transliteration to familiarizing tourists with Arabic language as they are interested in a language that definitely differs from their own. As guides notice the language potential as a cultural product, they tend to paraphrase and use Arabic words in an attempt to promote the destination's language, i.e. paraphrasing has become a marketing tool. As for paraphrasing, this strategy is suitable for handling cultural specificity and provides neither detailed nor reduced

information about a cultural item. The strategy of expansion is also noticeable; according to the researchers' viewpoint, it is more suitable in tourism contexts than paraphrasing, as it enhances further explication and provides tourists with more detailed information.

The word /ajnabī/ is interpreted as "Anyone who's not her father, brother or uncle, anyone who's a potential suitor for her." It's clear that guides choose the strategy of expansion for interpreting the word /ajnabī/. The use of "potential suitor" seems inaccurate; the word actually means anyone who is allowed by religion to marry her as there is no blood relation that prohibits their marriage. So someone may be /ajnabī/ but cannot and will not be a potential suitor for many regards. The word /ajnabī/ is a religious term that refers to Islamic law that entails prohibition and permission, thus a translator should use a word that signifies this concept which "a potential suitor" lacks.

Conclusion

Tourist guides use different interpretation strategies to explain a variety of cultural products in Jordan to foreign tourists. These strategies vary from a guide to another in many cases. Interpretation strategies employed in explaining cultural terms also differ. This relates mainly to the difficulty of translating such cultural elements to tourists who are usually unfamiliar with such terms. Language proficiency is another obstacle that limits tourist guides' ability to pass on a right and accurate meaning. In addition, cultural dimensions and their coherent relation with other elements of the tourism product create a challenge on the part of tourist guides.

It is necessary to bridge cultural gaps between tourist guides and tourists. This contributes to enhancing the role of culture in marketing tourist destinations. In this respect, a tour guide is expected to play a major role in promoting local cultural and enhancing the host- guest relation. Here also comes the vital role of the Jordanian Tourist Guides Association (JTGA) in promoting the profession and maintaining a high quality of skills through continuous development and the implementation of programs and specialized training courses, particularly in cultural interpretation as a core element of the Jordanian tourism product. Such skill development programs are an interest to JTGA members and also reflect on the visitors' experience, plus raises Jordan's competitiveness up as a tourism destination.

Government authorities need to play an active role in monitoring and licensing tourist guides, and in upgrading and updating tourism legislations regarding the quality of tourist guides. All industry stakeholders involved in tourism sector development, and destination and product marketing, in addition to tour operators need to review tour programs to involve more sufficient free time and shopping hours at different sites and attractions. This opportunity offers a great deal of direct cultural encounter, which may in turn reinforce understanding of the host culture on the part of tourists. There is an urgent need to review tourism publications, as a main reference for guides, tourism intermediaries and tourists to ensure the right interpretation and mutual understanding. Jordanian Tourist Guides Association (JTGA) and Tourism authorities in Jordan should prepare a uniformed and standard list of important cultural terms and ensure that guides transfer the right message that enhances cultural diversity and richness. Uniformed terminology must be incorporated within the curricula of educational institutions offering tour guiding courses. Expansion strategy might be one of the best choices for guides to follow in introducing cultural products of the destination to tourists who are

unfamiliar with Jordan's heritage and culture. This strategy offers a wide range of information and by that allowing tourist guides to promote for Jordan at their best.

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