

# A Sociolinguistic Look at Tourist Information

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**Abstract**— A myriad of discussions on tourist information have been made since the dawn of tourism studies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. And there have been also a plenty of research achievements on tourist information. Although such information largely depends on languages which vary from communities to communities in the world, treatises dealing with tourist information do not reveal sociolinguistic barriers which are inherent to language. Through applying sociolinguistic analyses of on-site tourist information, the aim of this paper is to bring about the linguistic issues of on-site tourist information and to propose a prescriptive solutions for quality control.

**Keywords**- tourist information channel; manufacturing process; global language

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the best tool ever found for communication between people. And information delivered by language largely depends on language. According to Ethnologue (2009), there are 6,909 living languages spoken throuout the world. Those languages have been acquired by transmission from parent to child, which is reffered to as the first language or mother tongue. In spite of the fact that language plays a crucial role in society, treatises on tourism have not paid much attention to langauges ever since the beginning of tourism studies began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the early stage of tourism studies, Mariotti (1928), Bormann (1931), and Glücksmann (1935) explain about advertising as a tourism policy. Then Buck (1977), Bhattacharyya (1997) and Moeran (1983) focus on tourist brochures or guidebooks, and Pearce (1984), Fine and Speer (1985), and Cohen (1985) pay attention to tourist guides. From the late 1980s, a concept of tourist information search starts to be analyzed. Fodness and Murray (1997), Okazaki and Hirose (2009) and Wilson (2014) concentrate on tourist information search while Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, and Izquierdo-Yusta (2015), Coromina and Camprubí (2016) focus on tourist information sources. However, research papers or articles utilizing a sociolinguistic approach to language usage are still rare to be found, partly because there is a limited number of researchers in tourism whose main field is sociolinguistics or intercultural communication dealing with langauges.

As more people from different countries or regions come to visit tourist destinations, on-site tourist information is expected to be provided in tourists' first languages. However, it is not a realistic idea in business because the initial cost of translations for such a number of languages is enomous. Consequently, there is a higher usage of English as a global langauge in lieu of the multiplicity of other languages. Although it seems to be an efficient tool of communication, there are several issues to be discussed. Through applying sociolinguistic analyses of tourist information, the aim of this paper is to bring about such linguistic issues and propose a prescriptive solutions of tourist information for quality control.

There is always a definitive issue in tourism research when it comes to discussing a person who travels, due to the fact that there are a variety of expressions for such a person as excursionist, journeyer, mover, passenger, sightseer, tourist, tripper, traveller, visitor, wayfarer, etc. In this paper, a person who visits a tourist attraction is defined as "tourist". And there are several ways of expressing information for tourists even if they all indicate the same lable texts provided at a tourist attraction, such as tourism information, tourist information, travel information, visitor information, etc. These expressions can be recognized as "information" for persons who visit tourist attractions. It is called "tourist information" in this paper.

## II. POSITION OF TOURIST INFORMATION

Based on his work in 1979, Leiper considers tourism as a system which consists of three geographic elements as shown in Figure 1.

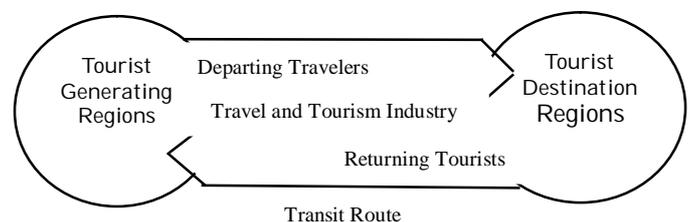


Figure 1. The geographical elements of tourism

Two of the three elements are a tourist generating region where tours begin and end (home) and a tourist destination region where tourists stay temporarily. To make it simpler, the two elements can be explained as a "subject" and an "object". A

subject generates tourist phenomena and plays a main character in the center of tourism. Without a subject, a tourist phenomenon never occurs. An object is what a subject decides to observe. It is a reason for a subject to visit or *raison d'être*. And the third element is merely a transit route or a medium element which connects a subject to an object in the travel and tourist industry.

According to the Encyclopedia of Tourism (2000), Jafari introduces an example of a holistic definition of tourism as follows:

“Tourism is defined as the study of man (the tourist) away from his usual habitat, of the touristic apparatus and networks responding to his various needs, and of the ordinary (where the tourist is coming from) and nonordinary (where the tourist goes to) worlds and their dialectic relationships.”

The worlds of ordinary and nonordinary here are the same as Leiper’s two regions. To avoid lexical confusion, the dichotomy between the two concepts can be expressed as “home” and “destination”. It was not until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when tourist information was focused on as a research target at the dawn of tourism studies began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cohen and Cooper (1986) introduces the notion of language brokerage through the sociolinguistic study of verbal encounters between the high temporariness of foreign visitors and the high degree of linguistic accommodation of the locals.

Gunn (2002) explains that the two main drivers of tourism consists of a demand side and a supply side, as shown in Figure 2. Firstly, Gunn’s model does not involve the concept of location, which can avoid a contradiction in the following thought experiment.

“Is it a touristic behavior if a resident who lives next to a tourist attraction visits the attraction located in the ordinary habitat zone?”

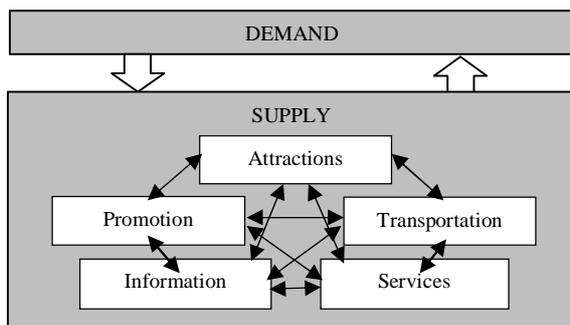


Figure 2. The tourism functioning system

Secondly, the model provides five auxiliary elements, including the element of information. Both Leiper’s model and Jafari’s example do not mention the concept of information. Information plays an efficient role which leads people to tourist destinations. MacCannell (1976) argues that attractions consist of three essential components – a tourist, a sight, and a marker.

Without a marker, which is a piece of information about a sight, there could not be touristic behaviors because no one would know what and where tourist attractions are.

Unlike intelligence, which remains closed in a certain group of people, information is open to the public and what should be shared among people. The roles of information can be categorized into three functions. The first one is “promotion” to attract people to tourist destinations by public transportation. The second is “assistance” to guide people to their destinations or indicate directions. And the last is “education” to provide the knowledge of tourist attractions.

### III. INITIAL SETTINGS

In order for a supply side to provide tourist information, it is essential to consider the following issues beforehand:

#### a. Budgeting

To provide productive on-site information, including its periodical maintenance, it totally depends on how much the leader of a providing organization understands the issues of tourist information. The leader is in a position to control expenditures to secure the management, so naturally the leader may be timid to set up a sufficient budget for an initial plan. The level of the leader’s understanding is crucial.

#### b. Language Selection

Based on the target groups of tourists, official languages must be selected. What is more, considering the employment of braille, sign language, or even pictogram is significant for universal accessibility.

Dann (1996) categorizes tourist information into three stages – pre-trip, on-trip, and post-trip, based on the dimensions of time. These three stages cover the whole process of gaining information before leaving home, during the journey, and after coming back home. The first two stages can mainly contribute to an initial journey, while the last one may not only produce a confirmatory effect of the initial experience but also generate the second journey. In other words, the third stage can also generate another travel the same way the first stage does.

Takeuchi (2010) combines five human senses into two traditional concepts – off-site information in ordinary zones (home) and on-site information in nonordinary zones (destination). Table 1 introduces tourist information channels of social media, based on Takeuchi’s work in 2010. Humans collect a variety of information of their environment for their security through five faculties of senses – vision, audition, olfaction, gustation, and tactition. Since most of tourist information depends on the faculty of sight, people who have trouble with eyesight cannot gain necessary information and may end up like foreign visitors who do not understand the local languages. Theoretically speaking, an extra budget must be arranged for those with difficulties in the five senses, but economically speaking, it is not easy for a supply side to gain

profits against the investment to infrastructural arrangements for those with less accessibility.

Table 1. Tourist Information Channels

Modes	Channels	Social Media
Off-site information (ordinary zones)	Vision	books, advertisements, websites
	Audition	word of mouth, radio
	Vision & Audition	word of mouth, television, education, you tube
	Vision	handouts, signboards, dactylogy
On-site information (non-ordinary zones)	Audition	audio guides, soundscapes
	Vision & Audition	tour guides, interpreters
	Olfaction	fragrance samples, smellscape
	Gustation	wine tasting, food samples
	Tactition	hands-on, braille, deafblind manual alphabet

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IV. MANUFACTURING PROCESS

Based on Takeuchi's work, the author claims that to provide tourist information requires three core bodies – "provider", "producer", and "translator", as indicated below in Figure 3.

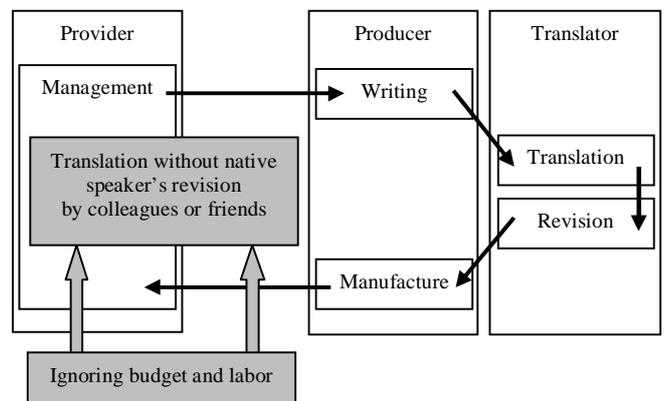


Figure 3. Manufacturing Process of Label

The provider is to provide on-site tourist information. The producer is to manufacture the on-site information bodies, including the written texts and designs with selected materials in accordance with the budget. The translator is to translate the original texts into the target languages, with the profound knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of the target languages. Then the translator is to ask native speakers of the target languages to check or revise, if any, the translated texts to avoid grammatical errors or cultural inconsistencies. Naturally, it must not be recommended to ask colleagues or friends with little knowledge of the target languages to translate texts, simply because of saving time and money. It may end up with embarrassing results of translation, or sometimes causing legal issues.

To a producer, a provider must carefully control the quality of the content and design of tourist information. Tilden (1957) defines the following six principles of interpretation:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.

Dull texts cannot attract tourists' interests. Impressive topics or familiar subjects may have the potential to be welcomed by tourists during their minute-long stays at attractions. And texts should give objective descriptions. For example, there could be tourists from victorious nations at the sites of defeated nations. Ethnocentrism or emotional texts should be avoided.

To a translator of the original texts, a provider must be aware of the cultural differences between employed languages. A provider must also keep an eye on translation works which should be matched with the original intentions. Writers or translators tend to focus on the native speakers of a global language, not for non-native speakers partly because writers or translators may have their own pride that their productions should look natural or refined to native speakers of the selected language. Translators tend to pursue refined expressions to

show off the level of their skills when translating text drafts into a global language that non-native speakers hardly understand. Clarity and simplicity should be the standard to which translators should aspire.

When employing English as a global language, there are quite a few cases of different names for the same tourist attraction. For example, "Kinkakuji", which is a famous temple covered in gold foil on the surface, located in Kyoto can be written in four ways in English as follows:

1. Pronunciation Mode

Kinkaku-ji: Here, "Kinkaku" is its original name and "ji" means temple.

2. Combination Mode

Kinkaku Temple: The first "Kinkaku" remains and the latter "ji" is translated.

3. Excess Mode

Kinkaku-ji Temple: The translation of "ji" is added after Pronunciation Mode

4. Translation Mode

Golden Pavilion: The whole name is translated in to English.

Those cases can be observed not only in Japan but in other countries as well. Tourists may be confused when they find there are more than one official name for the target attraction, and the situation, therefore, should be avoided. The idea of product liability can be applied when a person is harmed by a product, including navigation charts or instructions to introduce how the product should be used safely. If there is a flaw in such instructions and the flaw results in a cause of loss, it will be a case of product liability. When this idea is applied to tourist information, such as labels at attractions, inconsistencies of labels can be diminished.

## V. FUTURE ISSUES

No matter how carefully people try to protect tourist attractions and the environments by way of sustainable tourism management, time gradually decomposes the picturesque landscapes or weathers artificial structures. For people with the faculty of sight, there is a way to appreciate such tourist attractions through the digital images on a screen or PC monitor, preserved before the decomposition and weathering. Or they can enjoy such images even on the move by public transportation through connection to the internet. This, however, is merely a way for those with eyesight. Humans have not yet reached the world in which all the people can have their own ways of enjoying tourist attractions and the environments with no difficulty.

On the one hand, tourist information is a tool of business activities. It could become an extravagant advertisement because of its business activities to attract people to the tourist destinations. On the other hand, tourist information, including interpretive labels at tourist attractions or museum exhibits,

plays an educational role in knowledge delivery. Therefore, the content must be neutral, away from bias or favoritism.

Every theory or hypothesis is destined to be revised or altered with a more advanced one which better explains the mechanism of a target phenomenon. As the technology of digital devices advances, so may theories or hypotheses which are related to the technology. The study of tourist information is not an exception. However, the essence of the discussions in tourist information can remain the same so long as the information relies on language.

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