Exploring and Analyzing Cultural Issues in English and Arabic Tourist Advertisements

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ABSTRACT:

Advertisements play an important role in the tourism industry and are a crucial part of tourism discourse. The tourism text is not merely discourse to be transcoded, but it is embedded within a sociocultural background. The aim of this study is to expose how the 'nature' theme is used differently to promote tourism in different cultures. This paper examines and explores the discourse employed by English and Arabic tourist advertisements promoting Malaysia as a tourist destination. Based on domain or ideological categories, these advertisements try to convince potential customers to become travelers by meeting their cultural needs and motivations. Under the shadow of the comparative literature, the paper makes a comparison between the English and the Arabic advertisements focusing on convergences and divergences of cultural issues and motivations. Vocatively, the English and the Arabic tourist texts promoting Malaysia have been analyzed lexically, thematically, and the most important, culturally. Finally, tourist attractions are extremely ingrained in the norms and culture of a country.

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Introduction:

The large proportion of the debate in this study will be based on culture, thus, some explanations should be raised in this field. Culture is the "integrated pattern of human knowledge, beliefs, and behaviour that is both a result of an integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Culture thus consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies, symbols" (Stevens et al 2008: 430). Every culture of a country deeply engrains its tourist attractions. History and geography of a society influence culture of that society. As a matter of fact, variation in culture of a specific society creates more opportunities to be a country of important tourist attractions.

Culture diversity in Malaysia has become the most important attraction in persuading tourists around the globe to visit Malaysia. The tourist attractions in Malaysia are not confined in one area, but they are well distributed across the country. Interestingly, each state has its own identity and culture. Due to the fact that the thirteen states in Malaysia encompass a variety of cultures, this result in cultural diversity among Malaysians (Hasan & Habil & Mohd, 2008). Thus, the mission of cultural translation is to persuade the target readers that they will find their cultural needs and to address them according to the prior knowledge of their demands in the country of destination. This is because different societies have different conceptualizations of the world which are rooted in culture.

Text of tourism is embedded within a sociocultural context, not simply transcoded discourse. Brochures are vital means of the target culture and relays its norms and expectations; for Snell-Hornby (1999), brochures are essential texts which "even in an age of increasing globalization … are culture bound; their impact varies with the reader and his or her background, origin and mentality." Adab (2000:197) approves this view invoking a greater consciousness of target reader, needs, values and expectations. She also states that adapting intercultural advertising serves better in many cases rather than source text translating.

Cultural translation is the understanding and rendering of cultural conceptions. It does not refer to shifting meaning from one definite culture-bearing language to another (Sanning, 2010). In other words, meaning does not lie only in the words and languages, but in the way people view and conceptualize the world. For instance, the concept of family differs from one culture to another. In individualistic cultures, family means the husband, the wife and children, while in the collectivistic cultures, family means the extended family that includes the uncles, the aunts and the nephews. Hence, language is created within a cultural context. Language is grounded in culture.

Literature Review:

"Tourist text is any text published or directed by a public or private organization of any kind intended to give information to any kind of visitor, to advertise a destination and encourage visitors to go there" (Liao, 2018: 273). Tourist texts basically fulfill two common functions: informative and persuasive or vocative. The informative function is an exterior aspect. It could be described as the reality outside language. The vocative function is the addressee, the readership. "The term 'vocative' is used in the sense of 'calling upon' readership to act, think or

feel, in fact to 'react' in the way intended by the text. Nowadays, vocative texts are more often addressed to a readership than to a reader." (Newmark, 1988: 40-45).

Sanning (2010) referred that while the vocative function is the aim, informative function is a premise. This is because tourist text is a kind of general reading material for common people. Drawing the tourist's attention and stimulate their thought is the main goal behind the tourist text so that they may be content to visit the tourist destination on one hand. On the other hand, to be given enough knowledge about culture, traditions and tourists customs' attraction through reading or watching the text. In this concern, the vocative function is the most importance. Particularly, there is another function the tourist text possesses, "the aesthetic function" (Chen, 1998: 273) and "cultural values". When discussing the aesthetic function, it is obvious that the tourist text is brief, well-organized and very short in length using shining language.

Talking in this concern, cultural value is manifested primarily through three aspects: the traditional values rooted in heritage like traditions, habits, social structures, practices, crafts and arts, etc.; the inherent natural values like mountains, rivers and lakes and so on; and the artificial values held in human-made marvels such as temples, palaces, museums, architecture, etc. (Chen, 1998). The translation of tourist texts includes its special intention but with insufficient cultural equivalents. The model tourist texts should preserve such potentials as being informative, practical realistic, fascinating, educational, humorous, and usually poetic (Chen, 1998).

Only a good deal of understanding cultural differences and the difficulties that these differences may generate can make people approach a tourist text. The divergence between lexicons and cultures and the notion of sociocultural background are discussed by many scholars like Newmark (1998), Bassnett (1980/2002) and others. Their writings show the convergences of text and culture, the "indissoluble connection between language and way of life." (Bassnett, 1980: 2). This study focuses basically on the norms that can be different from culture to another. Several concepts affect, in a way or another, the norms and behaviours of a society. These concepts could be cultural, religious, regional, traditional or even environmental.

Methodology:

Comparative literature shows the relation between societies concerning thematic issues and how the culture, tradition, and believes are driving certain society and affect the people. De Zpetnec (1998: 13) states that "Comparative Literature has intrinsically a content and form which facilitate the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of literature and it has a history that substantiated this content and form". In this paper, English and Arabic advertisements promoting Malaysia as tourism attraction will be analyzed and culturally compared. The English advertisement is a video of 30 seconds in length, produced by TVC Europe in 2007. It comprises written and visual text promoting the nature in Malaysia. On the other hand, the Arabic advertisement is a video of 55 seconds in length, produced by TVC Malaysia in 2010. It includes a song and a small girl, visual and written text promoting tourism in Malaysia, too. The Arabic song is translated literally into English language by the academic expert (Prof. Dr. Abid Shahooth, College of Arts - University of AlAnbar) for the purpose of discussion. Due to the difference between Anglo and Arabic cultures, absolutely there will be divergences in the way, style and expectations through which the author addresses his/her audiences in both

advertisements. These divergences, and also convergences, will be considerably compared. Screenshots will be taken from the two advertising videos as illustrative diagrams to support the argument.

Textual Analysis:

After what has been mentioned above, a solid ground of understanding was established from which we can arise a precise analysis and adequate discussion concerning the English and Arabic tourist texts.

English Tourist Text:

> *WHEN QUEIT BEACHES BEKON*
>
> *WHEN GENTLE TIDES CALL OUT*
>
> *IT'S TIME TO PACK YOUR SWIMSUIT*
>
> *THE TIME IS NOW*
>
> *THE PLACE IS MALAYSIA.* (TVC Europe, 2007)

The major concept that attracts the western tourists towards Malaysia is nature which is represented here by the sun, the sea and the beach. Although the word 'sun' is not mentioned lexically in the text, but it is the most attractive image the author intentionally makes the reader feel its charm. Without sun, there is no aesthetic aspect to the beach. The sun is highly connected with the beach. Let's begin with the vocative function. The vocative function is the sun. It is visually, but brilliantly, promoted. Laurent (1967) argues that the sun is undoubtedly a significant and universal symbol for tourism. Everlasting sunshine is the idea that associated with the good life and pleasure. The sun is such important symbol that people have portrayed even snow-capped mountains advertisements or those of tropical rainforests in the jungle with sunshine. No matter if the word 'sun' or an image of the same to appear in this persuasive material. (see image 1)

Image 1 (TVC Europe 2007)

The concept of the sun can be felt also when the author promotes packing swimsuit. No swimsuit could be worn unless there is sunshine under which the western tourist would lie on the sand of the beach for hours until his/her skin is massaged and bronzed. "To expose ourselves to the sun is to look for the human warmth of Mother. To receive a tan is like a prolonged contact with her skin which penetrates ours by osmosis. The light is the clear

maternal gaze. The blue sky becomes the Immaculate mother" (Dufour, 1978: 18). He prefers to emphasize the sun's basis in myth. It is the myth of Oedipus reveals the sun in archetypal terms as Mother.

The second promotional domain in this advertisement is the sea. It is known that when somebody visits a place in any sea attraction in Malaysia, the most proportion of the tourists there would be Western people. The generating force of energy that refreshes and heals is symbolized by ocean, sea, river or any figure of active water (Trotta 1992:106). The sea or ocean is a place where many fun and adventures, the Western tourist is fond of, can be practiced all the day like swimming, surfing, fishing, go yachting the open sea, diving and the like. "gentle tides" is an informative function that there are soft sea-waves that could be very enjoyable in many activities on waves. These waves "call out" those who are interested in such adventurous activities.

In literature, Mentz (2009) shows that lots of particular information, language, and initial involvement of the sea has been lost by the typical reader today whereas they were once very common in Western culture. Except as a space for regeneration, the sea appears less present to early 2000s English as well as American readers. Recently, there is a shift and increasing attachment to the sea especially for spending nice times there at the weekends. Mentz (2009) continues:

"Airline travel, containerization, the automation of ports, and even the romance of outer space have all contributed to the decreasing centrality of the maritime world in the Western imagination. The modern era has also witnessed the discovery of maritime recreation, including such things as weekend beach-going and recreational swimming." (998)

Image 2 (TVC Europe, 2007)

The word "Quiet" is an attractive use of an adjective for persuading those who suffer from the crowded cities and the chaos of modernization in the West. It is a bright metaphoric statement that personification of the beach 'who' "beckon" or call the potential western tourists to come for getting rid of crowds and busy thoughts for spending dreaming times in the water (image 2).

The beach and the sand are Western paradise image as they represent the daybed, relaxation and body-tanning under the sunshine. "It's time to pack your swimsuit.", this invitation is typically oriented to the West because in their culture wearing swimsuit on the beach is a natural and welcomed habit; that every person's back-bag should contain it. The use of 'It's

time' provokes and tempts the potential Western tourists that there is no spare time and they should join the beach as fast as possible; lest they lose the fun, relaxation, sunshine on the beach. The imperative use of the verb 'pack' denotes to preparation for travel.

In summary, a series of specific discourse domains is exploited by the Western tourist industry in order to promote destination according to their culture and traditions. Moreover, through recurring selective discourse, the concepts are communicated. This discourse dominates the promotional messages that serve people's cultural needs. The key words that appeared in this text provide a respected source of dedicated language and screenshots oriented to the Western potential tourists, such as the sun, the beach, the tides, men and women with swimsuits.

Arabic Tourist Text:

<div dir="rtl">

عصافير بالسما وفراشات

شكلهن خيالي

بس مو هذا اللي في بالي

أبدا مو ببالي

ياريت الشمس تحن علي

والسما تشتي علي شوية

مع عطاء الطبيعة ... تتتابع الذكريات

</div>

There Are Birds and Butterflies In The Sky

They Look So Dreamy.

But, This Is Not What I Want,

Never, Never

I Wish The Sun Would Pity Me

And The Sky a Bit Wets Me.

   With Nature's Generosity, Memories Are Running. (Translation of the Arabic text)

Nature is also promoted in the Arabic advertisement. The most attractive theme in this text is the rain. The sky is mentioned two times in the verbal text promoting the rain. It is known that Middle East, in particular Arabic region, includes wide area of the deserted lands and these lands suffer from the lack of the rain. In addition to that, the sun is shining strongly in most of the days in the year. Thus, individuals there, try to resort to shadows and seek the rain. Hence, the text addresses the Arab people according to their needs and requirements.

Moreover, only a small Arab girl appeared to act in the advertisement. In Arab culture, as well as others, childhood represents innocence and purity. Hence, she symbolizes the purity of

nature. Thus, a gentile connection is made between childhood, birds, butterflies, the sky and the rain for promoting nature. No woman appeared in the video although her family is surely nearby somewhere else.

The beautiful 'birds and butterflies' the girl watches in the sky do not attract her; although they look unusual birds and butterflies which do not resemble those that she used to see in her country. Neither the twin towers nor the electric train that appeared in the video by any means appeal to her. She is not clearly interested in the views of the beach, the sea or the trees. All what she is looking for is to resort from the sun and to wait for the rain and only the rain. During her first steps on the stairs of the plane, she rises her face towards the sky waiting for the rain and she kept as such throughout the video (see image 3).

Image 3 (TVC Malaysia, 2010)

When a cloud comes and first drops of the rain finally fall down, she sets her umbrella free to welcome and enjoy the magic drops of the silver rain with great joy. (see image 4)

Unlike the concept of the sun in English advertisement when no word 'sun' written or said, but seen and felt, the concept of the rain in Arabic advertisement was written and said but again seen and felt. This technique in the tourist discourse is vocative rather than informative. The vocative function, as already mentioned, is the goal and the informative function is the premise.

Image 4 (TVC Malaysia, 2010)

Arabic advertising discourse is formal and indirect. There is no use of imperative verbs and no use of second person form. Arabic tourist industry usually offers a unique and strong theme in the process of marketing to create an attractive offer for the reader to savor. The matching and

mixing of the rain and the small girl allows the sender to convey a strong message, which reaches a broader Arab audience.

Comparatively, the two texts have two dimensions. The first one includes few similarities (convergences). The second dimension includes a big deal of lexical, theoretical and cultural dissimilarities (divergences). These two dimensions may be briefly explained as follows:

Convergences:

The two texts are promoting the same concept which is nature in Malaysia and using the same slogan, "Malaysia Truly Asia" (diagram 5). In addition, both advertisements utilize human beings as real characters to interact with nature.

Image 5 (TVC Malaysia, 2010)

Divergences:

There are differences regarding style for the English - Arabic language \ culture combination and also differences in conventions governing content. In particular, there are differences in tone: Arabic language text adopts a formal, distant relationship with the receiver, who is hardly addressed with a straight discourse. The English language text tends to be less formal, to establish direct communication with the reader, using second person form and imperative for example, 'Pack Your Swimsuit' and contraction form, 'It's Time'. More formal lexical choice in Arabic and more colloquial in English further highlight the difference in distance between the author and the reader.

Thematically, the author of the English tourist text depends on the combination of themes; the sun, the sea, the beach and time of adventures in order to promote nature. On the other hand, the author of the Arabic text depends on the image of the rain and the childhood for the same purpose. However, we cannot deny that the Arabic text also promotes implicitly the twin towers, the electric train and the jungles while exposing them in the video; pretending that the girl is looking only for the rain.

The biggest difference explicitly emerges in culture, in which the tourist attractions deeply rooted. The English advertisement communicates its audience through persuading them to join the fun and adventures that could be spent on the beach and in the sea. It also calls them to bring their swimsuit to swim together, men and women, in the sea and to lie under the sunshine; exposing semi-naked males and females in the video. This is not banned neither in their religion nor traditions. Alternatively, Arabic text communicates the potential Arab visitors by

exposing only one girl-child promoting the rain in Malaysia that the Arab lands mostly lack. The most important issue that Islam never gives permission to woman wearing only swimsuit or to mix with the men on the beach. Thus, greater awareness of Muslim reader needs, expectations and values must be considerably taken into account in this concern.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the English and the Arabic tourism texts promoting Malaysia have been examined and analyzed lexically, thematically, and the most important, culturally. They are together verbal and visual texts. Each text has its own ideology to communicate with the audience depending on their norms, cultural issues, needs and values. The biggest difference explicitly emerges culturally. Tourist attractions are extremely ingrained in the norms and culture of a country. English text upholds the sun, the sea and men and women on the beach to promote the theme of nature, while Arabic text highlights the childhood and the rain to promote the same theme. Comparative, cultural, lexical and thematic convergences and divergences have been stated.

استكشاف وتحليل القضايا الثقافية في الإعلانات السياحية باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية

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ملخص البحث:

تلعب الإعلانات دورا مهما في صناعة السياحة وهي جزء أساسي من الخطاب السياحي. إن نص السياحة ليس مجرد خطاب يجب تحويله، ولكنه جزء لا يتجزأ من خلفية اجتماعية وثقافية. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو الكشف عن كيفية استخدام موضوع "الطبيعة" بشكل مختلف للترويج للسياحة في الثقافات المختلفة. تدرس هذه الورقة وتستكشف الخطاب الذي تستخدمه الإعلانات السياحية باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية للترويج لماليزيا كوجهة سياحية. استنادا إلى المجال أو الفئات الأيديولوجية، تحاول هذه الإعلانات إقناع العملاء المحتملين بأن يصبحوا مسافرين من خلال تلبية احتياجاتهم ودوافعهم الثقافية. في ظل الأدب المقارن، تجري الورقة مقارنة بين الإعلانات الإنجليزية والعربية مع التركيز على التقارب والاختلاف في القضايا والدوافع الثقافية. صراحةً، تم تحليل النصوص السياحية الإنجليزية والعربية التي تروج لماليزيا معجمياً وموضوعياً والأهم ثقافياً. أخيرا، تعتبر مناطق الجذب السياحي متأصلة للغاية في معايير وثقافة البلد.