

# A Stylistic Analysis of Tourism Communication at Japan's World Heritage Sites from Cross-Cultural and Environmental Perspectives<sup>1</sup>

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## 0. Introduction

The final aim of the current study is to improve tourism communication in Japan, in particular for foreign visitors to the country. In this paper, by analysing foreign language texts provided for non-Japanese speaking tourists, we will investigate (1) how (in)appropriately cultural buildings and places are represented as attractive sightseeing spots. We will also examine (2) what narrative and stylistic devices are employed to raise awareness of the beauty, nature, and environment of Japan's World Heritage Sites. For this purpose, the 'original' Japanese and 'translated' English texts describing World Heritage Sites in Japan — Himeji Castle, Kiyomizudera Temple and Ryoanji — are comparatively analysed from the perspectives of stylistics and translation (Boase-Beier 2014; Boase-Beier et al. 2018; Saito 2007) and eco-stylistics (Zurru 2021), as well as that of cross-cultural understanding, to examine whether and to what extent the original Japanese messages are retained, modified, or even deleted in the foreign language. By focusing on the representation of Japan's culture and natural environment in tourism communication, we will explore the relationships between the value of sightseeing spots as cultural heritage sites, awareness of environmental preservation, and stylistic choices. Having connections to cross-cultural understanding and natural environment preservation, the current study contributes to developing a "green stylistics", the theme of PALA 2023.

## 1. Background: Problems in Tourism

While tourism is now recovering, it still faces many challenges and many of them are unchanged since before the spread of COVID 19. First, troubles over food and tattoos are cross-cultural problems common in Japan. For example, Seo et al. (2022) analysed how "five pungent roots (in Buddhism or Taoism)" in foods are dealt with in Japanese local city restaurants (see also Nootbaar (2023) and Sekiya (2022) for tattoos in the cross-cultural context). Second, inappropriate communication often causes trouble in tourist spots. While English has been spreading rapidly in Japanese society, you often encounter awkward expressions, like this one found inside a bus in Kyoto, for example:

When getting on the bus from the front, please get off from here (= bus door in the middle, usually used for getting on).

(Instruction inside the bus in Kyoto, recorded in March 2021)

Even to a bus commuter accustomed to Japanese bus services, this message is confusing. Also, spelling mistakes and translation errors can be found even in famous international sightseeing spots. Finally, the influence of tourism on the natural environment is often discussed in EFL classrooms in Japan. The following extract from an EFL textbook discusses the possible influence of tourism on the environment in the Azores.

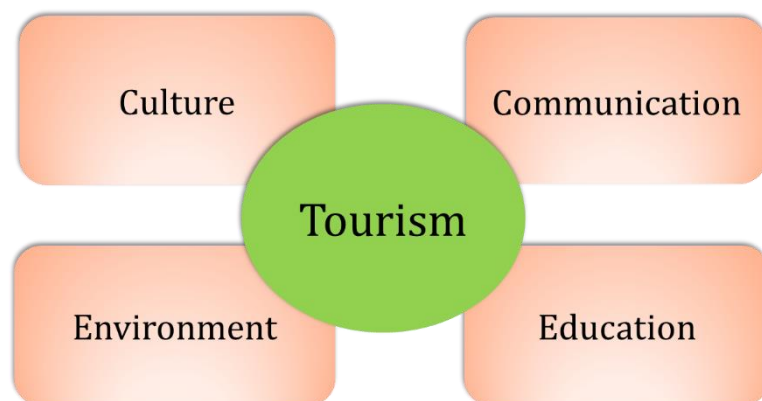
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For tourists, it's the Azores' natural beauty, volcanic craters, and whale-watching that draws them in, but some worry that influx of tourists could put its delicate ecological balance at risk. (Shishido et al. 2017: 74)

In summary, while tourism is primarily for leisure and relaxation, it is now a topic of interdisciplinary study that integrates culture, communication, environment, and education.

[Figure 1: Tourism as interdisciplinary study]



## 2. Seminal Works

The current study focuses on linguistic and stylistic aspects of tourism, and before presenting our analysis, it is instructive to review some important studies that address related problems.

First, some studies have discussed tourism communication from an ESL/EFL perspective. According to Shirahata et al. (2012), tourist English, such as brochures and guidebooks, is “authentic”: unlike artificial materials intended for English language learning, tourism communication, such as guidebooks, provides real messages that visitors need. Although this authenticity is not exclusive to tourism communication (cf. Takahashi 2015; Burton 2016; Kuze 2019), no one can deny that English communication in sightseeing spots is a strong motivation for many EFL/ESL learners.

Second, tourism often targets foreign visitors and it is important to consider how the values of one's culture can be conveyed to those with different cultural backgrounds. So, some researchers have addressed the problems involved in the translation of tourism communication into foreign languages. For example, Matsuura et al. (2020) collect a variety of translated texts used in tourism contexts and analyse the errors from linguistic and pragmatic perspectives. Li (2021) also examines Chinese tourism communication in Japan.

Finally, tourism attracts attention in stylistics as well. For example, Douthwaite et al. (2017) includes a stylistic analysis of landscapes described in canonical literature. On the other hand, Virdis et al. (2021) includes some examples of multimodal stylistic analysis of texts found in streets, such as signs and advertisements.

Considering the significant findings of these studies and the necessity of further studies in related fields, the current study examines tourism communication from stylistic, cross-cultural, and environmental perspectives.

### 3. Research Questions

Based on a review of the seminal studies and our field research, we have come up with three hypotheses about tourism communication.

- (1) Effective communication is essential to develop tourist spots.
- (2) Raising awareness of nature is critical to tourism communication.
- (3) Tourism communication is worth studying from stylistic and narratological perspectives.

In the sections that follow, we examine their validity by answering two research questions:

- (1) How (in)appropriately cultural buildings and places are represented as attractive sightseeing spots.
- (2) What narrative and stylistic devices are employed to raise awareness of the beauty, nature, and environment of Japan's World Heritage Sites.

### 4. Method

The research is based on a field study that gathered authentic data at World Heritage Sites in Japan. The current study simulates a foreign visitor's trip. As preparation for the field work, we examined the websites of the destinations. Next, we visited the locations by using public transport to collect samples of as many kinds of tourism communication as possible, such as tourist guides, maps, and even signs and announcements in stations. As of July 2023, the World Heritage Sites we have visited are: Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, Atomic Bomb Dome, Himeji Castle, Nijo-jo Castle, Kiyomizudera Temple, Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion), Ryoanji Temple, Tenryuji Temple, Todaiji Temple, Kasuga Taisha Shrine, Horyuji Temple, and Mozu-Furuichi Kofungun (Ancient Tumulus Clusters).

Finally, we conducted a stylistic and narratological analysis of the collected texts by applying the framework of translation and stylistics (e.g. Saito 2007), foregrounding, narrative structure, and evaluative devices. We paid special attention to differences between 'original' Japanese and translated English versions and, to visualize those differences, we also analysed verbatim translations made by DeepL, a cutting-edge machine translation system, for comparison.

### 5. Analysis

First, we analyse how (in)appropriately Himeji Castle is represented as a cultural and historical building (5.1.). Next, we examine how awareness of beauty, nature, and the environment is raised in the description of Ryoanji and Kiyomizudera in Kyoto (5.2.).

#### 5.1. (In)appropriate representation of cultural buildings and places

Himeji Castle was registered as World Heritage Site 30 years ago. To show how the castle is represented, we will show you both the original Japanese and its literal translation by DeepL. Then we will compare the literal translation with the authentic English version written for visitors from abroad. Both Japanese and English quotes are from *Himeji Tourist Guide & Map* (2023), published in Japanese, English, and eight other languages by Himeji City and available at Himeji City Tourist Information Center.

The following is the original Japanese version. (Sentences or clauses are numbered for reference and all the emphases in the quotations are provided by Teranishi and Yoshida.)

#### 【1-A】世界遺産・国宝 姫路城

(1) 姫路城は、慶長年間に建てられ、日本独自の城郭建築の技術が最高潮に達した時期の最も完成された城とされています。(2) 昭和26年には国宝に指定、平成5年には日本ではじめてユネスコの世界遺産（文化遺産）に登録されました。

(3) また、白漆喰で塗り込めた優美な姿は、飛び立つ白鷺に例えられ、白鷺城とも呼ばれています。(4) 平成21年から約5年半、約50年ぶりとなる改修を終え、一層白く美しく生まれ変わりました。

This is its literal translation.

#### 【1-B】 World Heritage and National Treasure Himeji Castle

(1) Himeji Castle was built during the Keicho era (1596-1598) and is said to be the most complete castle built at the height of Japan's unique castle building techniques. (2) In 1951, it was designated as a National Treasure, and in 1993, it became the first castle in Japan to be inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List (Cultural Heritage). (3) The castle is also called Shirasagi-jo (White Egret Castle) because of its graceful white plastered appearance, which is compared to an egret in flight. (4) In 2009, the castle was renovated for the first time in about 50 years, and was reborn even whiter and more beautiful. (Translated with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator) (free version))

As will be explained later, (4), which refers to renovation, is omitted in the authentic English version.

The following quote is from the English version of *Himeji Tourist Guide & Map* (2023).

#### 【1-C】 Himeji Castle

(1) Himeji Castle was built at the beginning of the 17th century, when Japan's unique castle architectural techniques had reached their peak. (2) It was the first site in Japan to be registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in 1993. (3) It was also designated a National Treasure, in 1951.

(4) It is called Hakuro-jo ("White Heron Castle") because of its brilliant white exterior, and is thought to resemble a white heron taking flight.

In (1), the Japanese calendar is replaced by the western calendar. This is understandable. In (2) and (3), while the Japanese version presents the two registrations chronologically, in the English version registration as a World Heritage Site comes first. This is probably because World Heritage is more appealing to foreign tourists.

As a whole, the English version of *Himeji Tourist Guide & Map* is concise, because any reference to renovation is missing. What is missing is sometimes important in any type of text, such as literature and news reports. In this introduction of Himeji Castle too, the fact that the renovation has made the castle much whiter and probably more beautiful

than before may be important. One reason the English version does not mention it may be to encourage English-speaking tourists to feel that it is original, to feel its long history.

Next, we examine how the castle's architectural structure is explained.

This is the original Japanese version.

#### 【2-A】大規模な構造と構成美 螺旋（らせん）式縄張り

(1) 姫路城は大天守と3つの小天守が渡櫓で結ばれた連立式天守が完全な姿で残されており、(2) 幾重にも重なる屋根、千鳥破風や唐破風が、白漆喰総塗籠造の外装と相まって、華やかな構成美を誇っています。(3) 場内の数ある建造物のうち、8棟が国宝に、74棟が国の重要文化財に指定されています。

(4) 天守閣を中心に、内曲輪、中曲輪、外曲輪が螺旋状の堀で区分され、本格的な螺旋式縄張りを構成しています。(5) 外堀に囲まれた城下町は合計233ヘクタールの広さを誇ります。

This is the literal translation by DeepL.

#### 【2-B】 Large-scale structure and beauty of composition: spiral-shaped turrets

(1) Himeji Castle boasts the complete appearance of the castle tower, which consists of the main tower and three smaller towers connected by a series of turrets. (2) The castle boasts a gorgeous composition of beauty with its multi-layered roofs, staggered gables and Chinese gables, combined with the white plaster all-nurikago structure on the exterior. (3) Of the many buildings on the site, eight are designated as National Treasures and 74 as Important Cultural Properties of Japan. (4) Centered on the castle tower, the inner, middle, and outer wards are divided by a spiral moat, forming a full-fledged spiral-shaped rope line. (5) The castle town surrounded by the outer moat covers a total area of 233 hectares.

In reading this version, it is necessary to notice that some technical words are mistranslated. For example, 千鳥破風 is translated as “staggered gables” but 千鳥 has nothing to do with “stagger” in this context. 唐破風 is translated as “Chinese gables” but it is a purely Japanese style of gable.

Next, we compare it with the authentic English version.

#### 【2-C】

##### Beauty of Overall Structure

(1) It retains the complete form of the combined keeps, with the Main Keep being connected to the three small keeps by means of four connecting corridors. (2) The gables and roof layers create a brilliant structural beauty, in combination with the flawless appearance of the exterior, covered entirely in white plaster.

##### What are Japanese Castles?

(3) The keep was a symbol of authority and power for the Lord. (4) At the same time, Japanese castles built during the Warring States Period were infused with the wisdom and techniques required for use as military facilities. (5) Despite its graceful

external appearance, Himeji Castle was built with a robust structure that also thoroughly considered defensive and offensive aspects.

(6) Please enjoy to the fullest every detail of its powerful and magnificent appearance.

The most conspicuous difference is that the English version is divided into two sections “Beauty of Overall Structure” and “What are Japanese Castles?”, the latter of which is missing in Japanese version and was added to the English version. This change should help visitors abroad fully appreciate the Japanese castle.

Another significant difference is that there is no reference to land area in the authentic English version. This is probably because, while “233 hectares” (【2-B】(5)) is large for a Japanese castle, it may not be so globally. Also marked is frequent use of appraisal expressions or boosters (see our emphases). Significantly, appraisal expressions are used not only to emphasize the beautiful appearance, but also to explain the castle’s practical aspects (e.g. “a robust structure that also thoroughly considered defensive and offensive aspects” (5)). On the contrary, reference to practical aspects is weak in the Japanese version. This is probably because it wants to emphasize that Himeji Castle is a cultural treasure. Last but not least, the last sentence is a direct invitation to visitors, and this is not in the Japanese version.

In this section we have comparatively analysed three different versions of an introduction to Himeji Castle. Our comparative stylistic analysis has visualized how the authentic English version has avoided mistranslation/misunderstandings by integrating knowledge of architecture into the translation. Furthermore, it also revealed that the explanations and information given are adjusted to take into account differences in the needs and culture of visitors.

## **5.2. Raising awareness of beauty, nature, and the environment**

In this section we analyse how beauty, nature, and the environment are represented for visitors from an ecostylistic perspective.

### **5.2.1. Ryoanji**

First, we examine the description of Ryoanji, a Zen temple with a famous rock garden. The brochure published by the temple is available on the spot. It contains both Japanese and English versions and explains six historical and cultural assets at the site; “Kuri” (the main building of the temple), Kyoochi Pond, The Rock Garden, Ryoanji Temple, “Tsukubai” (a unique wash-basin of stone), and The Tea-room Zoraku. The following is the Japanese explanation of The Rock Garden.

#### **【3-A】石庭**

(1) この石庭は、東西 25 メートル、南北 10 メートルの空間に白砂を敷き詰め、15 個の石を配したものです。(2) 極端なまでに象徴化されたこの石庭の意味は謎に包まれており、見る人の自由な解釈に委ねられています。

(3) 室町末期(1500 年ごろ)、特芳禅傑などの優れた禅僧によって作庭されたと伝えられています。(4) また、石庭は菜種油を混ぜた土で作られた油土塀によって囲まれ、時の経過による油の変化が独特な風合いを醸し出しています。

The following is the literal translation.

### **【3-B】 Stone Garden**

(1) This stone garden measures 25 meters from east to west and 10 meters from north to south, and is paved with white sand and 15 stones. (2) The meaning of this extremely symbolic stone garden is shrouded in mystery and left to the viewer's free interpretation. (3) The garden is said to have been created in the late Muromachi period (around 1500) by outstanding Zen priests such as Tokuhō Zenketsu. (4) The stone garden is surrounded by an oiled clay wall made of soil mixed with rapeseed oil, and the change of the oil over time gives the garden a unique texture.

(Translated with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator) (free version), revised by authors.)

In this machine translation, no serious mistakes were found except for the name of the historical person Tokuhō Zenketsu (this has been corrected in **【3-B】** ).

The following is the authentic English version.

### **【3-C】 The Rock Garden**

(1) This simple and remarkable garden measures only twenty-five meters from east to west and ten meters from south to north. (2) The rectangular Zen garden is completely different from the gorgeous gardens of court nobles constructed in the Middle Ages. (3) No trees are to be seen; only fifteen rocks and white gravel are used in the garden.

(4) The walls are made of clay boiled in oil. As time went by, the peculiar design was made of itself by the oil that seeped out.

(5) This internationally famous rock garden was said to be created at the end of Muromachi Period (around 1500) by a highly respected Zen monk, Tokuhō Zenketsu.

First of all, the two versions represent the same garden differently, especially in the middle. While the Japanese version emphasizes its symbolic meaning, the English version gives a more detailed explanation and compares the rock garden with a typical western garden. This comparison will help tourists to appreciate the concept. On the other hand, evaluation seems stronger in the English version, through the use of emphatic expressions such as 'only' (1) and 'completely' (2), for example.

Sentence (4) emphasizes that the garden is a kind of natural product, not artificial. What is missing in the English version is the fact that oil is rapeseed oil, which emphasizes an ecological aspect.

To summarize the comparative analysis of Ryoanji brochures, we can say:

- (1) The Japanese version takes a detached perspective, by focusing on its symbolic meaning, for example.
- (2) The English version explains the garden with stronger evaluation.
- (3) Reference to rapeseed oil may be ecologically important.

#### 5.2.2. Kiyomizudera

Finally, we analyse how the Kiyomizudera Temple is represented. In this paper we compare the Japanese and English websites. We found that although the two websites

deal with almost the same aspects of the temple, they are different in terms of the space used for each item. Also, the way those aspects are explained is significantly different. The current analysis focuses on the landscape surrounding the temple.

This is the Japanese version.

#### 【4-A】 四季

(1) 音羽山の中腹に建つ清水寺は豊かな自然に恵まれています。(2) 四季折々の伽藍の風景は、観音さまの慈悲の心そのものです。

(<https://www.kiyomizudera.or.jp/>, accessed on 02/06/2023)

This is rather simple.

The following is the verbatim translation by DeepL.

#### 【4-B】 The Four Seasons

(1) Kiyomizu-dera Temple, located halfway up Mount Otowa, is blessed with abundant nature. (2) The temple's seasonal scenery is a reflection of the mercy of the Goddess of Kannon itself.

(Translated with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator) (free version), revised by authors.)

In this mechanical translation, there were no errors in translation except for the name of Mount Otowa (【4-B】 shows the corrected spelling).

In the authentic English version, the description of nature is more detailed and emphatic.

#### 【4-C】 LANDSCAPES SEASONAL COLORS EMBELLISHING THE KANNON REIJO

(1) Halfway up Mt. Otowa, one of the peaks in Kyoto's Higashiyama mountain range, stands Kiyomizu-dera Temple, which is abundantly blessed with nature. (2) It provides landscapes to match each season, including cherry blossoms in spring, lush green in summer, colored leaves in autumn, and snowscapes in winter. (3) The mountains, which surround the temple buildings, reveal many different views from dawn till dusk and create a stunning landscape in harmony with the beautiful scenery of the ancient city. (4) As the pure water constantly wells up, the scenery also changes its appearance every moment. (5) Through the regular Buddhist events and special viewings, visitors can feel Kannon's compassion and acquire an even better understanding of the deity.

(<https://www.kiyomizudera.or.jp/en/learn/>, accessed on 02/06/2023)

Appraisal expressions or boosters, such as “abundantly blessed with nature” (1) and “a stunning landscape in harmony with the beautiful scenery” (3) are used. In terms of syntactic structure, the use of nature as a sentence subject with transitive verbs seems foregrounded. For example, in sentences (3) and (4), the mountain scenery is the subject and “surround”, “reveal”, “create”, and “changes” have objects. The mountains are represented as having a will and the magnificence of Kiyomizudera's surrounding nature is underlined.

As a summary of the comparative analysis of the Kiyomizudera texts, we can say:



- (1) The English version is more detailed and emphatic than the “original” Japanese version.
- (2) The English version is more evaluative than the Japanese version due to the frequent use of appraisal expressions
- (3) The English version highlights the solemnity of the surrounding natural environment and the stylistic features contribute to such a dramatic presentation of the location.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper we compared Japanese and English versions of tourism communication and by so doing we showed that the same World Heritage Site is represented differently in different languages and that the differences in content and style have something to do with differences in culture. The findings of the current study can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The comparison between a Japanese (original) and two English versions highlights the importance of cross-cultural understanding and knowledge of special fields (e.g. architecture and history).
- (2) Tourism communication is frequently intended to raise the visitor’s awareness of nature, but the style is different between the languages.
- (3) Tourism communication is worth studying from stylistic and narratological perspectives and, in particular, comparative stylistic analysis through translation is quite effective in highlighting stylistic devices such as foregrounding and emphatic expressions.

Despite these significant findings, we would like to emphasize that further research is essential to collect and analyse data from different places and in different languages to confirm and extend our results.

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