

Towards Operationalization of Tour Guides' Performance

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Abstract

Although there is an emergence of new roles of tour guides (TGs), interpretation seems to be their central role. This paper reviews numerous principles and models of interpretation with a goal of establishing a means of measuring tour guides' (TG) performance. As such, the paper provides an operational definition of their performance as the ability to stimulate and capture the visitors' attention, provide accurate information with great competence and help them evidently internalize learnt concepts by acting.

Key words: Tour guides; Tour guides roles; interpretive models; performance;

1 Introduction

Tour guides play vital roles in tourism in general, as well as in its more specific forms such as cultural and adventure tourism. Their services are utilized at destinations, triggering the need for studies relating to the performance of TGs. Cohen (1985) states that tour guides generally play dual roles of pathfinders and mentors. The pathfinder role which is still in existence indicates that TGs show the path to tourists who want to discover more about the place they are visiting, and provide a sense of security in a strange environment (McDonnell, 2001). Cohen (1985) contended that the pathfinder provides privileged access to an otherwise non-public territory. The contemporary mentoring role can be considered to be one of transmission of information and the interpretation of the information. The mentor edifies his or her party as in social mediation and cultural brokerage (Cohen, 1985). Cohen developed the four-quadrant model, which serves as basis for examining tour guide roles. This framework (Figure 1) encompasses four major tour guide functions: instrumental, social, interactionary and communicative. According to Cohen, guiding is evolving and shifting from the logical aspect to the facilitation of experience, from the pathfinder to the mentor role, away from leadership toward mediating and away from the outer toward the inner-directed sphere, with the communicative component becoming the centre of the professional role.

Although it is not possible to encompass all guiding roles within a comprehensive framework since guiding is not just about organizing a tour, socializing with tourists, and interpreting what visitors see and experience, TGs are also sales persons, receivers of tips, entrepreneurs and friend - and people with clear self-interest in guiding and telling tourism tales, being mainly motivated by their drive to learn novel things and meet new people (Salazar and Bryon, 2009).

Holloway (1981:385-386) lists the roles of tour guides as "information-giver and fount of knowledge", "teacher or instructor", "motivator and initiator into the rites of touristic experience", "missionary or ambassador for one's country", "entertainer or catalyst for the group", "confidant, shepherd or ministering angel", as well as "group leader and disciplinarian". Weiler and Ham (2000) emphasize the guide's central role of interpretation and education, while Salazar and Bryon (2009) have identified roles of tour guides as ranging from ambassador, animator, actor, buffer, catalyst, caretaker, communication link, companion, concierge, conduit, culture broker, demonstrator, director, disciplinarian, dragoman, educator, edutainer, entertainer, expert, facilitator, group integrator, host, informal educator, information-giver, infotainer, instructor, interactor, intermediary, interpreter, introducer, leader, manager, mediator, mentor, middleman, moderator, navigator, organizer, pathfinder, presenter, public relations representative, shaman, surrogate parent, teacher and translator.

It is clear from the foregoing literature that relatively new roles are evolving, although all lead to the central role of interpretation. It is apparent that tour guides take visitors around attractions, therefore becoming mediators between the host destination and its visitors when they interpret using the language of visitors' choice as Liao *et al.* (2011) explained. Thus, TGs are expected to work within certain principles if they must perform well and fulfil the expectations of tourists, which bring forth the question of performance of tour guides. Performance refers to how well a person does a piece of work or activity (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005). It refers to completion of a specific task measured against certain preset measurable standards. A task is the smallest identifiable and essential piece of a job that serves as a unit of work. For the case of tour guides, their task is to take visitors around and interpret the attractions to visitors. Whereas there are many standards of measuring tour guides performance, including the number of visitors served within a specified period of time or annual income accruing from tour guiding, the selected criteria in this paper lies within the interpretive paradigm where variables were drawn from a review of interpretation models.

2 The concept of interpretation and its relevance in tourism

Interpretation has been variously defined by different authors among them Tilden (1977), Moscardo (1999), Beck and Cable (2002) and NAI (2006). Tilden (1977) defined interpretation as a specific mode of communication, unlike the fact-only lectures, that appeal to both affective and cognitive domains of visitors. According to Moscardo (1999), interpretation is a special kind of communication that is particularly relevant to tourism. The National Association for Interpretation (NAI, 2006) describes interpretation as a process of communication, based on factual information, through which the development of themes and application of specific principles and techniques are used to create relevance, provocation, and a high level of interaction between the presenter and the audience. According to Interpretation Canada, interpretation is a communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships of cultural and natural heritage to the public through first-hand involvement and experience with objects, artefacts, landscapes, and sites (Veverka, 1994). Beck and Cable (2002) further contend that interpretation is a form of communication having an educational function with messages typically involving our natural legacy and/or cultural heritage. Beck and Cable also define it as an art and a gift. As an art, it is a highly individualistic creative act. Each interpreter's product will be different and personalized by one's background, experience, knowledge, imagination, creativity, and tenacity. And as a gift, interpretive programs help others to see the meanings carried within a landscape or an event in history, and in that regard interpretive services are a gift to their clientele.

From the foregoing definitions, it can be inferred that interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.

3 Principles of interpretation

Although tour guides in cultural tourism can fundamentally be described as interpreters of the cultures they represent, various authors have formulated guiding principles to interpretation. In his book titled "Interpreting Our Heritage", Tilden (1977) defined six principles of interpretation. Since then, many scholars have expounded on these principles and made additions. For instance, Beck and Cable (1998) rephrased the six principles and added nine others. Tilden's first principle that *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* relates to relevance of information being passed about the resource and to the audience. Uzzell (1994) and Harrison (1994) concur with the foregoing and their third and fourth principles respectively note that people are interested in people (Harrison, 1994), and therefore interpretation should have a strong human interest. However, interpretation cannot be relevant and meaningful if it is not based on pre-existing knowledge.

The second principle of interpretation according to Tilden (1977) states that *information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation*

includes information. This refers to the worth of information in interpretation. Beck and Cable's ninth principle relates to this philosophy as it urges consideration to both quality and quantity of information presented. Uzzell (1994) formulated two principles (first and second) that address this: the need for a clear concept, and the need to know, respectively. Harrison (1994) on the other hand provides advice on exploration of the "how" and "why" and the "what" and "when" of any particular piece of information in his first principle.

The third principle by Tilden states that *interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.* This signifies that interpretation is not only an art in itself but also an amalgamation of many arts. Uzzell (1994) and Beck and Cable (1998) thought of highly related principles. Uzzell's fourteenth and fifteenth principles states that interpretation should be opportunistic and must have the right staff, respectively. Beck and Cable recommend use of new technology to present and offer variation in their eighth principle; and that interpretation must have a base level experience in communication (tenth principle), which is basically what Uzzell referred to as right staff. Beck and Cable's fourteenth principle, which states that interpretation should promote optimal experiences through intentional and thoughtful program and facility design also relate to Tilden's third principle.

The fourth principle pioneered by Tilden states that *the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation.* This represents a shift towards facilitation. Uzzell's third principle and Beck and Cable's thirteenth principles make clear apprehension of provocation in interpretation, which advise that interpretation should be interactive, instill the ability and desire in people through experience to sense the beauty. Harrison (1994) second, sixth and tenth principles seem to emanate from this original philosophy. These are: explore the options for an interactive and involving experience; ensure that visitors gain some new knowledge and are stimulated to know more; and provide an overall experience which stimulates all the senses, respectively.

Tilden's fifth principle states that *interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.* This principle recommends that interpretation should not be selective, but rather give complete information. Beck and Cable (1998) formulated a similar principle (seventh), which states that interpretation should bring the past alive to make the present more enjoyable and the future more meaningful. Eleventh and twelfth principles by Uzzell are concerned with orientation and sequence of experience, respectively.

The final principle provided by Tilden relates to interpretation throughout the lifespan. It states that *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.* This means that each age group should be approached with appropriate programs. To better explain this, Uzzell (1994) sixth principle states that there should be different interpretation for different audiences, thus appropriately bringing the thirteenth principle on board that a variety of interpretive techniques be used. Harrison's fourth principle talks about the same thing: that interpretation should be provided at different levels to reflect the interest and comprehension abilities of different visitor groups. Perhaps the reasons for this rests in his seventh principle that interpretation should recognize that there is a limit to how much a visitor can absorb.

While there appears to be much duplication of Tilden's principles by subsequent scholars and researchers like Harrison and Uzzell, there are some unique principles advanced by Uzzell (1994), Harrison (1994) and Beck and Cable (1998). For instance, Uzzell's seventh and tenth principles state that interpretation should be a substitute experience and sympathetic to the local people, respectively. The latter seems to embrace the concept of sustainable development where the local community is considered the key stakeholder.

Other unique principles are the ninth and fifth principles by Uzzell and Harrison respectively, which state that interpretations should be consumer led. Harrison however further alludes in his definition that it should be resource led.

Another distinctive principle which states that interpretation should recognize how unobservant people are, and therefore need guidance as to what to look at and identify what is significant (Harrison, 1994). This eighth principle by Harrison is similar to Beck and Cable's fifteenth principle about being passionate to both visitors and resources for powerful and effective interpretation to be achieved. Beck and Cable's eleventh and twelfth principles concern interpretive writing and ability of interpretive programs to attract support, respectively.

4 Interpretative models

One of the earlier models of public interpretation is that developed by Gabriel Cherem in 1977 (Veverka, 1994). The model applies an integrated holistic approach and reckons not only the site, but also the managerial realities as major components in the planning process. This implies that interpretation should be performed in a holistic manner, and not partially. Veverka (1994) refers to this as 'the Interpretive Systems Planning', which is a way of looking at the entire system of interpretive agencies, sites and opportunities around the interpreted sites.

Forestell and Kaufman (1990) proposed a model for design and testing of interpretive programs following a review of the cognitive psychological theory and the study of whale watchers in Hawaii. The model used has three stages namely dynamic disequilibrium, managing cognitive dissonance and resolution of cognitive dissonance (Figure 2).

Dynamic disequilibrium refers to the pre-contact phase that involves creating a perceived need for information and therefore a motivation to learn. The intention of this stage of the model is to create questions in the mind of the tourists rather than answer them.

At the contact phase involving an experience with real attractions like animals or cultural objects, the cognitive dissonance created at the pre-contact stage needs to be managed. This requires that the needed information be provided in an informed and interesting manner and should be relevant to what the tourist is observing and experiencing. Finally, the resolution of cognitive dissonance should be undertaken and action strategies outlined involving broadening of experience and offering new information to provide broader picture of the environment surrounding the attractions and encouraging the tourists to internalize their knowledge and incorporate the new information into changed behaviour. Tourists at post-contact phase are more likely to be very receptive to environmental issues (Orams, 1996).

A key principle of Forestell and Kaufman's model is that a direct guided experience is more effective than just either a guided experience or direct experience. Direct experience refers to a real-life situation without a guide, whereas a guided experience is the exposure to a knowledgeable guide. However, both concepts combined lead to a guided, real life situation, which is the most effective form.

Orams (1996) further developed the Forestell and Kaufman's model and created Orams' model comprising of five major steps. The first step is the design of the interpretation programme which includes both theories of cognitive dissonance and affective domain. An interpretation programme should offer a variety of interesting questions, so that participants become curious and develop a cognitive dissonance between the questions and their knowledge. With stories about the animals encountered like marine mammals, the affective domain shall be addressed through the involvement of participants' emotions. A state of cognitive dissonance is meant to motivate and provide an incentive to act. Orams suggests that the interpreter should address specific environmental problems and issues, and offer solutions for each participant to act. Ideally, participants are given concrete opportunities to act during the experience, such as petitions to sign, signing up for membership of an environmental organization, or products to purchase that support environmental research. Orams stresses the importance of this stage, because tourists are highly motivated after the experience and are more likely to act than they would be once they go back home. The final stage of feedback and assessment are indicators for the success of the programme and should include observation, interviews of participants,

or questionnaires. In order to investigate the long-term effects of the educational programme, follow-up surveys should be undertaken (Orams, 1996).

Appearing to have their models in mind, Yu, Weiler and Ham (2001) developed a conceptual framework for assessing TG competence. They contend that the success of a TG in brokering an intercultural travel experience that is non-stressful, interesting and rewarding for clients depends largely on the guide's knowledge, attitude and interpersonal communication. Weiler and Ham (2001) confirm this when they identified qualities considered by tourists as essential, among them knowledge, speaking skills, entertaining, enthusiasm, personable, experience, time management, adaptable and group management. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework begins and stops at the contact phase. But the interpretive models reviewed particularly Forestell and Kaufman (1990) and Orams (1996) emphasize the need to initially provoke tourist's thinking before answers are given during the encounter with an attraction such as culture. The direct guided experience leads to post contact phase with tourists that are receptive to environmental issues. Applying the three stages, TGs are expected to begin their tour with a provocation of questions that stimulate tourists thinking. They must also be highly knowledgeable about the culture and local attractions and their surroundings. Finally TGs should utilize the opportunity presented at the post contact phase by helping the tourist to internalize behaviour of caring for environment and preservation of culture and other tourist attractions. Thus, Forestell and Kaufman (1990) model become the potential basis of assessing TGs with regards to their competence level, knowledge base, innovativeness, creativity, attitudes and perceptions.

5 Conclusions

The key principle for the underlying Model of Interpretation for this paper (Forestell and Kaufman, 1990) is that a *direct guided* experience is more effective than just either a *guided* experience (exposure to knowledgeable TG) or *direct* experience (real life situation but without a TG). Both concepts combined lead to a guided real life situation, which is the most effective (Forestell and Kaufman, 1990). The model proposes three phases of TG's performance namely ability to create cognitive dissonance among tourists, have sufficient knowledge about the culture and environment to fill tourist's information gap and tour guides attempts to help tourists internalize and change behaviour. Consequently, this paper defines a tour guides' performance as the ability to stimulate and capture the visitors' attention, provide accurate information with great competence and help them evidently to internalize learnt concepts by acting.

The ability to create a need of information among the tourists by TGs means that tourists are likely to have a fruitful experience. This largely depends on the performance of TGs with regard to creating a cognitive dissonance among the tourists. Key indicators of the TGs at this initial stage include the use of questions at the start of a tour or presentation, a mention of the local history, an outline of key issues of culture and relevance to the host, information about safety at the forest or site and an attempt to stimulate tourism minds before a tour.

Performance of TGs can also be assessed at the second phase. TGs are expected to address the affective domain by providing needed information in an interesting and informed manner. This requires the TG to be knowledgeable. Indicators include TG's involvement in research, continuous seeking of current information through books and media, language proficiency, giving special attention to the natural environment and adoption of relevant delivery methods such as narrative or storytelling.

Finally, the TG is expected to help tourists internalize new information and trigger a change in behaviour for the environment and culture. To this end, TG's performance hinges on their ability to encourage tourists to support lobby groups, engage in calls for and signing of petitions, make materials available and persuade to tourists to join in sponsorship.

Appropriate questions for the designed depending on whether they will be answered by tourists or tour guides, and using the likert scale such as Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5. The sixteen items are as follows:

Pre-Contact Phase: (1) *Use of questions at the start of a tour or presentation*, (2) *a mention of the local history*, (3) *an outline of key issues of culture and relevance to the host*, (4) *information about safety at the forest or site* and (5) *an attempt to stimulate tourism minds before a tour*.

Contact phase: (6) *TG to be knowledgeable* (7) *TG's involvement in research* (8) *continuous seeking of current information through books and media*, (9) *language proficiency*, (10) *giving special attention to the natural environment* and (11) *adoption of relevant delivery methods such as narrative or storytelling*.

Post contact phase: (12) *ability to encourage tourists conserve environment* (13) *to support lobby groups*, (14) *engage in calls for and signing of petitions*, (15) *make materials available* and (16) *persuade to tourists to join in sponsorship*.

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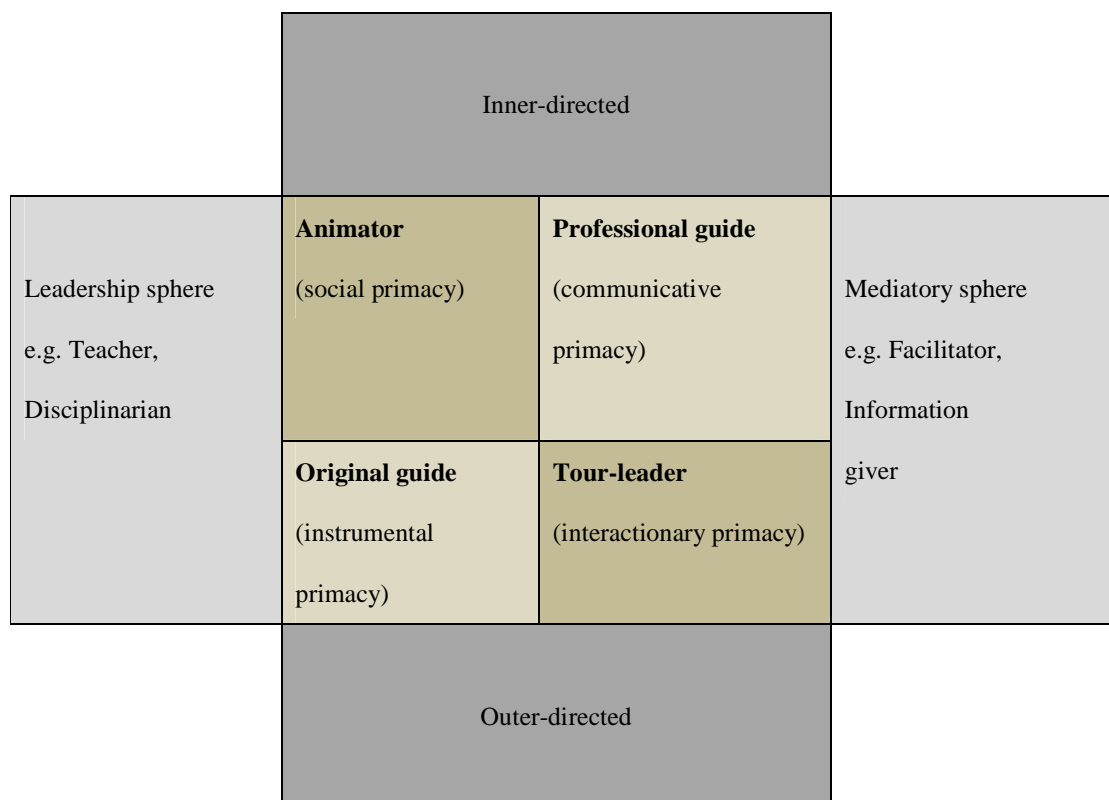


Figure 1: Cohen's four-quadrant model of tour guides' roles

Source: Cohen (1985: p10)

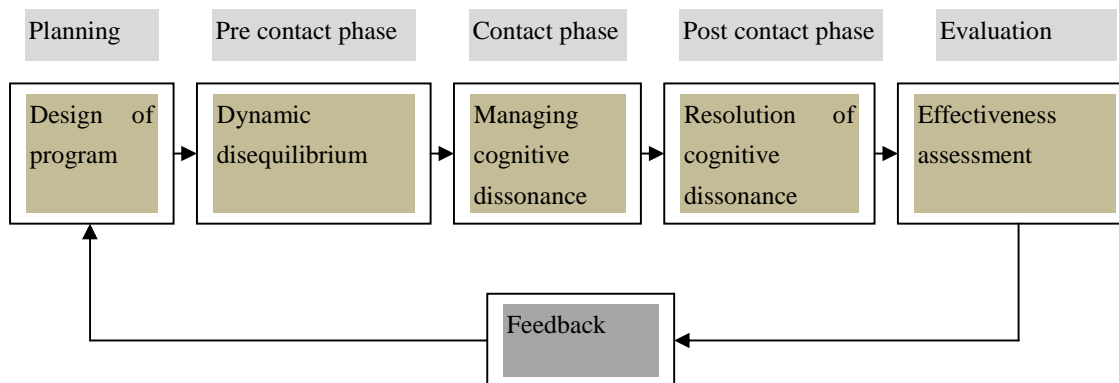


Figure 2: Forestell and Kaufman's interpretation model

Source: Malviya (2005: p108)

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