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**Does commissioning process matter? Understanding translation quality with a case of tourism promotional texts**

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**Abstract**  
This paper aims to shed light on how translation commissioning process relates to the level of the quality of translation set within the context of tourism promotional text translation. Translation quality has been one of the main concerns in the translation of tourism promotional materials. The translation of tourism promotional materials is necessary because they serve as a bridge of communication between visitors and a destination they consider visiting. Therefore, a high quality of translation is essential to create a full understanding of the visitors. Studies on the role of commissioning process have, however, remained limited. The analysis is based on two data, interview and corpus analysis. The interview involved six tourism professionals at the tourism board participating in the commissioning process. The corpus analysis examines six tourism brochures and their translation to consider the quality of the translation as the outcome of the commissioning process. The discussion of the paper focuses on the commissioning process by looking at how the tourism professional understand the purpose of the translation, the translator's selection procedure, the translation brief and quality assurance. The translation of tourism texts are then examined to find out the extent to which the commissioning procedure has influenced the quality of the translations. The paper argues that the commissioning process is inadequate and that has significantly affected the level of quality of the translation that has been commissioned by the Tourism Board in Gorontalo.

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**Keywords:** commissioning process, translation quality, tourism promotional texts

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**1. Introduction**  
The translation of tourism texts is the translation of a specialised text type as tourism texts use language in particular ways to achieve their purpose. The language of tourism itself has recently become a field of research which has been stimulated by various fields such as discourse analysis, cultural studies and specialised discourse studies (Agorni, 2012). The language of tourism has also been developed as a field within languages for specific purposes and has often been included as a form of language for business (Ruiz-Garrido & Saorin-Iborra, 2013). In addition, the language of tourism

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# Does commissioning process matter? Understanding translation quality with a case of tourism promotional texts

*by* Novriyanto Napu

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## 1. Introduction

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The translation of tourism texts is the translation of a specialised text type as tourism texts use language in particular ways to achieve their purpose. The language of tourism itself has recently become a field of research which has been stimulated by various fields such as discourse analysis, cultural studies and specialised discourse studies (Agorni, 2012). The language of tourism has also been developed as a field within languages for specific purposes and has often been included as a form of language for business (Ruiz-Garrido & Saorin-Iborra, 2013). In addition, the language of tourism

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has also been classified as part of the language of promotion (Dann, 1996), or the language of consumerism (Moeran, 1983).

The language of tourism has been examined from product-oriented research perspectives, which have evolved since the 1990s as an attempt to explore approaches and strategies in translation by comparing a large corpus of texts in a language (Valdés, 1997). The research on the language of tourism in the field of translation reveals how effectively source texts have been transferred into the target language and how translators deal with the cultural elements in tourism texts.

The translation of tourism materials has been considered as an interesting domain in translation research as it involves not only linguistic dimensions but also cultural and social features of the source and target language (Ko, 2010). Tourism texts and their translation are essential because they are the bridge between tourists and the place as well as the culture they visit. Since tourists come into contact with the places they are visiting as the result of reading tourism texts, Muñoz (2011) argues that a high-quality translation needs to be provided. A high-quality translation is essential in order to guarantee that tourists feel that they have a full understanding of the destination that they are considering visiting. However, high-quality tourism translation is not always achieved. Nowadays, it is easy to find tourism texts translated into English of poor quality with many problems with spelling, word choice or grammar that produce difficulties in understanding the texts.

### 1.1. Literature review

#### 1.1.1. Studies on the translation of tourism texts

Studies of tourism translation have looked at the quality of tourism texts translation in many different ways. The studies include linguistic issues, cultural issues, source text features, translators' competence and the role of commissioner (e.g. Valdeon, 2009; He & Tao, 2010; Ma & Song, 2011; Vahid Dastjerdi & Abdolmaleki, 2012; Bin, 2013; Liu & Wen, 2014; Napu, 2016). The studies of the quality of translations of tourism texts have used corpus analysis and have focused on many different languages to see how the promotional materials have been translated into the target language and culture for tourism promotion purposes. The discussion aims at providing a general overview of research on the issues around the quality of the translation of tourism texts with a particular focus on translations into English.

A number of studies show that poor quality are common in tourism translation, and that these are the result of a number of different factors, including translators' insufficient linguistic and cultural knowledge (e.g., Wang, 2011; Bin, 2013) and the practice of translating into the second language (e.g., Stewart, 2011) that lead to poor quality translation. In order to explore the nature of the quality of the translation, studies have adopted different ways to evaluate the quality of translated tourism texts. Extensive studies have looked at the quality in terms of linguistic aspects to see the quality in relation to the source text and the accuracy of the target text in reflecting the source text (e.g. Valdeon, 2009; He & Tao, 2010; Milton & Garbi, 2000; Wang, 2011; Guo, 2012; Muñoz, 2012; Liu & Wen, 2014). Findings of these studies are mostly limited at the level of grammatical errors in the translations.

A few studies have, however, looked further at other aspects related to a functional view of translation that go beyond linguistic features such as the role of the commissioning process that may have a significant influence on translation quality. The functional approach (Nord, 1997) suggests that assessing the quality of tourism translation involves not merely looking at the relation between the target and source texts, but at the translation commissioning process. Studies of the quality of translation from commissioning process have, however, remained limited (Napu, 2016).

Research findings of tourism texts translation from the context of Indonesia, for example, have focused on examining grammatical errors in translations. Permadi and Prayogo (2012) and Hartati

(2013) in their study examine translation quality by comparing the source and target texts to find grammatical errors. The attempt to look beyond the linguistic aspect and question why these translation problems occur has not been considered.

Therefore, in order to fill this gap, it is timely to consider the quality of translation by examining the commissioning process, where the translation work is initiated and commissioned.

## 2. Methods

The purpose of this study is to examine the process for commissioning the translation and to find out the extent to which this process relates to the quality of the translations. It was designed through a qualitative case study investigating the nature of the commissioning process and the quality of the translation of tourism brochures, which was set within the context of the provincial level of tourism board of Gorontalo as one of the emerging tourism industry in Eastern Indonesia.

### 2.1. The data

The data of this study is based on the interview and corpus data. The interview includes six tourism board staff members who are involved in the process of commissioning translations at the Tourism Board in Gorontalo Indonesia. The interview was carried out through semi-structured interview using a set of predetermined open-ended questions. These questions were followed up with more questions that emerged during the interview with the participants. This interview was designed to identify the procedures used by the Tourism Board to commission translations and how staff understand the purpose and process of commissioning translations. The corpus data are the entire tourism brochures commissioned by the Tourism Board. There are currently six brochures available publicly at the Board.

### 2.2. Analysis

The data analysis started by preparing and organising the data from the interview. This was carried out through the process of transcribing data. Because the interviews were done in Indonesian, some materials that were used for analysis were also translated into English. All of the quotes taken from the interview materials were presented in Indonesian with an English translation in order to represent the voices of the participants.

The next step in the analytic process was to read the transcription of the interview data carefully. The data from interviews were analysed through content analysis in order to generate interpretations of the contents of the data. This was done by coding to identify themes from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to synthesize common information from the participants about the translation commissioning process.

The responses from participants were classified in response to all four major questions. Responses with similar ideas were grouped together. The data were analysed by comparing the participants' responses to reveal what the fundamental understandings were in relation to each question and if there were shared or different views about aspects of the commissioning process.

Following the analysis of the commissioning process, a set of translations of tourism brochures produced by the Tourism Board was examined to find the nature of the quality of the translation. This was carried out through examining the translation errors. The errors were identified regarding linguistic and cultural errors. The purpose of the text analysis is to investigate to what extent the commissioning process influences the quality of the translation commissioned by the Tourism Board.



### 3. Findings and discussion

#### 3.1. The commissioning process

The discussion is explored through a set of extracts that contain a series of individuals' comments about the commissioning process. The extracts are discussed in terms of what individuals show about the nature of the translation commissioning process and the understanding of tourism professionals about the process. The discussion will give selected extracts that contain detailed information from individuals at the Tourism Board.

##### 3.1.1. The purpose of the translation

The purpose of translation is considered necessary in the process of translation as *Skopos Theory* (Vermeer, 1989) has suggested. This section outlines how these tourism staff members understand the purpose of translation they commission.

The quote below contains information gained from a senior staff member in the tourism promotion section.

*“Menurut saya pariwisata berhubungan dengan banyak orang jadi harus ada informasi dalam Bahasa Inggris sehingga mereka tidak sulit memahami. Karena ada banyak tamu - tamu dari luar atau acara - acara diluar maka terjemahannya ini perlu”.*

(I think that tourism relates to many people and so there should be information available in English so that it is not hard for people to understand. Because there are many visitors from overseas, or events overseas, so a translation is needed).

The quote shows that the brochures are published to provide information about tourism in Gorontalo and indicates that the texts are to be used in two professional promotional contexts: for visitors from overseas and for tourism exhibitions held overseas. The brochures are therefore seen as addressing two quite distinctive audiences and thus as having different purposes. This participant seems to understand that the purpose of translation is both for providing information and for attracting potential visitors through the information provided. The audience of the brochures is categorised into two groups: *‘tamu-tamu dari luar’* (visitors from overseas), that is those who have already come to Gorontalo, and potential visitors that they contact through tourism promotional events held overseas: *‘acara-acara diluar’* (events overseas).

The quote also indicates that English is expected to function as a language that can accommodate all sorts of audiences such as the individuals and participants at tourism events. The way the audience and English are considered relates to two ideas: every foreigner speaks English, and therefore information written in English is important: *‘harus ada informasi dalam Bahasa Inggris’* (there should be information available in English). This means that since English has become a lingua franca, it seems difficult for the Board to define any specific target audience when the potential readership may range over hundreds of countries that use English either as first or second language (Stewart, 2013). The quote indicates that the brochures are expected to do the work for tourism promotion by communicating with any types of audience and English is felt to be suitable for communicating with this loosely defined audience.

It appears that the Tourism Board perceive their target audience in general and as a result, the translated texts are not specifically designed for a particular audience. This understanding of the audience may also indicate why there is a lack of understanding about the purpose of translation. As Nord (1997) have argued, the purpose of the translation can only be specified once the target readers

have been identified and defined. In fact, the translated brochures are intended for any group or target audience or any tourism promotion events.

### 3.1.2. Selecting translators

The section examines the translators' selection process and how the Tourism Board sets their criteria for selecting the translators. The discussion focuses on the process of how translators are chosen to consider the extent to which there is an established procedure for selecting translators.

The extract provides a description of information about requirements of the people at the Tourism Board in selecting translators.

**Researcher:** *“Apakah ada persyaratan khusus dalam pemilihan penerjemah?”* (Are there special criteria in selecting translators?)

**Participant:** *“Untuk sebelumnya seperti itu. Tapi untuk tahun ini sudah dipakai pihak ketiga. Tapi saya kurang tau kapabiliitas mereka, apakah mereka memang sudah memakai tenaga ahli untuk mentranslate atau menggunakan internet, karena sekarang sudah canggih ada Google translate, ada macam-macam mungkin menggunakan itu saya kurang tahu”.*

(In previous years we did not have such criteria. But, this year we asked a third party [the university language centre] to do the translation work. But, I do not know their capabilities whether they have language experts to do the translations or they use the internet such as Google translate. There are many different translation tools they may be using, but we do not know).

The quote shows that there were not any clear criteria used when selecting translators especially before the Tourism Board sought help from the university: *‘Untuk sebelumnya seperti itu* (in previous years we do not have such requirements). This indicates that in earlier years they relied on an internal person, who was considered competent because of her educational background, as discussed above. However, as this participant indicated in the quote, they now have a kind of criterion for choosing translators, which involves giving translation work to a language centre at a university: *‘tapi untuk tahun ini sudah dipakai pihak ketiga’* (but, this year we asked a third party [the university language centre]). This shows that their understanding of ‘criteria’ seems to involve identifying language professionals only in terms of their institutional affiliation. It appears that there are no requirements in their criteria for selecting translator beyond employment by the university. By choosing the university language centre, they seem to assume that the institutional affiliation of the translator will help them solve the problem of translators' competence and they will get a better quality translation.

It also seems they have not actually considered the competence of translators in terms of whether or not the translation provider they have chosen possess the required translation competence to do the translation properly: *‘tapi saya kurang tau kapabilitas mereka’* (I do not know their capabilities). This suggests that there is a little sense of what kind of expertise the translation provider has. They have decided to send the job to be done by people outside the office but at the same time they are also not sure whether or not the language centre has people who have sufficient competence for doing translation: *‘apakah mereka memang sudah memakai tenaga ahli’* (whether or not they have (language) experts). This shows that the people at the Tourism Board have chosen their translators with little information about the level of expertise the translators at the language centre may have. The process does not look at the actual requirements in terms of whether the university language centre they selected can deliver the quality translation service they need.

The idea that the selection process is not based on well-defined criteria can be also seen from the participant's statement that she does not have information about whether the translator selected is competent.

### 3.1.3. The translation brief

The translation brief (Nord, 1997, 2006) is an instruction or set of guidelines for translators that provides basic information about what and how a text needs to be translated to achieve a particular purpose. This section aims to look at the way the people at the Tourism Board design and provide such guidelines for the translators before commencing the translation.

The following extract contains information about the features of the guidelines given to the translators as described by one of the senior staff members.

*“Misalnya kita akan ikut pameran, atau saat kegiatan promosi di Jakarta maka kita akan sampaikan. Karena kita tahu siapa yang ikut disana. Jadi kita lihat pangsa pasarnya orang mana saja”.*

(For example when we take part in a particular exhibition or promotional events in Jakarta, we tell this to the translator. Because we know the people who are going to the events, so, we look at the market and the people who are attending these events).

The quote shows that the information given to the translator contains a general idea of what the translation is for, for example, where the translation will be used: ‘*pameran*’ (exhibition), or ‘*kegiatan promosi*’ (promotional events). This indicates that the translation guidelines given to the translator are about the purpose and target audience of the translation, but that this is done in a general sense only because there seems to be a little detail or specific information about what group of people the audience will be. Important information such as the translation purpose, intended text function or target audience (Nord 1997) that need to be included in the translation commission are not provided. As *Skopos* Theory states, a translation commission should clearly or explicitly cover the function of the text in order to achieve a particular purpose (Vermeer, 1989) as this is necessary for establishing the quality of the translation. Thus, despite the indication that there is information given to the translator, the information seems to be inadequate.

### 3.1.4. Translation quality assurance

The translation quality assurance has been included to examine the nature of the process of checking and maintaining the quality of translation at the Board upon receiving the translation from their translators before publication.

The following data given by a senior staff member shows one version of the procedure for how the quality check is done after the translation has been received from the translation provider.

**Researcher:** *Apakah ada editor yang mengecek hasil terjemahan dari penerjemah?* (is there any editor who checks the translation?)

**Participant:** *“Kita tidak memiliki editor tapi hanya staf yang memiliki kualifikasi Bahasa Inggris”.* (We do not have an editor but a staff member who has a qualification in English).

This information shows that in fact here is not a language expert or editor to check the language of the translation. The process of quality checking relies on in-house resources, which seems to be inadequate because there is no expertise in the office to do the quality check properly. It appears that the quality checking process does not focus on whether the translation meets the required translation purpose as a tourism promotional text. The involvement of native speakers of English as the target audience in checking the translation (Chesterman, 1997; Adab, 2005) has been overlooked. This suggests there is no real quality assurance process because the process of quality assurance is only at a superficial language form level.



### 3.2. Translation evaluation

The quality of translation often depends on the ability of the translator in carrying out the work without any deficiency, errors or mistakes (Muñoz, 2012). In other words, translation quality relates to the absence or presence of problems in the text that could influence its success in achieving the goal of the translation. In a functional translation approach, Nord (2006) has stated that anything which obstructs the translation from achieving its purpose in the target language is called a translation problem.

The analysis will focus on the quality of the translations as the product resulted from the commissioning process carried out by the Tourism Board. The analysis of the translation quality was done by examining the translation errors that may have influenced the quality of the translation of each of the texts and their function as tourism texts. The findings show that most of the problems are on the surface level, particularly in the linguistic translation problems, such as syntactic and semantic as well as editing problems. The analysis in this section will only provide a selection of typical examples that are evident in the whole translated texts.

#### 3.2.1. Linguistic translation problems

##### 3.2.1.1. Syntactic problems

The syntactic problems in the text involve low-level grammatical errors such as the omission of grammatical items. The missing items include the article ‘the’ and past participle endings as can be observed below.

- 1) Missing article ‘the’:
  - a) “...observing documentation of (the) president’s visitation on that time.” (*mengamati dokumentasi kunjungan presiden pada waktu itu*).
  - b) “...history of the landing of (the) Catalina Amphibious plane...” (*tempat bersejarah mengenang pendaratan pesawat Amphibi Catalina*).
- 2) Missing head noun in a noun phrase as in “This was built in 1925 by Dutch colonial (authorities)...”. (*tempat ini dibangun pada tahun 1925 oleh kolonial Belanda*). The word ‘colonial’ is an adjective and that the phrase is missing the head noun in order to form a complete noun phrase.

##### 3.2.1.2. Semantic problems

The cases of semantic problems found in the text relate to lexical choices and also to a missing translation. The problems of lexical choice involve words in the source text that has more than one meaning in the target language, where the word was chosen is not appropriate in the context. The missing translation is a case where phrases in the text are left untranslated.

- 1) “This place is to memorize history of the landing of Catalina Amphibious plane” (*Tempat ini merupakan tempat bersejarah mengenang pendaratan pesawat Amphibi Catalina*). The word *mengenang* is polysemous which equates to ‘memorize’ or ‘commemorate’ in English. However, the word ‘memorize’ refers to learning something by heart and does not represent the meaning of the source text. The word ‘commemorate’, which means a recall or remembrance of a person or historical event is the most suitable translation.
- 2) Missing translation: “He came to Gorontalo to unify Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia” (*Dia datang untuk menyatukan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*). The translator has not translated the official name of the country, which has an official English translation as the “Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia”. As the phrase is left untranslated, it is not accessible to an English speaker, who would not be able to identify what is being unified and as a result cannot interpret the significance of the event that is used to promote the site.

### 3.2.1.3. Editing problems

Besides the syntactic and semantic problems, there are a number of editing problems found in the text. These editing problems involve repetition of material and problems with punctuation.

1) Repetitions of information and words:

- a) “The museum also store [sic] several antique and historical instruments. The museum also store [sic] several antique and historical instruments. The museum is very close to Lake Limboto which is quiet and has beautiful scenery” (*Museum ini juga menyimpan beberapa instrument antik dan sejarah. Museum ini sangat dekat dengan danau Limboto yang tenang dan memiliki pemandangan yang indah*).
- b) “It is only 10 km from the city centre of Gorontalo city” (*hanya berjarak 10 km dari pusat kota*).

These problems of repetition as seen in the underlined sentences seem to result from the lack of attention to editing the completed translation, especially in the first case.

2) There is a punctuation problem in the writing of compound word: “we can also find several rare animals such as pig, deer and anoa” (*Kita juga dapat menemukan beberapa hewan langka seperti babi rusa dan anoa*).

The translator has literally translated the source text lexical items of the compound word *babi rusa* as ‘pig deer’ (*babi* as ‘pig’ and *rusa* as ‘deer’), but has also inserted a comma between ‘pig’ and ‘deer’ to list three animals instead of two as indicated in the source text.

### 3.2.2. Cultural reference problems

Along with linguistic problems above, there is also an issue found in [46](#) text that relates to a cultural reference in which an act of mediational work is needed to provide a better understanding of the text for the target readers.

“President Sukarno landing museum is located in Iluta village Batudaa sub-district. This place is to memorize history of the landing of Catalina amphibious plane that was used by President Sukarno in 1950 and 1959. He came to Gorontalo to unify Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia”.

*(Museum/rumah pendaratan presiden Sukarno ini terletak di desa Iluta kecamatan Batudaa. Tempat ini merupakan tempat bersejarah mengenang pendaratan pesawat Amphibi Catalina yang digunakan oleh presiden Sukarno pada tahun 1950 dan 1959. Dia datang ke Gorontalo untuk menyatukan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia).*

It is assumed that tourists would visit the site because it highlights an important figure, the first Indonesian President Sukarno, who visited the site during the 1950’s. It presupposes that all readers know who *Sukarno* is. However, this is more likely to work for Indonesian readers, who could be expected to have shared knowledge of the person and his significance. Target text readers, on the other hand, may not all know who the figure is and share the same knowledge as Indonesian readers. Due to differences in readers’ background knowledge, the translated text may not portray the full significance of the site in English. A mediational work by providing additional information or what Liddicoat (2015) has called ‘expansion’ on the cultural reference in the text could have adjusted to the target readers’ knowledge. The addition may overcome the knowledge gap in understanding the context by making this knowledge explicit as in “the first Indonesian President, Sukarno”.

The overall translation problems above [44](#) suggest that the translator lacks sufficient English language competence to do the translation and this [impacts on the quality of the translation in](#) the form of the frequent errors evident in the text. The use of a literal translation approach in some parts of the text and a lack of mediation also indicate a limited translation competence, and this creates a less professional image for the translated text as a tourism advertisement.

#### 4. Concluding comments

This study has discussed the translation commissioning process and the consequences it has on the quality of the translation. The discussion reveals that there is a lack of clarity in the commissioning process in which the understanding of the process of commissioning the translation has not been well designed and carried out. There also appears to be poor quality assurance process to check and maintain the quality of the translated texts before publication. The quality check process, which is to check whether the translation meets the needs of the commissioner and the intended purpose of the translation (Vermeer, 1989; Nord, 1997, 2006) has not been well performed by the Tourism Board. The checking is limited to low-level language features, and not to the appropriateness for the purpose or the suitability for the purpose and audience. The inadequate commissioning process results from a lack of understanding of the translation purpose among the staff that has been carried on to the whole process. As a consequence, the translated texts contain a great number of problems that range from linguistic up to cultural problems as shown in the discussion.

The overall picture of the lack of clarity of the commissioning process presented in this study may, therefore, clarify why the translations have such poor quality. In other words, the poor quality translations are the result of a poor system of the commissioning process.

To sum up, this study suggests that commissioning process is one important aspect to be considered when it comes to understanding the quality of the translation. Looking at the translation problems alone is not sufficient as they are limited to showing the translation quality at the surface level. On the other hand, including the commissioning process is significantly crucial to show a clear picture of the nature of quality of translation as a whole.

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## Devreye alma süreci önemli mi? Bir turizm tanıtım metni örneği ile çeviri kalitesini anlama

### Öz

Bu makale, çeviri işletmeye alma sürecinin turizm tanıtım metni çevirisi kapsamında belirlenen çeviri kalitesi düzeyiyle nasıl ilişkili olduğuna ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tercüme kalitesi, turizm tanıtım malzemelerinin tercümesinde ana kaygılardan biri olmuştur. Turizm tanıtım malzemelerinin çevirisi zorunludur, çünkü bunlar ziyaretçiler ve ziyaret etmeyi düşündükleri yer arasında bir iletişim köprüsü görevi görürler. Bu nedenle, ziyaretçilerin tam olarak anlaması için yüksek kalitede bir çeviri yapılması şarttır. Ancak, işletmeye alma sürecinin rolü konusundaki çalışmalar sınırlı kalmıştır. Analiz iki veriye dayanmaktadır; görüşme ve korpus analizi. Görüşme, işletmeye alma sürecine katılan turizm kurulundaki altı turizm uzmanını içermektedir. Korpus

analizi, altı turizm broşürünü ve bunların çevirisini, işletmeye alma sürecinin sonucu olarak değerlendirmek için çevirilerini inceler. Makalenin tartışması, turizm profesyonelinin çevirinin amacını nasıl anladığını, çevirmenin seçim prosedürünü, çeviri özetini ve kalite güvencesini inceleyerek devreye alma sürecine odaklanır. Turizm metinlerinin çevirisi daha sonra komisyonlama işleminin çevirilerin kalitesini ne derece etkilediğini bulmak için incelenir. Bu çalışma, işletmeye alma sürecinin yetersiz olduğunu ve bunun Gorontalo'daki Turizm Kurulu tarafından yaptırılan çevirinin kalitesini önemli ölçüde etkilediğini ortaya koymuştur.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* işletmeye alma süreci; çeviri kalitesi; turizm tanıtım metinleri

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