

How Do Tour Guides Answer the Same Question? A Corpus-Based Study of Individual Variation in Responses to Standardized Tourism Questions

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Abstract

Tour guides do more than convey factual information about destinations; they select, organize, and evaluate information with visitors in mind. This study examines how 33 professional tour guides in the Okayama region of Japan responded to the same 23 standardized tourism-related questions. Quantitative and qualitative analyses focused on information volume, uncertainty expressions, evaluative language, and visitor-oriented expressions. The results showed substantial variation across both questions and guides. Questions allowing historical background or anecdotes tended to elicit longer responses, and the most detailed guide produced approximately 4.8 times as much text as the most concise guide. For uncertain questions, guides adopted different epistemic strategies, including acknowledging lack of knowledge, presenting inference or speculation, making categorical assertions, and citing evidence. Questions about souvenirs, food, and activities also elicited recommendations and suggestions for visitor action. These findings show that tour-guide explanations are shaped by multiple communicative choices rather than simple information transfer. Explanation style should therefore be understood as multidimensional, involving information volume, epistemic stance, evaluative stance, and visitor orientation.

Keywords: tour-guide discourse, individual variation, corpus-based analysis

1. Introduction

The role of a tour guide is not limited to conveying factual information about a destination. Tour guides explain historical and cultural backgrounds, select information from a large body of available knowledge, evaluate attractions, and sometimes recommend particular actions to visitors. In this sense, tour-guide explanations can be regarded not as the simple transmission of existing information but as a form of professional communication involving the selection, organization, evaluation, and audience-oriented presentation of information.

Even when guides explain the same tourist destination, their explanations are not necessarily identical. One guide may provide only the factual information needed to answer a question, whereas another may elaborate on historical background or add anecdotes. When reliable information is unavailable, guides may also respond in different ways: they may explicitly state that they do not know, offer a tentative explanation, or provide evidence from relevant sources. Likewise, when asked about food, souvenirs, or tourism experiences, responses may reflect the guide's own selection and evaluation of what is worth recommending.

Such differences are important for understanding professional communication among tour guides. However, directly comparing explanations produced by multiple guides in authentic tour settings is difficult. In real tours, the characteristics and interests of visitors, the questions asked, the location, time constraints, and preceding interaction all vary from one situation to another. Consequently, when differences are observed between guides, it is difficult to determine whether they arise from individual explanation styles or from differences in the communicative situation.

To address this problem, the present study analyzes a corpus of written responses produced by 33 professional tour guides working in the Okayama region of Japan. Each guide responded to the same set of 23 tourism-related questions concerning Okayama Castle, Okayama Korakuen Garden, and related topics. Because the same questions were presented to all participants, the data allow

direct comparison of variation across guides while controlling for question content.

The study uses this feature of the corpus to investigate how, and to what extent, professional tour guides differ when answering the same tourism-related questions. The analysis focuses particularly on (1) the amount of information provided, (2) stance toward the certainty of information, (3) evaluation of tourism-related objects and experiences, and (4) orientation toward visitors. It also considers how these features vary according to question type.

The central research question is therefore: Do professional tour guides answer the same question in the same way? By addressing this question, the study treats differences among guides not merely as differences in knowledge, but as differences in communicative choices: what to say, how much to say, how certain the information should be presented as, what should be treated as worth mentioning, and how directly to engage with the visitor.

2. Related Work

2.1 The Communicative Role of Tour Guides

A foundational account of the tour-guide role is provided by Cohen (1985), who conceptualizes modern tour guiding in terms of two broad dimensions, leadership and mediation, and identifies four components: instrumental, social, interactionary, and communicative. In particular, Cohen argues that the development of the professional guide involves an increasing emphasis on the communicative function of interpreting and presenting the destination to visitors, rather than merely fulfilling an instrumental role of leading them from place to place.

Developing this perspective, Weiler and Walker (2014) argue that the communicative role of tour guides should not be limited to that of a one-way commentator. Instead, they conceptualize guides as experience brokers who mediate the visitor experience. Through interpretation and communication, guides influence visitors' understanding, interests, and experiences of a destination.

These studies suggested that tour-guide discourse should not be analyzed solely as the transmission of factual

information. Rather, it should be understood as communicative action through which the relationship between the visitor and the destination is constructed. The present study adopts this perspective and focuses not only on what guides know, but also on how they construct explanations from that knowledge.

2.2 Linguistic Research on Tour-Guide Discourse

A growing body of linguistic research has examined language use in authentic tour-guiding situations.

Sharma (2020), for example, analyzes interaction between tourists and guides in guided village tours and examined how professional authority is constructed and negotiated through linguistic, material, and multimodal resources. The study demonstrates that tour-guide expertise is not manifested only in the information being provided, but is also interactionally constructed.

From a corpus-based perspective, Alfano (2025) analyzes discourse markers in a corpus of authentic speech produced by professional tourist guides in Naples, Italy. The study identifies interactional, metatextual, and cognitive functions of discourse markers, showing that professional tour-guide discourse contributes not only to information transfer but also to discourse organization and the management of relationships with listeners.

An important characteristic of these studies is that they analyze naturally occurring professional discourse in authentic tour settings. This makes it possible to examine interaction between guides and tourists in detail. At the same time, however, the questions, listeners, locations, and discourse trajectories differ from one guide and tour to another.

The present study takes a different approach. Rather than attempting to reproduce natural interaction, it focuses on variation across guides under controlled conditions by presenting the same 23 questions to 33 professional guides. This design allows comparison of how different guides construct explanations when question content is held constant.

2.3 Epistemic Stance and Orientation to the Listener

Differences between guide responses involve not only the informational content of an answer but also the degree of certainty with which the information is presented. In this study, this dimension is treated in terms of epistemic stance.

For example, saying “There were ninja,” “I think there were ninja,” and “I do not know” represents different levels of epistemic commitment to the proposition, even though all three utterances respond to the same question. The present study examines such differences as ways in which guides manage the certainty of the information they provide.

Another important dimension concerns how responses are oriented toward an intended listener. Bell (1984) describes the way speakers modify linguistic style in relation to their audience as audience design.

The present corpus does not consist of naturally occurring conversations with actual tourists, but of written responses to standardized questions posed from the perspective of hypothetical visitors. It therefore does not provide direct evidence of audience design in Bell’s original sense.

Nevertheless, expressions such as “I recommend,” “if you have time,” “please try,” and “as a souvenir” suggest that guides may construct their responses with an imagined visitor’s interests and possible actions in mind. In this study, this feature is referred to as visitor orientation.

2.4 Positioning of the Present Study

Previous studies have shown that tour guides are not simply information providers but communicators who mediate between destinations and visitors, and that their professional expertise is reflected in language use and interaction.

The present study, however, focuses not primarily on the internal organization of individual tour-guide discourse, but on variation that emerges when multiple professional guides respond to exactly the same questions.

By comparing responses from 33 guides to the same set of 23 questions, the study examines whether individual differences in explanation style remain when question content is controlled, and whether such variation emerges in dimensions such as information volume, epistemic stance, evaluation, and visitor orientation.

The study therefore aims to describe professional tour-guide discourse not as a single idealized mode of explanation, but as a form of professional communication characterized by multiple legitimate communicative strategies.

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Data

The data consist of free-response answers collected from 33 professional tour guides working in the Okayama region of Japan. Each guide was presented with the same 23 questions, yielding a maximum of 759 responses (33 guides × 23 questions). When a participant did not provide a substantive response to a particular question, that response was excluded from the analysis of that question.

The questions broadly covered the following areas:

1. the construction date, building period, black exterior walls, roof ornaments, and stone walls of Okayama Castle;
2. the functions of the castle and the lives of lords and retainers;
3. historical and cultural topics such as ninja, the establishment of Korakuen Garden, and red-crowned cranes; and
4. visitor information concerning food, events, kimono experiences, souvenirs, local cuisine, and nearby attractions.

Some questions sought relatively straightforward factual information, such as “When was this castle tower built?” Others, such as “Were there ninja at Okayama Castle?”, concerned information for which guides might not necessarily possess certain knowledge.

Still other questions, such as “What would you recommend as a souvenir from Okayama?” and “What food would you recommend in Okayama?”, required selection and evaluation rather than a single objectively correct answer.

The inclusion of questions with different communicative characteristics, presented to the same group of respondents, is a key feature of the corpus.

The full wording of all 23 standardized questions used in this study is provided in Appendix A.

3.2 Analytical Procedure

The study combines quantitative and qualitative analyses to investigate individual variation in guide responses.

First, response length was used as a basic measure of information volume. The number of Japanese characters in each response was calculated after removing spaces and line breaks. Mean, median, minimum, and maximum response lengths were calculated for each question. For each guide, the total number of characters across the 23 questions and the mean response length per question were also calculated. Based on total response length, the 33 guides were divided into three equally sized groups of 11: concise, intermediate, and detailed responders.

Second, expressions related to uncertainty and inference were identified in order to examine how guides represented the certainty of information. These included expressions equivalent to “I do not know,” “I think,” “it is thought that,” “perhaps,” “might,” and “it seems.” These are collectively referred to as uncertainty expressions below. Because the analysis was exploratory and based initially on surface linguistic forms, each occurrence was interpreted in its local context rather than assumed to represent the same degree of epistemic commitment.

Third, evaluative and recommendatory expressions were examined. These included terms equivalent to “famous,” “recommended,” “good,” “wonderful,” “beautiful,” “interesting,” and “popular,” which attribute some form of value to an attraction, product, or experience.

Fourth, visitor-oriented expressions were examined, including terms equivalent to “I recommend,” “please,” “why not,” “as a souvenir,” “enjoy,” and “try/experience,” which explicitly orient the response toward a visitor’s actions or experience.

Finally, Question 15 (Q15), “Were there ninja at Okayama Castle?”, which showed a particularly high concentration of uncertainty expressions, was examined qualitatively in detail. Thirty-two substantive responses to this question were classified according to response strategy.

4. Results

4.1 Differences in Response Length Across Questions

Comparison of response lengths across the 23 questions revealed substantial variation according to question content.

The longest mean response was elicited by Q17, “Why are there cranes in Okayama Korakuen Garden?”, with a mean of 82.8 characters and a median of 69. This was followed by Q19, concerning events at Okayama Castle and Korakuen Garden, with a mean of 73.8 characters; Q3, concerning the reason for the black exterior walls of the castle tower, with 64.2; Q16, asking when, by whom, and why Korakuen Garden was constructed, with 63.4; and Q4, asking about the golden fish-shaped ornament on the roof, with 63.3.

These questions share the characteristic that the answer can be expanded beyond a single name or date to include historical background, causes, anecdotes, or examples.

For Q17, for example, some guides mentioned not only that

Rank	Question	Mean	Median
1	Q17 Reason for the cranes	82.8	69
2	Q19 Events at the castle and garden	73.8	70
3	Q3 Reason for the black castle walls	64.2	65
4	Q16 Origins of Korakuen Garden	63.4	59
5	Q4 Golden roof ornament	63.3	51

Table 1: Questions with the longest mean responses

cranes had been kept in the garden since the Edo period but also the Ikeda family, the disappearance of the cranes during the war, and the later gift of cranes from Guo Moruo in China. Thus, a single question frequently developed into a historical narrative.

Q19 also allowed respondents to list multiple events, including seasonal illuminations, tea-picking events, rice-planting festivals, lotus-viewing events, and grass-burning events, which likely contributed to the greater response length.

At the other end of the scale, the shortest mean response was found for Q13, asking where food for the feudal lord had been prepared, with a mean of 29.2 characters. This was followed by Q15, asking whether there had been ninja at Okayama Castle, with 31.0; Q20, asking where visitors could wear kimono, with 31.2; and Q2, asking how long construction of the castle tower had taken, with 35.8.

Rank	Question	Mean	Median
1	Q13 Location of the kitchen	29.2	23
2	Q15 Whether there were ninja	31.0	22
3	Q20 Kimono experience	31.2	23
4	Q2 Construction period	35.8	30

Table 2: Questions with the shortest mean responses

For questions such as Q13 and Q20, a direct answer can be provided simply by identifying a location. Consequently, many guides answered without adding substantial background information.

These results indicate that response length is affected not only by the individual guide’s explanation style, but also by the extent to which the question itself allows elaboration.

4.2 Differences in Response Length Across Guides

The total amount written by each guide across the 23 questions was then compared.

The shortest total response length was 452 characters, whereas the longest was 2,191 characters. Thus, the most detailed guide produced approximately 4.8 times as much text as the most concise guide. In terms of mean response length per question, the shortest average was 19.7 characters and the longest was 95.3. The 33 guides were then divided into three groups of 11 on the basis of total response length.

Response type	N	Mean characters per question
Concise	11	29.0
Intermediate	11	43.9
Detailed	11	73.6

Table 3: Guide groups by response length

The detailed group used approximately 2.5 times as much text per question as the concise group.

Detailed responders tended to provide not only a direct answer but also names, dates, historical background, related events, and anecdotes. Concise responders, in contrast, tended to provide only the information needed to answer the question.

Examples include responses equivalent to “It is called a shachihiko,” “There were no ninja,” and “You can wear one on the second floor of Okayama Castle.”

However, longer responses should not automatically be interpreted as better responses. When a visitor is seeking a quick factual answer, a concise response may be more appropriate. These findings should therefore be interpreted as differences in explanation style rather than differences in guide quality.

4.3 Distribution of Uncertainty Expressions

An exploratory search for expressions of uncertainty and inference showed that their frequency varied across questions.

Q15 “Were there ninja at Okayama Castle?” was particularly notable. Of the 32 substantive responses, 20 contained expressions indicating uncertainty or inference, such as “I do not know,” “I think,” “it is thought that,” “perhaps,” or “it seems.”

Uncertainty expressions were also relatively frequent in Q4, concerning the golden roof ornament; Q5, concerning how large stones had been transported upward; and Q3, concerning the reason for the black walls.

These findings suggest that when guides face questions for which reliable knowledge is less readily available, or questions requiring causal explanation, they may adjust the degree of certainty expressed rather than simply presenting information categorically.

4.4 Response Strategies for “Were There Ninja?”

Q15 provides a particularly clear illustration of individual variation in responses to the same question. Qualitative examination identified at least four major strategies.

(1) Explicitly indicating uncertainty or lack of knowledge

Examples included:

“I do not know.” “I do not know the details.”
“I’m not sure.”
“I’m not really sure, but I have never heard that there were.”

In such responses, guides explicitly mark the limits of their own knowledge.

(2) Offering inference or speculation while marking uncertainty

Examples included responses equivalent to:

“Information has always been important, so I think there probably were.”
“I think there were people who gathered information.”
“Most feudal lords probably had people who did work similar to that of ninja.”
“They may not have been called ninja, but I think there were probably people who performed roles similar to oniwaban or covert agents.”

Rather than simply accepting the modern category “ninja” as a historical fact, these guides reframe the question using related concepts such as intelligence gathering, oniwaban, or covert agents.

(3) Giving a categorical answer

Other guides responded directly:

“There were.” “There were none.” “No.”
“There were some.”

These responses provide a direct answer with little or no explicit qualification.

(4) Providing specific evidence or a source

Some responses supported the answer with documentary or bibliographic evidence.

Examples included:

“According to Michifumi Isoda’s *The Household Account Book of a Samurai Family*, there were Iga ninja known as the ‘Onnin-shu.’”
“Apparently the Okayama Domain’s Ikeda Family Archives record members of the ‘Onnin-shu,’ including their names, addresses, and treatment.”
“Yes, there were. The Okayama Domain’s Ikeda Family Archives contain records of the ‘Onnin-shu,’ including their names, addresses, and treatment.”

Such responses go beyond a simple affirmative answer and introduce evidence supporting the claim.

In addition to these four strategies, one response was particularly interactional:

“It might be more interesting if there had been ninja, don’t you think?”

Rather than focusing solely on establishing historical fact, this response treats the topic of ninja as something whose entertainment value can be shared with the visitor.

Thus, even for a single standardized question, guides may acknowledge limits to their knowledge, speculate, make categorical claims, provide evidence, or transform the answer into a more conversational exchange.

4.5 Question Type and Evaluative Expressions

An exploratory search for evaluative expressions such as “famous,” “recommended,” “good,” “beautiful,” “wonderful,” and “interesting” showed that such expressions were not evenly distributed across questions. They occurred particularly often in questions requiring visitors to make choices.

They were especially frequent in Q21, “What is a good souvenir from Okayama?”, and Q22, “What food would you recommend in Okayama?”

Among the responses, 11 of 33 answers to Q21 and 9 of 32 substantive answers to Q22 contained at least one of the evaluative expressions included in the analysis.

Examples included:

“Kibi dango is famous.”

“From this season, peaches, muscat grapes, and Pione grapes are also good.”

“In summer, I recommend white peaches and Pione grapes.”

In such questions, guides do not simply list available tourism information. They choose among multiple possibilities and present particular options to the visitor.

Evaluative language can therefore be understood not merely as the use of adjectives, but as part of the process through which guides select and assign value to tourism resources.

4.6 Visitor-Oriented Expressions

Expressions involving recommendation, encouragement, and suggestions for visitor action also varied across question types.

Such expressions were relatively common in Q11, concerning activities available at Okayama Castle; Q20, concerning kimono experiences; Q22, concerning recommended food; Q21, concerning souvenirs; and Q23, concerning other attractions.

Examples included responses equivalent to:

“If you have time, please try making Bizen pottery before you leave.”

“Please dress as a lord or princess and make it a memory of your visit to Okayama.”

“I recommend a fruit parfait.”

“I think Kibi-ji would be a good choice. I would like you to experience the world of ancient Kibi.”

These responses go beyond providing information about what is available. They also address what the visitor might do next and what kind of experience might be worthwhile.

This suggests that tour-guide responses have at least two distinguishable functions: an informational function, which provides knowledge about the destination, and a visitor-oriented function, which helps shape visitors’ actions and experiences.

The latter appears particularly strongly in questions concerning food, souvenirs, activities, events, and nearby attractions.

4.7 Question Type and Individual Variation

The results indicate that tour-guide responses are shaped by an interaction between the characteristics of the question and the individual guide’s explanation style.

For example, in Q17 concerning the cranes in Korakuen Garden, several recurring informational elements appeared across responses, including references to the Edo period, the postwar period, Guo Moruo, China, and red-crowned cranes. However, guides differed in which of these

elements they selected, how they organized them, and how far they elaborated on them.

One guide simply stated:

“Cranes have been kept here since the Edo period.”

Another described the disappearance of the cranes during the war, the gift of two cranes from Guo Moruo in China, and their subsequent breeding. Another added an anecdote concerning Ikeda Tsunamasa and cranes.

Thus, even when multiple responses contain overlapping informational elements, different explanations emerge through differences in selection, sequencing, and degree of elaboration.

More generally, questions about history or origins tended to elicit more detailed and narrative responses; questions involving uncertainty tended to elicit more expressions of uncertainty or inference; and questions involving choice, such as food or souvenirs, tended to elicit more evaluative and recommendatory language.

At the same time, substantial individual variation remained even within the same question. Some guides answered concisely, others provided extensive historical background, some explicitly marked uncertainty, and others developed more conversational or visitor-oriented responses.

5. Discussion

5.1 Individual Variation in Responses to Identical Questions

The most important finding of this study is that substantial individual variation remained even when professional guides were presented with exactly the same questions.

Tour guides have long been conceptualized not only as providers of information but also as mediators between destinations and visitors. Cohen (1985) emphasizes the communicative component of the professional guide’s role, while Weiler and Walker (2014) conceptualize the guide as an experience broker rather than a one-way information provider.

The present findings show how such communicative functions can be realized through concrete differences in linguistic choice.

For the same question, one guide may provide only the minimum factual answer, whereas another may add historical background and anecdotes. Some explicitly indicate uncertainty, some recommend actions to visitors, and some construct responses that are more conversational in character.

Variation among guides therefore cannot be reduced to differences in how much knowledge they possess. Rather, individual variation is reflected in multiple communicative choices concerning:

- which information to select;
- how much detail to provide;
- how to represent the certainty of information;
- what to present as valuable or worth mentioning;
- how directly to address or influence the visitor.

In the present study, these dimensions are treated collectively as aspects of explanation style.

5.2 Two Variation in Information Volume

The response-length analysis identified two distinct variations.

The first is variation across questions. Questions that allow elaboration through historical background, reasons, origins, or anecdotes tended to produce longer responses, whereas questions that can be answered by naming a location or providing a short factual response tended to produce shorter answers. Response length can therefore be influenced by what may be termed the explanatory potential of the question itself.

The second is variation across guides. The most detailed guide produced approximately 4.8 times as much text as the most concise guide across the 23 questions, suggesting that individual guides differ systematically in how much elaboration they tend to provide even when the questions are identical.

Nevertheless, greater detail should not automatically be interpreted as higher quality. When a visitor seeks a simple factual answer, a lengthy historical explanation may be less appropriate than a concise response. Conversely, visitors with a strong interest in history or culture may prefer richer contextualization and narrative detail. A good tour-guide explanation should therefore not be defined by a fixed amount of information, but by the ability to select an appropriate degree of detail for the question and the listener.

5.3 Managing Uncertainty Through Epistemic Stance

One of the most striking findings concerns the treatment of uncertain information.

For Q15, “Were there ninja at Okayama Castle?”, responses ranged from:

“There were.” “There were none.” “I do not know.”
“I think there were.”

to responses equivalent to:

“I do not think they were called ninja, but there may have been people performing similar roles.”

These differences can be interpreted in terms of epistemic stance, that is, how speakers present their degree of commitment to the truth or certainty of a proposition. Tour guides may receive a wide variety of questions from visitors and cannot be expected to possess certain knowledge about every topic. In such situations, relevant professional strategies may include:

- explicitly acknowledging lack of knowledge;
- marking a statement as inference or speculation;
- citing a source or evidence;
- reformulating the question in terms of more reliable general knowledge.

Some Q15 responses cited evidence such as the Onnin-shu or the Ikeda Family Archives, whereas another guide responded:

“It might be more interesting if there had been ninja, don’t you think?”

The latter can be interpreted as prioritizing conversational engagement and shared interest in the topic over the establishment of historical fact.

Tour-guide communication may therefore involve at least two partly distinct demands: factual reliability and interactional engagement. Individual guides may differ in how they balance these demands.

5.4 Constructing Responses for an Imagined Visitor

Questions concerning food, souvenirs, activities, events, and nearby attractions produced frequent expressions of recommendation and encouragement.

For example:

“Kibi dango is famous.”

This answer primarily provides information.

By contrast:

“In summer, I recommend white peaches and Pione grapes.”

This answer selects information in relation to the visitor’s seasonal circumstances.

Similarly:

“If you have time, please try making Bizen pottery before you leave.”

This answer goes further by suggesting a future action.

Such linguistic choices can be related to the concept of audience design, in the broad sense that language is shaped in relation to an intended listener.

The present data do not represent authentic face-to-face interaction and therefore do not provide direct evidence of audience design in Bell’s original sense. Nevertheless, the occurrence of expressions such as “please,” “I recommend,” “if you have time,” and “as a memory of your visit” suggests that guides may construct even written responses with an imagined visitor in mind rather than simply producing decontextualized factual answers.

5.5 From What Is True to What Is Worth Telling

Responses concerning souvenirs, food, and tourist attractions also differed in terms of what guides chose to mention.

For the same question about souvenirs from Okayama, guides proposed Kibi dango, Ōte manju, white peaches, muscat grapes, Bizen pottery, and other items. All of these may be factually associated with Okayama, but a guide cannot present every available piece of information in a limited explanation. The guide must therefore select from many possible items. In this sense, tour guides make decisions not only about what is true, but also about what is worth telling. Such decisions may involve perceived fame, local identity, seasonality, accessibility, price, or visitor interest.

If tour-guide discourse is treated simply as information transmission, this selective process becomes difficult to observe. By comparing multiple guides answering the same question, however, the present corpus makes visible individual differences in the selection and valuation of information. Tour guides may therefore be better understood not as agents who simply reproduce destination

information, but as mediators who select, organize, and assign value to information before presenting it to visitors.

5.6 The Multidimensionality of Explanation Style

Taken together, the findings suggest that tour-guide explanation style cannot be adequately represented along a single dimension such as “long” versus “short.”

Based on the features directly analyzed in this study, together with additional features suggested by the response data, at least five potentially relevant dimensions can be identified:

1. Information volume:
How much detail is provided.
2. Epistemic stance:
How the certainty of information is represented.
3. Evaluative stance:
How objects or experiences are evaluated and what is presented as worth mentioning.
4. Visitor orientation:
To what extent the visitor’s interests, actions, and experience are explicitly taken into account.
5. Narrativity:
Whether information is presented as isolated facts or organized into narratives involving people, events, and historical sequences.

The present study directly examined information volume, epistemic stance, evaluative expressions, and visitor orientation. Narrativity emerged as a potentially important dimension, particularly in responses such as those to Q17, but was not systematically quantified in the present analysis.

These dimensions may also interact. More detailed guides may be more likely to include narrative material, while more visitor-oriented responses may also contain more evaluative or recommendatory language.

Future annotation and quantitative analysis of these dimensions could make it possible to construct multidimensional explanation profiles for individual guides rather than relying on a one-dimensional distinction between concise and detailed responders.

5.7 Implications for AI-Generated Tourism Explanations

The findings also have implications for the generation and evaluation of tourism explanations using generative AI.

As the present study demonstrates, professional guides may provide substantially different responses to the same question. This suggests that it may not be appropriate to assume that there is a single ideal explanation for a tourism-related question. The most appropriate explanation may depend on factors such as the time available, the visitor’s interests, prior knowledge, age, and desired level of detail. AI-based tourism content generation should therefore consider not only factual accuracy but also controllable dimensions such as information volume, degree of epistemic certainty, evaluation, and visitor orientation. The corpus used in this study is particularly useful in this respect because it contains multiple professional responses

to identical questions. Rather than evaluating an AI-generated answer against a single reference answer, it may be possible to compare it against the human variation observed among professional guides.

For example, an AI-generated response could be evaluated in terms of whether its length falls within the range observed among human guides, whether it avoids excessive certainty when evidence is uncertain, and whether it provides an appropriate degree of visitor orientation. In this sense, the present data may contribute not only to the description of tour-guide discourse but also to human-centered approaches to the generation and evaluation of AI-assisted tourism explanations.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed a corpus of responses produced by 33 professional tour guides working in the Okayama region of Japan to the same set of 23 standardized tourism-related questions in order to investigate individual variation in tour-guide explanations.

First, substantial differences in information volume were observed across questions. Questions that allowed discussion of historical background, reasons, or anecdotes tended to elicit longer responses.

Second, substantial variation was also observed across guides. Across the 23 questions, the most detailed guide produced approximately 4.8 times as much text as the most concise guide.

Third, questions involving uncertain information elicited a range of epistemic strategies, including explicitly stating lack of knowledge, presenting information as inference or speculation, giving categorical answers, and citing evidence or sources.

Fourth, questions concerning souvenirs, food, and tourism activities frequently elicited recommendations, evaluations, and suggestions for visitor action.

These findings indicate that tour-guide explanations are not simply acts of transmitting existing tourism information. Guides construct explanations through choices concerning what to say, how much to say, how certain the information should be presented as, what should be treated as worth mentioning, and how directly to engage with the visitor.

The answer to the central research question—Do professional tour guides answer the same question in the same way?—is therefore no. However, this variation is not random. The characteristics of the question affect whether explanation length, uncertainty expressions, evaluative language, or visitor-oriented expressions are likely to occur, while individual guide strategies create additional variation within those constraints.

Tour-guide explanation style should therefore be treated not as a single ideal form of response, but as a multidimensional form of professional communication involving dimensions such as information volume, epistemic stance, evaluative stance, and visitor orientation. The response data further suggest that narrativity may represent an additional important dimension for future investigation.

Future research should systematically annotate and quantify these features in order to model individual

explanation styles multidimensionally. More detailed analysis of the relationship between question type and explanation style may also clarify which types of questions are likely to trigger particular communicative strategies.

A further direction is to apply the observed diversity of professional guide responses to the generation and evaluation of AI-assisted tourism explanations. Rather than treating a single model answer as the target, AI systems could be designed and evaluated with reference to the range of explanation styles actually produced by professional human guides, potentially supporting more flexible and reliable tourism communication adapted to different visitors and situations.

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Appendix A.

Standardized Tourism Questions Used in the Study

- Q1 When was this castle keep built?
- Q2 How long did it take to build this castle keep?
- Q3 Is there a reason why the walls of the castle keep are black?
- Q4 There is a golden fish-shaped ornament on the roof of the castle keep. What is it?
- Q5 How were the stones for the stone walls transported up to the castle?
- Q6 Were the castle keep and all the surrounding buildings destroyed by fire during the war?
- Q7 Most castles are built on high ground. Why is that?
- Q8 There are many castles like this in Japan. Who built them, and for what purpose?
- Q9 Are there any other castles like this in Okayama?
- Q10 What kinds of exhibits are there inside the Okayama Castle keep?
- Q11 Are there any activities or experiences visitors can try at Okayama Castle?
- Q12 Did the feudal lord live inside this castle keep?
- Q13 Where was the kitchen where meals for the feudal lord were prepared?
- Q14 Where did the retainers and other people who served the castle lord live?
- Q15 Were there ninja at Okayama Castle?
- Q16 When was Okayama Korakuen Garden built, by whom, and for what purpose?
- Q17 Why are there cranes in Okayama Korakuen Garden?
- Q18 Are there any places to eat inside Okayama Castle or Okayama Korakuen Garden?
- Q19 Are there any events at Okayama Castle or Okayama Korakuen Garden? If so, what kinds of events are held?
- Q20 I would like to wear a kimono. Is there anywhere I can do that?
- Q21 What would you recommend as a souvenir from Okayama?
- Q22 What food would you recommend in Okayama?
- Q23 Are there any other tourist attractions you would recommend besides Okayama Castle and Okayama Korakuen Garden?