Tourism communication: the translator's responsibility in the translation of cultural difference

Mirella Agorni[i]

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano (Italia)

Abstract: Tourist discourse can be considered as a specialised type of cross-cultural communication. The subject of this work is the degree of intervention translators are asked to exercise in order to achieve successful communication. Their task is not that of demonstrating their knowledge on specific subjects, as, rather, their capacity of mediating it, so as to make it available to a type of tourist who is necessarily different from that targeted by the original work. Hence, translators should learn to dose the amount of information tourists will be able to take in. Theoretical assumptions will be illustrated by means of a comparison between a tourist text in Italian and its translation into English. It will be demonstrated that translators' decisions at linguistic and explanatory level allow a more or less substantial degree of reader involvement, and consequently affect the promotion of tourist destinations.

Keywords: translation, ESP, the language of tourism

Título: La comunicación del turismo: la responsabilidad del traductor en la traducción de la diversidad cultural

Resumen: El discurso del turismo puede ser considerado como una forma especializada de comunicación intercultural. Este trabajo se propone analizar la labor de mediación que se requiere a los traductores para lograr una comunicación eficaz. Su tarea no consiste en demostrar sus conocimientos de determinados temas, sino, más bien, su capacidad de mediarlos, para que resulten accesibles a un turista diferente del destinatario original. De ahí que los traductores tengan que seleccionar adecuadamente la información asimilable. El marco teórico del artículo se ilustrará comparando un texto turístico en italiano con su traducción al inglés, con el objetivo de demostrar que las decisiones del traductor repercuten en la implicación del interlocutor y, por ende, pueden afectar a la promoción de un destino turístico.

Palabras clave: traducción, lenguas de especialidad, lengua del turismo

i E-mail: mirella.agorni@unicatt.it

Tourism and its language

The language of tourism has recently become a productive field of research, stimulating work in various fields, such as cultural studies, discourse analysis and specialized discourse, to name just a few[1]. Yet, in spite of the fact that several linguistic approaches are currently focusing on the analysis of specific genres and text types - which could make popular texts such as those adopted in the tourist field into objects of special attention - research on tourism in a translation perspective is still a relatively recent development.

One of the reasons for this state of affairs lies undoubtedly in the difficulties encountered by scholars attempting to define the nature and degree of specialization of the language of tourism. Tourism phenomena take shape in a well-defined, although large and variegated, community of practice, which includes professionals of the tourist industry as well as simple tourists. Yet, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Agorni, 2011), it is precisely the heterogeneous nature of this community that produces the complex discursive practices characterizing this field, best exemplified by those hybrid genres such as the guidebook, brochure, leaflet, for example.

The language of tourism is characterized by a peculiar variety, expressed at all linguistic levels, which is due to the distinctive lack of uniformity of an extended subject area such as tourism, whose borders with other disciplines such as geography, history, economics, marketing, etc., are less than clear-cut. As I have thoroughly discusses elsewhere (Agorni, 2012), it is extremely difficult to define the principles upon which the language of tourism can be considered as domain-specific discourse. A microlinguistic definition narrowly based on a lexical and/or terminological approach would not be productive in the case of this type of language. On the other hand, it has been amply demonstrated that a perspective focused on the textual and pragmatic dimensions of language is especially fruitful (cfr. Calvi, 2002; Gotti, 2006; Nigro, 2006; Castello, 2002). The specificity of this language is therefore situated at the communicative level: it can be acknowledged in the discursive and textual strategies devised for successful interaction in any kind of tourist activity.

However, if tourism and the phenomena associated with it are relatively easy to identify, the same cannot be said about its principal actors, that is tourists. Paradoxically, consensus can be easily achieved on the existence of a specific "community"[2] of tourists, and yet the identity of its components is a matter of debate. Tourists in fact identify themselves in terms of practice, whether involved in any stage of travel or in any professional activity connected with it. However, the "epistemic competence" of tourists, to use Riley's words (2002: 47), is extremely difficult to define, as the knowledge and experience necessary to be identified as a "tourist" can be virtually discovered in any human being. This aspect, however, becomes extremely important in all those instances of communication which go beyond language and culture borders. The translation of tourist texts is a case in point.

Tourist discourse as cross-cultural communication

The subject of this work is the degree of intervention, or amount of mediation translators are asked to exercise in order to achieve successful cross-cultural communication in the case of the translation of tourist texts. As has already been pointed out, the main problem lies in the definition of the identity of the addressee of this communication, that is the recipients of tourist texts. The concept of identity I am referring to is to be understood as distinctively social and situational: it normally consists in a limited number of subject-positions available in specific communicative situations. Speakers display their identity by selecting distinctive strategies, whose adequate performance depends on the degree of familiarity (or knowledge) they have with these situations. For example, tourist texts producers involved in the realization of a brochure about, say, the castle of Brescia must be familiar with subjects such as history and architecture, as well as be well-versed in techniques of promotional writing.

However, in the case of translation, the main question does not concern translators' ability in demonstrating their knowledge of specific subjects, as, rather, their capacity of mediating this knowledge, so as to make it effectively available to a readership which is presumably different from that targeted by the original work. The notion of "mediation" was originally applied to translation by Hatim and Mason (1990, 1997), who described it as "the extent to which translators intervene in the transfer process, feeding their own knowledge and beliefs into their processing of a text" (1997: 147). This means that translators adjust texts to new communicative situations by means of choices, or by a process of decision-making which involves all linguistic and textual levels.

Degree of mediation may vary, ranging from minimal to maximal. Venuti's (1992, 1995) distinction between two principal approaches to translation, respectively represented by techniques of "domestication" (by means of which translators often end up by reducing or even deleting specific tokens of cultural difference) and "foreignization" (the opposite pole of the continuum, as difference in this case is highlighted) is well known. In the case of the translation of tourist texts, however, a characteristic tension arises between the two poles. On the one hand, a strong emphasis on the traits characterising the Source culture (i.e. the Other) risks to mess up communication, as tourists may be unable to decode information about subjects they are not familiar with. On the other hand, the effect of "domesticating" the foreign to an extreme point is that of losing that flavour of novelty and change, in a comparison with everyday life, that lies at the basis of the recreational drive of tourism (cfr. Dann, 1996). Translators should therefore find a balance between the necessity to provide information in an accessible and yet appealing way, and this means that different approaches to translation must be adopted, so that cultural difference may be strategically enhanced or reduced, according to specific situations.

The language of tourism is itself a form of "cultural mediation", as it "translates" cultural values by promoting the identity of specific geographical areas and their communities. The translation of tourist texts is an extremely interesting case of cross-cultural communication, as not

only is it founded at that crossroads of languages and cultures which is at the basis of any border or contact zone communication (Pratt, 1992), but it also deals with the transfer of those cultural markers which represent destinations in their specific historical, geographic, social and cultural aspects. The latter have been defined as culture-specific items by translation theorists (Baker, 1992, 1995; Franco Aixelá, 1996), and represent undoubtedly one of the hardest tasks for a translator. Translators' intervention has to be exercised both at textual and cross-cultural level. Given the case of the translation of a brochure, for example, and the assumption that foreign tourists must be given a higher degree of information than local ones, translators must exercise a choice amongst textual techniques such as glossing, adding explanations in the text or providing detailed information in footnotes. The selection and combination of these strategies is, or should be, regulated by the complex assessment of foreign tourists' profiles.

Kelly (1997, 2000) deals at length with the problem of the transposition of the so-called culture-specific elements. She points out that translators should, on the one hand, help readers contextualize implicit information by adding glosses and explanations, especially in the case of subjects particularly important for tourist promotion, such as geography or history. On the other hand, however, translators should test the limits of their explanatory interventions by taking into account the risk of providing an excessive amount of information, too difficult to process for the reader. As Kelly puts it, foreign tourists need "information to be dosed in some way to prevent an overload which could lead to a breakdown in communication" (1997: 35). In some cases, therefore, strategies of condensation or even omission may be the most appropriate answer.

Translation of tourist texts: theoretical premises

An approach to the process of translation marked by a high degree of translators' intervention, almost bordering on rewriting, characterises the translation of tourist text types. Kelly exposes the fine line which differentiates translation from rewriting, and which lies at the basis of all the works in this field. There is a large demand for this kind of products by the tourist industry, and this is one of the reasons for the implementation of courses on the translation of tourist text-types in Schools of Languages and Translation.

Tourist texts appear to be particularly suited for the didactic of languages, specialized discourse (cfr. Fodde / Denti, 2006, in press) and especially translation, for a series of reasons that scholars such as Kelly (2000) have already pointed out, and can be summarised into the following elements:

- the professional relevance of these texts. The market needs a more professional involvement so as to address the problem of the poor quality of works in this field (Snell-Hornby, 1999).
- tourist texts represent variety in terms of subject areas and the stylistic and discursive techniques employed. Another characteristic of these texts is that of being gradable in difficulty (in terms of linguistic difficulty as well as degree of specialisation), and therefore

precious for the learning process.
- students generally demonstrate a great familiarity with this type of texts, as a large majority of them has been a consumer of similar works either in the foreign or in their native language. This facilitates the management of all those competences linked to discursive and textual conventions.

The presentation of culture-specific elements is an issue both in translation and in intralingual text production, that is regardless of the language used. As has been pointed out earlier, the central question is represented by the fuzzy identity of tourists, be they from the same country or foreigners. Poncini argues that the notion of shared knowledge and common ground, used to describe all those assumptions shared by the participants of intercultural communication such as knowledge, goals and values, play a fundamental role in tourist communication (2006: 139). Her analysis of a corpus of multilingual brochures for mountain areas published in Italy demonstrates that writers of these texts decided to adopt a range of strategies going from "textbook presentations" of local specialties or attractions, with little evaluative language and no strategies of reader involvement, to positive evaluation and explicit connection between readers and the elements described (2006: 147).

As far as translation is concerned, translators should not only consider the amount of background knowledge already possessed by their intended readership, but should also be aware of the ways in which their own decisions at linguistic and explanatory level will allow a more or less appreciable degree of reader involvement, and consequently affect the promotion of tourist resorts and attractions. In other words, translators' choices may increase "not only readers' awareness but also their appreciation of these features and their value" (2006: 141). As a consequence, translators should not only select the most appropriate solutions taking into account both denotative and connotative meanings, but they have also to decide which aspects should be given special emphasis.

Translation of tourist texts: An application

In this section I would like to offer an application of the assumptions illustrated at theoretical level by means of a comparison of a tourist text in Italian (ST) and its translation into English (TT). The example is taken from a lesson on translation into the second language at postgraduate level[3]. Although I shall not go into the details of translation pedagogy in this article, it is necessary to specify that the activity is designed for students of an Italian Degree in Modern Languages, for obvious reasons less specialized in translation than the more professionally-oriented Degrees offered by Schools for Interpreting and Translation. It must be pointed out, however, that domain-specific discourse and cultural mediation are fundamental issues in the curricula of the former type of students too.

Contrastive text analysis, that is work on parallel texts (tourist texts in our case) in both native and foreign languages provides students with the necessary familiarity with discursive and textual conventions, which may differ to a more or less apparent extent. However, rather than working at that level of analysis, I have decided to focus on specific problems posed by the translation of

tourist texts. The methodology adopted is comparative, as it allows students to identify problems together with the strategies used to solve them. This approach brings to the fore the degree of mediation exercised in translation, which requires translators to choose amongst a number of alternatives in order to create a text matching a specific (and contingent) context of situation.

The source text

Mercatino Mon Amour

Si svegliano quasi sempre all'alba, anche se è domenica. Si vestono in fretta, look sportivo, scarpe comode, una borsa grande che possa contenere tante cose. Il più delle volte uno zaino, comodo, pratico, in grado
5 di difendere la fragilità degli oggetti che costituiscono l'obiettivo, la molla di queste spedizioni domenicali. Li vedi aggirarsi tra i banchi come cacciatori intorno alla preda. Guardano, osservano, scrutano, confrontano, esaminano, valutano. Poi, se il colpo di fulmine
10 scocca, si mettono a trattare. Un duello con l'espositore fino all'ultimo prezzo. In caso di successo, se ne vanno via soddisfatti, difendendo sotto fogli di giornale l'oggetto appena acquistato. E così via, la scena si ripeterà la domenica dopo, e quella successiva, e
15 quella dopo ancora.
Da cosa è dettato tutto questo? Da una grande, fortissima passione che sta dilagando sempre più: quella per l'antiquariato, anzi per il piccolo antiquariato, per gli oggetti del passato dal fascino tutto particolare.
20 Tutto è cominciato all'inizio degli anni sessanta, quando nacque il primo vero mercato antiquario ad Arezzo: forse altre iniziative simili erano state sperimentate prima, ma nessuna ha avuto il successo di quella di Arezzo, né tanto meno è riuscita a innescare
25 una vera e propria reazione a catena che ha portato commercianti ambulanti di oggetti d'epoca e da collezione a invadere piazze e strade.
I mercatini antiquari conobbero il secondo importante periodo di espansione verso la metà degli anni
30 '70: stavolta, le manifestazioni vennero organizzate quasi tutte in centri turistici senza particolari tradizioni antiquarie, da Viareggio e Forte dei Marmi a Cesena e Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna. Un'altra serie di mercatini è nata tra il 1982 e il 1985, soprattutto
35 in grandi città, sfruttando – raccontano gli organizzatori – la presenza sul posto di una buona clientela e con una discreta capacità di spesa. È il caso, per esempio, dei mercati del Naviglio Grande, di Brera e del Gran Balon. Ultimamente è scoppiato il fenomeno
40 de gli "hobbisti", cioè di chi frequenta i mercati antiquari come venditore, pur non essendo fornito di iscrizione al Registro degli esercenti. La loro presenza spesso e volentieri stimola una pullulante borsacambio.
45 L'Italia è ormai ai livelli dell'Inghilterra e della Francia per quanto riguarda il numero e la qualità delle manifestazioni d'antiquariato.

The target text

The Italian Antique Craze

They are almost always up at the crack of dawn, even on Sundays. They dress quickly, casually, in comfortable shoes, with a bag capacious enough to put anything in. More often than not, it is a rucksack, handy,
5 practical, ideal for protecting the fragile objects which are the goal and the trigger for their Sunday expeditions. You see them hovering round the stalls, like hounds ready for the kill. They look, observe, scrutinize, compare, examine and assess. Then, if love
10 strikes they are in there, bargaining. It's a duel to the lowest price. If they win, they leave satisfied, clasping their new purchase carefully wrapped in old newspaper. And so it goes on: the same will happen again the following Sunday, and the Sunday after, and the
15 one after that.
What's behind all this? It's a great, consuming passion which is spreading fast all over Italy. It's the craze for antique fairs, or rather for flea markets, for objects from the past and their peculiar charm. It all
20 started back in the early 60s with the birth of the first real antique market in the South of Tuscany, in Arezzo. Similar experiments may have been tried earlier, but none of them was as successful as the one in Arezzo and they certainly didn't set off the chain
25 reaction which brought roving merchants of antiques and collectables to streets and squares all over Italy. The next big expansion of the antique markets took place in the mid-70s; this time fairs were nearly always organised in towns and tourist resorts with no
30 great tradition in antique trading. Yet another series of street markets emerged, mainly in the large towns, between 1982 and 1985, exploiting – according to the organisers – the abundance of local customers with some money to spend. This was the case with
35 markets such as the ones in Milan – Naviglio Grande and Brera – and in Turin – the Gran Balon. Lately, there has been the explosion of a new phenomenon, the so-called 'hobbisti': amateurs who set up stall in antique markets as unregistered sellers. Their
40 presence tends to create a bubbling trade.
By now, Italy has caught up with England and France as far as the number and quality of its antique fairs are concerned.

Discussion

The text describes in colourful terms the vogue for antique fairs currently spreading throughout Italy. It is an extract from an in-flight magazine[4] publishing Italian articles and their English translations, which aims to provide interesting and entertaining reading while also advertising travel in general. The audience, which according to the magazine itself is largely made up of professional customers, is supposed to be similar for both the original and the translation, and this is confirmed by the fact that

the two versions are published side by side. However, the background knowledge respectively possessed by an Italian and an English readership should necessarily be expected to be different.

The extract is a typical case of a tourist hybrid text with two main communicative functions, persuasive and informative. It provides information about tourist attractions, and at the same time aims to engage readers' attention. The two functions, or rethorical purposes (Hatim / Mason, 1997) can be clearly identified in the body of the text. The opening section (1-15) displays a remarkable vocative tone, as the reader is involved in a process of identification with the scene described. Then the texts' focus shifts to become informative (ST 16-47; TT 16-43). The split is marked by a rhetorical question (16), reproduced in the TT, which introduces the more explanatory, or informative, part of the article, providing historical, geographical and social data.

In translating the title, the ambiguity of the word *mercatino* - which is used for several types of street markets in Italy - has been resolved by adopting a metonymic strategy which renders it with 'antique'. A literal translation of the French loan in the original (referring to the title of a well known film: *Hiroshima mon amour*) wouldn't have worked; the English title is arguably less captivating than the Italian, but it has the advantage of illustrating the article's content.

Another reference to the Italian tradition of antiques, "*piccolo antiquariato*" (18) is translated as 'flea markets' (18). In Italian the term *antiquariato* is usually reserved to high-quality antiques, while *piccolo antiquariato* refers to old but not so precious objects. The English 'antique' can be virtually applied to both Italian definitions, hence the translator's decision to make a distinction by introducing a different expression, 'flea market'. This solution, however, appears to be more appropriate for the sale of second-hand articles in a British context. Rather than working at the level of semantic accuracy, the translator seems to be more concerned with the pragmatic effects of her/his solution.

An extremely interesting case of translator's intervention can also be noticed in the rendering of geographical references. The reference to Italy has been made explicit in the title in an evident attempt at promoting a specific destination. Explicit references to Italy are introduced in another two cases (17; 26), as the target readership (made up of English-speaking tourists) is supposed to possess a lower degree of geographical knowledge than their Italian counterparts. For similar reasons, the region in which the city of Arezzo is situated, that is Tuscany, has been specified (21). On the other hand, the translator appears to have taken into consideration the risk of an overload of geographic details, and decided to omit references to places like Viareggio, Forte dei Marmi, Cesena and Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna, which are not prominent internationally. Towards the end of the article (TT 35-36), on the other hand, references to well-known Italian markets such as Brera, Naviglio Grande and Gran Balon

has been provided with geographical contextualisation, as this kind of knowledge cannot be expected from non-local tourists.

The theoretical discussion about the specificity of tourist texts translation has shed light on the degree of responsibility translators have when they are given the choice to increase tourists' knowledge and appreciation of the attractions presented. A discriminating use of evaluative language and techniques of reader involvement can be extremely productive in this respect. I would like to concentrate on the strategies adopted for the translation of similes and metaphors, rhetorical devices frequently used in persuasive text-types in order to involve readers by captivating their attention.

The first part of the article is particularly rich in metaphorical language, and the translator has to choose among a number of possible solutions, which have been amply illustrated by Toury (1995), and can be summarised in the following way:

- translation by means of a similar metaphor in the foreign language (L2)
- translation by means of a different metaphor in the L2
- translation by means of explanation (that is by making the meaning of the metaphor explicit)
- omission of the metaphor in the TT.

It is interesting to notice that the translator of this text only opts for the first two strategies, in a coherent attempt at reproducing the rhetorical function of metaphorical language. This approach does not seem to be the fruit of a technique of literal translation, as the target text is well-written in fluent English. It would rather appear that the translator has deliberately decided to reproduce, and even emphasise, the stylistic force of metaphorical language, so as to involve readers by keeping their attention. The following examples, in which instances of ST and TT will be compared, should serve to clarify this point.

- *l'obiettivo, la molla* (6): 'the goal and the trigger' (6) the Italian text combines everyday language with a metaphorical expression, and a similar effect has been achieved in English. The image of the trigger also keeps the idea of a mechanical cause, even if the field of reference of the metaphor has been changed.
- *come cacciatori intorno alla preda* (7-8): 'like hounds ready for the kill' (7-8) here the semantic field of the simile (a hunting scene) has been maintained, although its terms have been changed to follow an English idiom.
- *se il colpo di fulmine scocca* (9-10): 'if love strikes' (9-10) the image of love striking with its arrows is at the root of both ST and TT images.
- *Un duello ... all'ultimo prezzo* (10-11) 'a duel to the lowest price' (10-11) the ST pun can be translated into English with little change in its structure. This is not often the case, as usually plays on words have to be sacrificed in translation.

Another example of translator's intervention is represented by a coherent reproduction of the colloquial language used in the ST. Once again, this strategy is not

realised at the expense of fluency and naturalness in English, on the contrary, it appears to correspond to the translator's own agenda, since in some of her/his interventions she/he goes as far as to lay an even stronger emphasis on a colloquial regiser. For example:

- *si mettono a trattare* (10): 'they are in there, bargaining' (10). A less colloquial alternative might have been 'they start bargaining'.

Also the rhetorical question which marks the main shift in the text is reproduced in the translation:

- *Da che cosa è dettato tutto questo*? (16): 'What's behind all this?' (16) Although the voice of the verb has changed from passive to active, the idea of a hidden cause remains to attract the curiosity of the reader. Further emphasis is ensured by the use of the interrogative form. Moreover, in this case, as in the example above, the translation displays a more colloquial register than the original.

Finally, the translator appears to be sensitive to the use of evaluative language. For example, the positive description of the spreading interest in antiques in Italy, revealed by the use of the evocative word *passione* (17), is not only retained and reproduced in the translation (passion, 16-17), but receives an extra evaluative connotation by a variation within repetition, that is by introducing the emphatic synonym 'craze' (18) in the following sentence. The overall effect is to highlight the cohesion of the text by consolidating the favourable image of the destination already produced by the Source Text.

Conclusion

The aim of this comparison between a source Italian tourist text and its translation into English has been to demonstrate the complex dynamics of cross-cultural transfer effectively at work in such a peculiar field as tourism. Identities are necessarily fashioned and mediated in the translation of tourist texts. This concerns above all the image of the destination, whose characteristic features, particularly those of a cultural-specific nature, require a high degree of translator's intervention. Strategies will range from introduction of detailed explanation to drastic omission of any type of reference. Several issues need to be taken into consideration in order to make adequate choices, but the main preoccupation for the translator of tourist texts should be the pragmatic effect of her/his work upon readers.

In the course of the analysis it has become clear that informative and persuasive text functions are two poles of a continuum when we look into the texture of tourist discourse. Not only do translators need to learn how to dose the amount of information in a functional way, so as to increase the value of their work, but they also have to devise strategies of "inclusion", so as to ensure readers' direct and indirect participation. We have looked at the way in which a colloquial tone and a dynamic, creative use of language (meant to attract and keep readers' attention)

has been coherently employed throughout the TT.

Finally, translation has the potential to reflect and construe an identity for a readership which is made up of tourists, and is particularly difficult to pin down. Linguistic choices, at all levels, meant to orient readers and their knowledge, affect the ways in which a destination is presented. For this reason translation quality should become a fundamental preoccupation for all the agents involved in tourist promotion.

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Notes

1   Cfr. reasoned bibliography on linguistic research in Tourism Studies by Peverati (in press). On this topic see also Gotti 2006, Calvi 2000, Nigro 2006.

2   For a discussion of the notion of community in linguistic terms, and particularly on the concept of discourse community cfr. Swales 1990; see also Saragi and van Leeuwen 2003, and Wenger 1998 on the notion of community of practice.

3   The course devoted a considerable amount of hours to the practice of translation of texts belonging to the tourist field. Reasons for this choice are the widespread use of tourist material in the students' territory. On the subject of translation into the second language see Campbell 2000, Pokorn 2005, Stewart 1999, 2000.

4   *Ulisse*, a monthly magazine published by Alitalia.