

TOURIST COMMUNICATION: A SPECIALIZED DISCOURSE WITH DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

In everyday speech, we often hear expressions like language of music, language of computing, language of civil engineering etc., and we know that these various fields communicate with us. Why should we not use this term: the language of tourism? This article highlights the importance of considering and developing the language of tourism as a specialized discourse which encounters several difficulties in translation. It is language-like in its properties; it is structured, it follows certain grammar rules, it has a specialized vocabulary and a semantic content, it conveys messages and operates through a conventional system of symbols and codes; moreover, it adopts a special register.

As tourism communication is an intercultural discourse not only should the translator be proficient in both languages, but s/he should also be multicultural and able to identify with the original author as well as with the content in order to detect all the finer points of the language s/he is translating into. The major problem in translating tourist discourse is due to its cultural content. This type of texts describes and informs about other cultures and therefore, their main difficulty is to introduce a reality (being a city, a country, a type of food, etc.) to a person who may have never heard of it. Also, we often find words or concepts that do not exist in other cultures, so called *realia*, what makes translators employ different techniques with the aim at transferring the original meaning to the target audience and to solve the problem.

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As all languages have to be learned, the language of tourism, too, requires a process of socialization for those who generate it and those who translate. It is claimed that tourism is also referred to as communication, advertising, publicity and promotion. Since the tourist industry has become one of the most important economic influences and also one of the fastest growing industries of modern times, it needs certain advertising and public relations efforts to offer various services to the traveling public and encourage them to travel to specific places. For this purpose, promotional material in the form of pamphlets, brochures, posters, leaflets, throwaways etc. is published in order to familiarize travelers with the services offered, report on the facilities and amenities available, or simply provide information about a certain place of interest or a sight.

Therefore, tourist brochures have to appeal to the tourists, firstly by well-conceived outward form and alluring pictures, and secondly, which is of even greater importance, by addressing the tourist in spotless English. The language should meet the criteria of terminological accuracy and stylistic fluency, and be effective in terms of the communicative situation of a tourism text, which differs from other forms of human exchange. Dann (35) adds four additional characteristics of the language of tourism, which distinguish the language of tourism from other forms of communication. The characteristics are the following: lack of sender identification, monologue, euphoria, tautology. These are equally important for the translator as for the writer of the tourism text. Furthermore, the translator should be able to

recognize the properties of tourism language in the pre-translation analysis of the text tourism are presented.

The translators of tourist brochure and difficulties that are encountered

The most widely spread opinion is the “traditional view” –that translators should translate only into their mother tongue in order to create linguistically and culturally acceptable translations. This traditional truism is not universally accepted, either in practice or in the theory of translation. It can happen that such translations made by non-native speakers are full of “unacceptable or improbable collocations” (Pokorn Kocjančič 310). One of the most repeated critiques according to Duff (11) is that the translation is not readable fluently and does not feel natural because of the strong source language influence.

Translator of tourist texts should not only be proficient in both languages, s/he should also be multicultural and able to identify with the original author as well as with the content in order to detect all the finer points of the language s/he is translating into.

As I mentioned above, tourists come into contact with a town, a region, a country by reading and consulting tourist texts (tourist brochure, leaflet, guide book), and it is often the case that tourists receive their first impression from a translation of these texts. Tourist texts present several difficulties that are based on the features that we have seen before. Nevertheless, the major problem in translating tourist discourse is due to its cultural content. This type of texts describes and informs about other cultures and therefore, their main difficulty is to introduce a reality (being a city, a country, a type of food, etc.) to a person who may have never heard of it. Also, we often find words or concepts that do not exist in other cultures, so called *realia*, what makes translators employ different techniques with the aim at transferring the original meaning to the target audience and thus, to solve the problem.

Apart from that main problem about *realia*, the translation of tourist texts also present other difficulties related to cultural aspects. In our opinion, the cultural problems that present tourist texts would not exist if translators had an adequate level of knowledge about the cultures involved, source and target cultures. However, translators who translate tourist texts are not trained to do so and lack cultural knowledge so as to offer high-quality translations. The choice of non-professional translators to translate tourist texts is mainly due to the fact that the language of tourism is not considered a specialized discourse. This is the idea behind all orders to translate tourist texts: anyone can do it because it is very easy. As Pierini (2007: 99) states, “The complexity of promotional tourist discourse is underestimated by clients and translators: it may appear to be deceptively easy to translate with its extensive use of general language; yet, it is a specialized discourse with specific linguistic/cultural features”. With this complexity of the language of tourism claimed by Pierini, the need for language experts in this field turns evident and essential. We require experts that could create effective promotional materials and, thus, achieve success in a field characterized by keen competition.

Following with the problems that can be found in tourist texts and that can cause translation mistakes, we have to mention another cultural difficulty: translation equivalents of proper names (people, museums, institutions, typical dishes, customs, festivals, etc.)

The translation of proper names is controversial and of high difficulty, since every language treat them in a different way and there is no a unique rule to translate them. For example, nowadays in Spanish we just translate proper names of kings and queens (*Elisabeth II*, in English = *Isabel II*, in Spanish) and popes, but before we used to translate all proper names (*Karl Marx*, *William Shakespeare*, etc.), either artists’ names or kings.

Regarding typical dishes, festivals, places, etc. the translator must look for an adequate solution according to the text function, its audience, and the media, in order to maintain the same message as in the original text and to correctly transfer it to its target audience. This is considered a very important matter, since the target audience must understand the text in order to do, go, buy or whatever the aim of the text be.

In case the audience did not understand the text, the function would be broken and therefore, its aim would not be fulfilled and the communication would fail. Place names are also proper names, but they cause a diverse difficulty, since there is no rule to translate them. We can find some equivalents in other languages that are used nowadays (*New York*, in English = *Nueva York*, in Spanish; *Sevilla*, in Spanish = *Seville*, in English), but also we can find equivalents that are not used any more (*Neu-York*, in German). In this sense, not all place names are adaptable neither the adapted ones are always easy to recognize.

Regarding style, also there are some differences between languages and cultures. For instance, Spanish tends to be more formal and less colloquial than English, as well as Spanish texts employs more poetic structures and description than English ones. All this makes English and Spanish texts be different from a style viewpoint.

Stylistic conventions also differ from one language to another and hence, translators have to know discursive, syntactic and textual conventions to obtain an optimal result. In the following fragment, taken from the official site of the Italian Agenzia Nazionale del Turismo, we can observe several examples of misadaptation and lack of nativeness:

(Italian) Dove dormire in Italia? Esiste solo l'imbarazzo della scelta. Agli oltre trentatremila alberghi, disseminati in ogni località, si aggiungono altri trentacinquemila indirizzi di campeggi, alloggi agrituristici, bed & breakfast, ostelli per la gioventù, alloggi privati e così via.

(English) Where to sleep in Italy? There is only an embarrassment of choice. In addition to more than thirty thousand hotels located in every part of the country, there are an additional thirty five thousand addresses of campsites, country farmhouses, bed and breakfasts, youth hostels, private accommodation and so forth.

The translator transferred Italian discursive and linguistic features into the target text, instead of adapting the message to the target culture. Due to this, the translator maintains the non-personalisation of the original text, i.e. lack of first and second person pronouns; he uses a heavy style, with long and complex sentences, and writes syntactic oddities (e.g. *There is only an embarrassment of choice*), and his lexical choices are influenced by the Italian version. In short, the example above exhibits clumsy language with signs of non-nativeness due to interference and non-adherence to the stylistic conventions established for tourist texts in English.

These differences between source and target cultures make translator question themselves whether to reproduce the source text conventions or opt for the target text conventions. Apart from the linguistic or stylistic differences that a translator may encounter during the translation process, there are other constraints that must be taken into account. One of the main constraints refers to publication of the same text (leaflet, brochure) in different languages (multilingual or bilingual editions) at the same time, with the same photographs, and the same space for the text. These types of edition require the different language texts to be of similar length, and to be relevant to the pictures printed. This sometimes becomes very hard to achieve, since languages do not present the same length when explaining something and, as we have seen above, some visitors need more information than other, or at least presented differently.

Strategies During Translation

Different texts and different contents of the same text can be translated by different methods. What is essential concerning the matter has been said more than a century ago by the dear theologian Schleiermacher' in his work *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* (1813). It is also said by Ortega, who contemplates the two possible methods of translation proposed therein: 'Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader' (Ortega y Gasset, 1992: 108). However, Ortega's position

is categorical: only when we tear the reader away from his native linguistic conventions and force him to throw himself into the mind of the original author can we speak of ‘translation proper’ (Ortega y Gasset, 1992: 108). This is the procedure to be followed by the ‘shy’ translator. Ortega then proceeds to establish some principles that should govern the ‘the new enterprise of translating’ (Ortega y Gasset, 1992: 108) and define what a translation should be:

Translation is not a duplicate of the original text [...] translation doesn’t even belong to the same literary genre as the text that was translated [...] translation is a literary genre apart [...] with its own norms and own ends [...] a translation is not the work, but a path toward the work [...] I imagine a form of translation that is ugly, as science has always been; that does not intend to wear literary garb; that is not easy to read, but is very clear indeed. (Ortega y Gasset, 1992: 109, 111)

Different strategies were developed during a tourist text translation. Foreignising strategy, which maintain the original text in original words, while domesticating gives the original and translated texts together, or nearly together. A new strategy, namely neutralising, may be able to be put forward as the criterion for the translation of tourist texts and can help promote cultural exchange, because the translator should try his best to transfer the cultural message from the original text to the target text, while retaining readability and acceptability of the translation. Here the neutralising strategy does not simply mean a mixture of the domesticating and foreignising strategies. It refers to the act and process of constantly modulating the translator’s own awareness of what is being translated to satisfy the reader’s needs and to achieve correlative equivalents between the ST and the TT. In other words, the translation of tourist texts does not rely on either strategy and the translator fully takes into account all the cultural elements existing in the text whenever necessary. Newmark (1991), who put forward the —correlative approach to translation, states that —The more important the language of the original or source language text, the more closely it should be translated.

According to this approach, seven methods are suggested to cope with different kinds of texts: component analysis, modulation, descriptive equivalent, functional equivalent, cultural equivalent, synonymy and paraphrase (Newmark 1991: 1-33). The degree of compatibility in the first method is highest and the last is the lowest.

Conclusion

Translation of tourist texts is a kind of publicity activity. Its essence is that the translator should attempt to produce the same effect on the target language readers as is produced by the original on the source language readers. However, cultural discrepancies will hinder foreign readers from understanding such texts properly. Therefore translators should adopt an appropriate method to adjust the version to help readers comprehend the texts. Otherwise —they will find the translation requiring so much effort to understand that they are likely to stop reading, unless they are very highly motivated. (Jin Di and Nida 1984: 102)

When translating tourist texts, we are not just dealing with words written in a certain time, space and socio-political situation; most importantly, it is the cultural aspects of the text that should be taken into account. There are at least five kinds of influences that need to be considered when translating tourist texts from SL to TL, and they are: (1) the influence of associative and connotative meanings; (2) the influence of different understandings and thoughts, (3) the influence of metaphors and expressions; (4) the influence of religions and myths; and (5) the influence of values and lifestyle. Technically, we can use both of the strategies to tackle the cultural elements in translating tourist texts. This paper argues that tourist texts should be translated primarily by means of foreignising to retain the original cultural resonances. Only in a situation that we cannot deal with do we use a domesticating strategy, in other words, allowing the alien to be seen, or as Schleiermacher famously put it, by bringing the reader to the text rather than the other way round. The problem is that if a

translation is successful, in the sense of reading as if it were written in the target language, then its creator and its original culture become invisible. For this reason, it is believed that the domesticating strategy should be applied as little as possible when translating tourist texts.

This is because the purpose of tourist texts is to spread the foreign or different cultures to the reader, and the translator is responsible for disseminating the original culture to the TL reader.

To sum up, the foreignising strategy is a preferable approach to translating tourist texts. The advantages include revealing the cultural and historical factors of the ST, disseminating the culture and customs of the original, and showing the equality between languages and between cultures. Disadvantages include neglecting the reader's emotion and understanding.

In other words, the functions of disseminating the ST cultures are found, but the effects of attracting the tourists are most likely lost when employing such a strategy. It is clear that the domesticating or the foreignising strategies cannot solve all the problems in translating tourist texts. So the neutralising strategy does not simply mean a mixture of the domesticating and foreignising strategies. It refers to the act and process of constantly modulating the translator's own awareness of what is being translated to satisfy the reader's needs and to achieve correlative equivalents between the ST and the TT.

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