



Questions of Mediation in the Translation of Tourist Texts

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DEFINITIONS OF "SPECIALIZED LANGUAGES"

Definitions of what is meant by "specialized language", "domain-specific discourse", or "special purposes language", depend very often on the methodological frameworks adopted for research purposes.

The distinctive traits characterizing special languages have received different emphasis according to different approaches – approaches that are often language-specific. For example, Sager *et al* (1980) indicate economy, precision and appropriateness as specific markers of specialized discourse, and the three criteria are conceived of as influencing each other:

Appropriateness is the measure of the effectiveness of the intention as it is expressed and understood in a message and, at the same time, it arbitrates between precision and economy. [...] It regulates the explicitness of the psychological intention and therefore influences the assumptions that can be made about the correct interpretation of the intention of text forms (Sager *et al*. 1980: 323).

On the other hand, Hoffmann (1984) provides a much more detailed list of the linguistic qualities of specialized discourse:

1. Exactitude, simplicity and clarity
2. Objectivity
3. Abstractness
4. Generalization



5. Density of information
6. Brevity or laconism
7. Emotional neutrality
8. Unambiguousness
9. Impersonality
10. Logical consistency
11. Use of defined technical terms, symbols and figures.

However, both this detailed list of characteristics and the definitions mentioned above are based upon different criteria, as Nigro (2006: 47-8) has convincingly argued, by pointing out that

- sometimes they have to do with “mode” (the channel of communication)
- sometimes with “tenor” (that is the participants of the communication)
- or with “field” (the subject, or specific domain).

Gotti chooses the expression “specialized discourse” because, as he puts it, “it reflects more clearly the specialist use of the language in contexts which are typical of a specialized community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice” (2005: 24).

There are three important elements at the basis of this definition:

- type of user
- domain of use
- use of the language in a specific setting.

Gotti argues that all of these elements must be found in the same text, at the same time, for a specialized discourse to be defined as such.

The concept of “specialized community” is another fundamental element of this definition. The communicative practices of more or less specific groups of language users is given special attention in any sociolinguistic approach. Philip Riley adopts the term “epistemic communities” in the case of users of specialized discourse, as the element that all of its members have in common is specialized knowledge. As Riley puts it: “Domain-specific discourses operate as the boundary markers for *epistemic communities*, which have been defined above as knowledge-based social groups or figurations” (2002: 57).

The function of any boundary is to define and map a space, in order to promote some kind of identity – and normally we do this by creating a distinction between what is inside and what lies outside. As a consequence, as Riley puts it: “using a domain-specific discourse is an *identity claim*” (*ibid.*: 57). The result of affirming one’s membership to a specific social organization is to direct audience behaviour and ex-



pectations, and I shall argue that this process can be seen at work in the production of specialized (tourist) text types.

By taking into account the dialogic relation between the individual and the social, we are going beyond the narrow microlinguistic perspective that used to focus on the lexical or terminological dimensions, in order to establish a distinction between general language and specialized discourse. Beyond the lexical level, the morphosyntactic, textual and pragmatic dimensions are played out in specialized discourse, so as to produce the semantic and functional peculiarities of a type of discourse, which is indeed being produced for specific purposes.

I am aware of the fact that brief references such as this to the vast area of specialized discourse may come across as simplistic, but it seemed necessary to open the way for the subject discussed in this paper, which is the language of tourism.

THE LANGUAGE OF TOURISM

The question of whether or not the language of tourism can be considered as a specialized type of discourse has been examined by several scholars in recent publications, such as Gotti 2005, Nigro 2006, Calvi 2000, Castello 2002, Manca 2004 to mention just a few.

Being “the largest industry in the world” (Dann 1996: 1), tourism plays a fundamental role in our post-modern society. It is a very variegated field, from a professional point of view, accommodating a large number of professional organizations, which are exemplified by tour operators, tourist and information agencies, hotel and accommodation providers, restaurants and other forms of catering, transports, and last but not least, publishing.

Calvi (2000: 17) stresses Cortelazzo’s (1990) distinction between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of specialized languages, and applies it to the language of tourism, where she identifies two fundamental units:

- A thematic component, which refers to the contents of the specific domains included in the large field of “tourism”, and answers the referential needs of the people working in the area (i.e. the professionals).
- A communicative component, framed according to the context of situation, the latter lying at the basis of the choice amongst a limited series of textual macro-functions.

The thematic components of the language of tourism are quite numerous, and are taken from different disciplinary fields or professional domains, for example:

- Economics
- Marketing



- Geography
- Sociology
- Psychology
- History (Art History)
- Popular/Mass Culture
- Sport

As a result, it is difficult to define the specificity of such an extended and variegated field. However, there are several elements which set the language of tourism apart from other kinds of specialized discourses:

- the language of tourism has no apparent restriction in terms of usage. In spite of the fact that it is possible to make a distinction between the linguistic variety used by professional experts and the language used for tourist promotion, obviously the spread (and I would add the economic and social impact) of the second type of language is certainly larger than the first.
- the referential needs of professionals working in this field are rather low, compared with other more traditional domains such as Economics, Law etc. Consequently, although specific terminology in the tourist field does indeed exist, as a rule there seems to be a high level of interchange between tourist discourse and general language.
- On the other hand, the communicative needs of tourist interactions are complex and conspicuous – by communicative needs I mean an efficient use of the language for any type of communication which can be included under the umbrella of “tourism”.

Given the impact of the communicative needs, it is not surprising that recent research is identifying the specificity of the language of tourism at the communicative level, paying special attention to the discursive strategies effectively employed by language users.

THE COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES OF THE LANGUAGE OF TOURISM

The linguistic strategies adopted in the field of tourism are extremely various, but they can be mainly divided into three groups:

1. Strategies meant to identify text receivers, with their specific needs and expectations, so as to produce functional messages/texts (for example, strategies of reader inclusion, use of prescriptive language, involvement strategies, etc.)



2. Use of specific genres (for example, the guidebook, brochure, or fliers), characterized by the occurrence of a strong persuasive function in predominantly informative or descriptive text types.
3. A strong presence of "cross-cultural" references. Culture-specific elements abound in the language of tourism, as they very literally represent cultural identities.

Although other strategies may be employed, this short list appears to give enough food for thought, and can be used as a methodological tool to define the specificity of this type of language.

THE LANGUAGE OF TOURISM: A SMALL CORPUS

Now I would like to analyse a series of texts which illustrate the strategies mentioned above. The examples are taken from a small corpus composed of 20 tourist brochures in English, published by the British Tourist Authority, and mainly concerning areas in the South-East of England (<http://visitbritain.com/en/GB>). The brochures are relatively short, counting a maximum of twenty pages each. As a consequence, the "corpus" is arguably too small to allow us to attempt any kind of generalisations; for this reason I shall refer only to the most common and frequent findings.

The first aspect worth noting is a well-known lexical phenomenon which is taking place not only in the English language. The term "tourist", used to identify the receivers of tourist brochures (and tourist customers in general) is being substituted by other names. The findings in my corpus are "visitors", "guests", "travellers".

Scholars have pointed out that the word "tourist" is increasingly being associated with the notion of mass tourism and that other terms are coming to the fore, since they appear to be more consonant with contemporary practices and expectations. This finding confirms the first strategy mentioned earlier, that is the identification of the receiver.

A similar phenomenon can be observed if we look at the proliferation of specific terms which come to identify very narrow categories of tourism, often corresponding to specific interests or activities: I found seventy-eight "types" of tourism in Wikipedia, ranging from "alternative tourism", "cultural tourism", "experimental travel", "heritage tourism", "package holiday tourism", "religious tourism", "sustainable tourism"; to "disaster tourism", "shark tourism" and "suicide tourism".

When we shift our attention to the analysis of discursive strategies, a number of interesting findings are revealed. The language of tourism appears to be extremely rich in metaphorical associations and the findings in my corpus point to a considerable number of examples. Brochures abound in metaphors because of their textual hybrid profile, in which the persuasive function plays a stronger role than the descriptive or informative meta-functions. In the case of other genres, such as the guidebook, for instance, the latter macro-functions play a more important role, and this is proba-



bly the reason why metaphorical expressions (characteristic of a persuasive style) are less frequent.

Here is an example of metaphorical language found in my corpus:

Watch swan-white sails and cotton wool clouds racing over the rippling waters of the Broads. Drift along "The Backs" in a punt past the manicured lawns and medieval colleges of historic Cambridge.

Visit the East of England and you will begin a love affair with the area that will last a lifetime.

The East is a paradise for sailing...

In spite of these examples, both from a quantitative and a qualitative analysis, the use of metaphor cannot be considered a fundamental trait of the language used in these brochures.

On the other hand, adjectives used to create a sense of exaggeration and hyperbole are a more consistent characteristic of this type of discourse. The result of such a strategy appears to be a desire to surprise text receivers by describing places in extraordinary terms – often by means of analogy or comparison:

1. thick and splendid forests
2. open skies and fiery sunsets
3. glorious gardens
4. fantastically diverse cultural scene
5. fabulous historic towns
6. once-mighty fortress
7. hordes of tourists
8. enigmatic ruins
9. quaint fishing villages
10. dazzling seafront illuminations
11. grand stately homes
12. glorious gardens
13. character-packed market towns

Some of these expressions have already become standardized, others display a sense of novelty and a strong evocative force. The large number of examples found in the corpus, together with their large variety, is a signal of the vitality of this type of language and points to its capacity to create a sense of novelty, so as to attract the attention of an audience which is more and more demanding. Stereotypical images wouldn't be so effective. This is another instance of a strategy of accommodation to receivers' expectations.

The central role played by the recipients of this type of discourse is also apparent in strategies of inclusion, which are meant to draw the recipient into the discourse. A couple of examples will be useful to illustrate this point:



Ask anyone what they love most about the cities and towns of the East of England, and they will enthuse about the wealth of history, the abundance of wonderful ancient buildings and the many picturesque streets they feel safe to wander in. Visitors return time and again to marvel at the massive castle keeps [...]

The way in which recipients (that is visitors) are addressed must be paid special attention, and particularly by analyzing the use of pronouns, that is “anyone”, “no one”, and especially “they”. Such elements are commonly employed in impersonal expressions, which set apart the subject and the object of enunciation, creating a certain distance between the two. However, pronouns are used in a completely different way in this example: they are used to include recipients into discourse, rather than distancing them. So-called impersonal pronouns are in fact employed to demonstrate that the tourist experience is described in such general terms as to accommodate any type of visitors (but not, of course, tourists). Readers’ identification is therefore facilitated by use of impersonal pronouns. It is interesting to see the way in which in this example images follow each other quickly, in a kind of *crescendo*; the itinerary is being visualized by the reader, who is invited to experience it directly. We should notice also the large number of adjectives and their hyperbolic forms, used to attract the attention of the reader. Another example of the same phenomenon can be analyzed:

What you won’t find in the East of England are hordes of tourists and endless queues, which will of course be one of your reasons for coming here.

Also in this case, a very effective strategy of reader-identification appears to be at work: the recipient is addressed directly as “you”, and, at the same time, an analogical modality is adopted in the comparison between the “here” of the place being described (the East of England), mirroring itself against “another” undefined place, characterized by the negative emphasis on mass tourism. The recipient travellers (once again, not tourists) are identified by their presumed choice of a rather selective destination.

Another way in which recipients of tourist texts are identified is by dividing them into categories, which are usually defined in terms of specific activities:

[...] for keen walkers there are many picturesque paths through heath and woodland, marsh and moor, forest and country park. Then again you may prefer the open skies and fiery sunsets of The Fens or the remote splendour of The Wash, England’s largest tidal estuary where you can hear the haunting sound of the oystercatcher.

Families will love the beaches that go on forever – the region has over 400 kilometres of coastline, a joy for both sailors and nature lovers alike.

Recipients are invited to identify themselves with either the “keen walkers”, the “families” or with a more generic “you”, and each category is presented with an ample



choice as far as activities or environment are concerned. The passage is very rich in adjectives and the final effect is that of a sequence of images which are projected in front of the tourist, as if she/he were "living the experience". The use of modal verbs – "may", "can" – contributes to creating the notion of choice.

It is also very interesting to notice the elements to be found in subject position: "keen walkers", "you", "families". There is a characteristic lack of coherence, which would be difficult to accept in other text types. However, in the case of tourist brochures, shifts from one subject to the other are perceived as natural, as coherence is given by the discursive focus on recipients and their specific needs.

All the examples provided illustrate discursive strategies promoting the identification of the recipient with the images (tourists/travellers, places) and services offered. At the same time, they offer an idea of the way in which a persuasive textual function in fact predominates in a genre (the brochure), which is ostensibly meant to inform readers. However, in order to substantiate this claim I should provide a larger number of examples, and work on longer extracts – but this is a point which will be developed in further research.

THE LANGUAGE OF TOURISM AND TRANSLATION

Now I would like to analyze briefly the third and last discursive strategy characterizing tourist texts, and namely that concerning the presence of culture-specific elements. This is a topic which is particularly interesting when it is shown in the context of translation practice. The language of tourism is itself a form of "cultural mediation", as it "translates" cultural values by promoting the identity of specific geographical areas/communities.

I would like to take into examination an extract from a translation work of one of my students, Diego Agnelli, which is an example of the degrees of mediation at work in a cross-cultural textual practice such as the translation of tourist texts. The extract is taken from the translation of an English brochure on Durham Cathedral into Italian.

DURHAM CATHEDRAL

The Shrine of Saint Cuthbert

CATHEDRAL HISTORY

Durham Cathedral has been described as "one of the great architectural experiences of Europe". It is renowned as a masterpiece of Romanesque (or Norman) architecture. It was begun in 1033 and largely completed within 40 years. It is the only cathedral in England to retain almost all of its Norman craftsmanship, and one of few to preserve the unity and integrity of its original design.

The Cathedral was built as a place of worship, specifically to house the shrine of the North's best-loved saint, Cuthbert, in whose honour pilgrims came to Durham from all over England. It was also the home of a Benedictine monastic community. The Cathedral holds an annual Benedictine Weekend when there is an opportu-



nity to explore in more depth the historical and living tradition of St Benedict, focusing on its expression at Durham Cathedral in the past and present. The Cathedral also served a political and military function by reinforcing the authority of the prince-bishops over England's northern border. (<http://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/history>).

DURHAM: LA CATTEDRALE DI SAN CUBERTO

Il fascino del sacro

TRA STORIA E ARTE

La cattedrale di Durham sorge maestosa e imponente nel cuore dell'omonima cittadina situata nella contea di Durham nella regione nord-orientale dell'Inghilterra un tempo conosciuta come Northumbria. Il celebre storico d'arte inglese, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, definì la cattedrale una delle migliori forme espressive dell'architettura europea, essendo un capolavoro assoluto dell'arte romanica e specialmente di quella variante inglese che è l'arte normanna. La fabbrica della cattedrale fu avviata nel 1093, pochi decenni dopo l'ascesa al potere di Guglielmo il Conquistatore. I lavori durarono ben quarant'anni a testimonianza del fatto che i normanni tradussero in arte la volontà di imporre il loro prestigio. L'edificio sacro è l'unico in tutta l'Inghilterra ad avere mantenute inalterate le forme architettoniche dello stile anglo-normanno ed uno dei pochi ad aver preservato l'impianto unitario e compatto del progetto originario.

La cattedrale di Durham fu concepita principalmente come un luogo di culto e destinata ad ospitare la preziosa arca con le spoglie di San Cuperto, caro alla devozione degli inglesi che ancora oggi giungono in pellegrinaggio da ogni angolo dell'Inghilterra. Divenne anche sede di una fiorente comunità di monaci benedettini. Per questo la Cattedrale offre al visitatore la possibilità di conoscere più da vicino la vita monastica durante il *Benedictine weekend*, un fine settimana all'insegna del mistero e della spiritualità per capire l'importanza della regola di San Benedetto nel passato e nel presente di Durham.

Il complesso monastico fu anche sede del potere politico e roccaforte militare. I vescovi della città erano infatti principi-vescovi e in tal modo potevano estendere la loro autorità sul confine settentrionale dell'Inghilterra, proteggendosi da eventuali incursioni dal nord.

It is immediately apparent that the TT has been expanded. What kind of elements have been inserted? Primarily elements that have to do with geography or, rather, the history (and art-history) of the area.

The TT provides more detailed information about the area in which the Cathedral is situated than the ST. Furthermore, the rather obscure quotation of the original is meticulously referred to its author, an art historian. Also the ST brief reference to "Norman" architecture is given a specific British flavour, when this artistic current is defined as a "variante inglese" of the Romanesque style. The only date mentioned by the ST (1093) is contextualised through an explicit reference to a specific moment of British history, that is the early decades of the rule of William 1st. Finally, the reference to the pilgrimages to St Cuthbert's shrine, which are still taking place nowadays, repre-



sent another example in which a flavour of “Englishness” is added to the TT: in other words, it is another attempt to promote the English identity for the benefit of Italian recipients/prospective tourists.

In this short discussion I have taken into account only the so-called culture-specific elements, leaving aside an analysis of the morphosyntactic or stylistic characteristics of the ST and TT. I shall only mention the presence of a large amount of adjectives, which are effectively added in translation.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the notion of “mediation” – meant as a symbolic space for interplay and negotiation – is the main characteristic of the language of tourism. The force of tourism communication lies in its capacity to develop a language capable of satisfying the needs of the diverse components of this field.

A variety of discursive strategies are exploited and textually organised into hybrid text genres, in which a persuasive function is inserted into informative or descriptive textual profiles.

The concept of “mediation” surfaces also at the ideational level of language, and this is especially apparent in translation, where tourism-fashioned identities are transported across linguistic, social and cultural barriers.

The purpose of tourism is in fact to negotiate the encounter with the Other (another region or Country), and in doing so identities are very often re-arranged and distorted. As we have seen, a significant degree of translator intervention (mediation) is very often necessary for successful communication.

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