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CULTUS

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The Intercultural Question and the Interpreting Professions

2016, Issue 9, Volume 2

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the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication

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Introduction

David Katan

Volume two is divided into three main areas: Translation, Museum and Audio Guides and Tourist Evaluation.

Part 1: Translation

In part one *Mirella Agorni* focusses on the identity and epistemic knowledge that a tourist can bring to a text. She discusses the problems of translating culture-specific items, taking us through some of the more important literature on the strategies, including Aixelà, Newmark and Baker. As she notes, the domestic/foreign, self/other dichotomy will always create tension, when following the essentialist view of translation as (inter)cultural mediation. With this view the translator is faced with either losing the reader (the translation is too-unfamiliar) or risks demotivating the tourist by providing too much that is familiar. What needs to be focused on instead, she argues, is not the transfer of meaning but the negotiation of signification. Hence translation, and the teaching of translation should revolve around approximation and (re)creation. She gives examples of an MA student's creative approach in her translation of a tourist text, but accepts also that this approach clearly involves questions of risk taking – something which translators, and translation students have traditionally avoided.

Mohamed Zain Sulaiman shows us how worldviews central to the Anglo and Malay cultures regarding nature and 'naturescape themes' are easily lost when translating tourism promotion material, leading to a clear reduction of attractiveness of holiday destinations. Following Agorni, the main criticism of translated material is that a purely linguistic approach is almost always adopted by translators, whether in Europe or in Asia. However Sulaiman also puts the blame on the functional *skopos* approach to translation. Again, in line with Agorni, Sulaiman argues that it is creative writing and transcreation which should be the model that translators should follow when dealing with tourism promotional material. He tests

the tourism Australia website and its Malay version on focus groups who were able to pinpoint cultural conceptual differences regarding, for example ‘beauty’ and ‘paradise’ which were entirely lost to the translator, resulting in functionally inadequate translations. He concludes by showing how it is possible to provide much more effective alternative translations, which will meet the values of the target reader culture.

Napu Novryanto also focusses on Asia, and on the rise of international tourism to Indonesia, which consequently has given a kick start to the translation of tourism literature. His focus is on the quality of translation into English. He notes that the main, and well-documented, issue is that of the lack of language competence in English. What, though, has not been documented is how come this is, and continues to be, the case, particularly when a country stands to profit from new waves of international tourism. His study then was to analyse official tourism brochures in translation in terms of translation quality, and interview the professionals who were involved. He outlines the academic view which highlights a number of crucial factors and checks the actual process against the theory. For example, he investigated the translators’ awareness of a ‘translation purpose’ and the commissioners’ awareness of ‘a translation brief’. In studying the commissioning process, he identifies the (many) weak points in the procedures, such as unregulated recruitment of translators and revision of the language by anyone “who happens to be in the office”.

David Katan rounds off this section, very much in line with the previous papers suggesting that (for the moment at least) ‘cultural informers do it better’. He demonstrates how the professional translators’ stubborn attachment to the source text may provide linguistically acceptable texts but does little to enable the Outsider tourist to access the host destination as a cultural Insider would, especially when it comes to (using Greimas’ terminology) *pouvoir-faire* texts. He argues that ‘Outsiders’ necessarily have a limited and distorted ‘tourist gaze’ so that much of the *pouvoir* content of the source text is lost. Consequently translations, instead of enabling the tourist, reduce their access to that of an onlooker with only *savoir* knowledge. He shows how unconsciously but mindfully, cultural informers (such as blog travel writers) follow an *ordo naturalis* procedure taking the Outsider reader into the Insider’s world allowing the tourist to perform more like an Insider. He concludes by illustrating a taxonomy of contexting orientations (developed from E.T. Hall) arguing that, apart from the need for bi-cultural understanding, a low context communication

approach should be mindfully used by translators to produce texts that might actually be useful.

Part 2: Museum and Audio Guides

Robin Cranmer opens this section by asking what communication approach(es) can best improve the International Visitor experience, taking museums and art galleries as a case in point; and much of his material comes from a project involving London museums and his University. He widens the possibilities discussed in the translation section to include a number of other possibilities. He begins by arguing the need ‘to decentre’, away from the source text and culture, to reduce ‘domestic bias’, so that the script writer can focus more on the needs of the International Visitor reading the text. Apart from gaps in knowledge and problems of ‘non equivalence’, discussed by Agorni, Cranmer adds those of different cultural narratives and representations, as well as format and visual expectations. As he points out there is no ‘one’ correct strategy to be followed, and hence when it comes to creating the new text, often “a strange hybrid” of the domestic and the foreign both in terms of language and in cultural appropriacy will result. Cost is a major issue here, requiring a ‘one size fits all’ translated or ‘international’ text. He then discusses other ‘less common strategies’, and indeed suggests a form of cultural informer approach which may indeed also be the most cost-effective.

Maria Elisa Fina devotes her paper to a study of what, in theory, should be Insider cultural informer guides *par excellence*, and reports on her analysis of 50 city guides taken from Italy, the US and the UK. She uses Neves’s guidelines for audio guides as a benchmark for her investigation of some of the features of the audio guide genre in terms of accessibility. In particular, she focusses on the features regarding navigation and circulation /way-finding. Her investigation of the features shows that the genre itself is extremely variegated. At the same time there are a number of features which are generally or always present in the Anglo corpora and either less present or entirely absent in the Italian corpus, such as maps, introductions, instructions and, in particular, safety advice. She refers to Katan’s contexting taxonomy to suggest that the reasons may be framed within the low context communication ‘explicitness’ orientation, a feature of Anglo-American transactional communication. She also notes that the Anglo guides tend to ‘guide’ rather than ‘describe’. As such the Anglo guides comply more with Neves’s guidelines than the Italian, which again

suggests that a low context communication orientation is the most appropriate when translating for accessibility.

Joselia Nieves, herself, ends this section with an innovative development of the audio guide, and describes a project involving a museum's attempt to improve "meaning-making", through 'enriched descriptive' audio guides (EDGs). She begins with the same problem outlined by Cranmer, how to make the cultural heritage on display accessible to a growing range of (Outsider) visitors. She focusses on the specialists who write the guides often creating opaque rather than accessible texts, and suggests that rather they should be written instead 'to appeal' and 'to guide'. Her solution is to employ multimedia and multisensory materials to enrich the audio guide, and she describes a project to create an EDG in Arabic and in English at the Arabic Museum of Modern Art (Mathaf). She outlines the "textual structure" of the guide, which may be seen as a development of Katan's *ordo naturalis* procedure. The 'enrichment' process involved the addition of multisensory features such as soundscaping (also discussed in Fina). The script was tested for clarity, inaccuracy and inconsistency and the changes are documented in the paper. She concludes suggesting that a tested user-centred product "might not equally satisfy everybody" but may well get close.

Part 3: Tourist Evaluation

In this final part we have two papers, both of which set out to analyse opinion of American tourists staying at Brazilian hotels (Navarro) and of culturally diverse 'gastronauts' in Northern Italy (Komninos). While Navarro clearly points to culture-bound orientations as providing the key to differences in tourist opinion, Komninos demonstrates that culture is not necessarily a key indicator of tourist reaction.

Sandra Navarro analysed 10,000 hotel reviews written in Brazilian-Portuguese and American English using *Wordsmith*, which allowed her to compare both American and Brazilian traveller reviews of both their own (Insider) country and (as Outsiders) abroad. She begins outlining Hall's Iceberg Theory and focusses on cultural orientations which filter the perceptions of the Other in predictable ways (at the group level). Her search for key words and clusters shows how much Americans stress objective 'standards' whether it was the room or the breakfast, and openly criticized 'Brazilians' and Brazilian ways. The Brazilian reviews of American hotels did not focus on standards but did notice what they saw

as American lack of personal rapport, even suggesting that American staff 'hate' Brazilians. Navarro neatly explains these key differences in terms of culture-bound 'thinking', American universalism compared to Brazilian particularism and to the American orientation to 'action' (also discussed in Katan) compared to the Brazilian orientation to being. She concludes by linking the study of cultural orientations to Translation studies suggesting that a pragmatic understanding of cultural differences can only deepen our understanding of equivalence.

Nikolas Komninou reports on a questionnaire survey and series of interviews given to a group of 50 'gastronauts', culinary tourists, from 8 different countries. They were asked to evaluate a series of items concerning their holiday in Northern Italy, from the advertising and transport, to the communication and eye-contact, and from the appearance of the local people to the organization of the urban spaces. The overall satisfaction reduced in line with geographical proximity. So the Swiss and the Slovenians gave the lowest satisfaction while the American and the Japanese gave the highest. Komninou also notes that overall satisfaction was high when tourists evaluated the host-culture's *non*-culinary features, and that there was much observation but surprisingly little comment. On the other hand, all participants, regardless of culture, demonstrated lower satisfaction and much more critical comment to questions related to global tourism needs, such as access to efficient transport, accommodation and clear communication. Finally, with regard to culinary tourism satisfaction, feedback was the most animated, critical and intense (though not extremely low). As a result of these differences, Komninou suggests that 'sub-group cultural values', such as food, provides as strong a framework for identity, values and beliefs as any national cultural orientation.