

CULTURAL FACTORS AND THEIR IMPACT ON TEACHING TRANSLATION

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English takes quite a beating in many forms, whether in the instructions we find in boxes of items we have purchased, on restaurant menus or official notices in towns and cities around the world. Indeed, it is frightening how poorly texts directed specifically at tourists tend to be. Whether the problems behind such horribly mistranslated texts stem from a lack of professionalism or simply a bad attitude towards the importance of proper translation is a matter for debate. Regardless, the proliferation of unintelligible English documents for international tourist consumption seems to be a common practice. Perhaps the availability and training of professional translators specialized in tourism will improve the situation, but only once the tourist industry finally takes note of intercultural sensitivities and decides to act aggressively. In this paper, I highlight the problems seen in actual cases and suggest changes that might deliver results in improving tourism texts.

1

Keywords: ESP, intercultural communication, specialized translation

This article is based on my experience teaching English terminology and writing classes to technical translation students. Many of the students who take the four semester technical translation course originally studied as B.Sc. tourism majors and, logically, I therefore include tourism-based texts in the course syllabus. Such English language materials exclusively stem from primary sources, e.g. official Hungarian tourist office brochures and websites, visitor's booklets I have purchased at various Hungarian tourist sites, such as palaces, castles and museums, as well as more general literature tourists are exposed to, i.e. restaurant menus or guidelines for using trams, buses and underground lines.

Texts prepared for use in the tourism industry may include a nation's historical and cultural background, such as guidebooks to cities and museums or even people's ways of living and thinking, such as menus or transportation guides. In many cases, tourism texts are written for visitors who share the same or similar cultural background. In other words, such texts are written by natives of the culture about which is being written. Tourism texts are means of preserving and spreading the culture of a nation or a community, which is always unique to that nation or community. The problem with translating such texts lies in the failure of the author and/or the translator to take the intended audience(s) into consideration when shaping the contained information in the target language.

Because it is the aim of any text used in the tourism industry to attract the reader's attention and then make a sale, the needs of the reader require careful consideration. Confusing, even ambiguous, language should be avoided. Slang, for example, is an inherent danger, as it never translates well. In translating tourism texts containing culturally-loaded terminology, a decision must be made as their relevance to the cognitive environment of the foreign readership before including these in the final translation. Translators are indeed expected to make presumptions of relevance in the target language which is similar to that originating from the message in the source text. Crucial thereby is the need to achieve the communicative goals between the source text author and the target text readership. Thus, those learning translation must undergo an adaptation process which will provide them with an understanding of e.g. how languages differ, inferences diverge between cultures or how the reader from the target culture might judge the subject matter of the source text content. In essence, the translator is supposed to aid the tourism text readers in adapting their

expectations to a new cultural environment. Through their careful work, translators empower target tourism text readers to gain fuller access to the source culture, history and attitudes and to better understand the information implied in the source tourism text.

House (2001: 247) discusses what makes a good translation, arguing that it “[...] lies at the heart of all concerns with translation criticism”. Objectifying the quality of any translation is not easy. By nature, a good translator should be highly self-critical. House distinguishes three main approaches to meaning, which in turn determine three different approaches to evaluating a translation: mentalist approaches, presupposing the view of meaning as residing in the user’s head; response-based approaches, i.e. behaviouristic and functionalist approaches in which the most relevant criteria are either the reader’s reaction to the translated text or the respect of the function of the source text; and text and discourse-based approaches, such as linguistically-oriented approaches, such as House’s suggestion itself, in which translation is, in the end, text re-contextualisation. The translated text must at any rate have a function equivalent to that of the source text. This requires a “cultural filter” (House 2001), or rather an “adaptation” of the translated text to make up for socio-cultural, stylistic and rhetorical differences between both texts. Other means of judging translation quality include the analysis of translation by the genre and the function of a text, according to the subject matter and the linguistic features of the text, how the text is presented and the nature and relations between the cultures involved in communicating the intended messages therein.

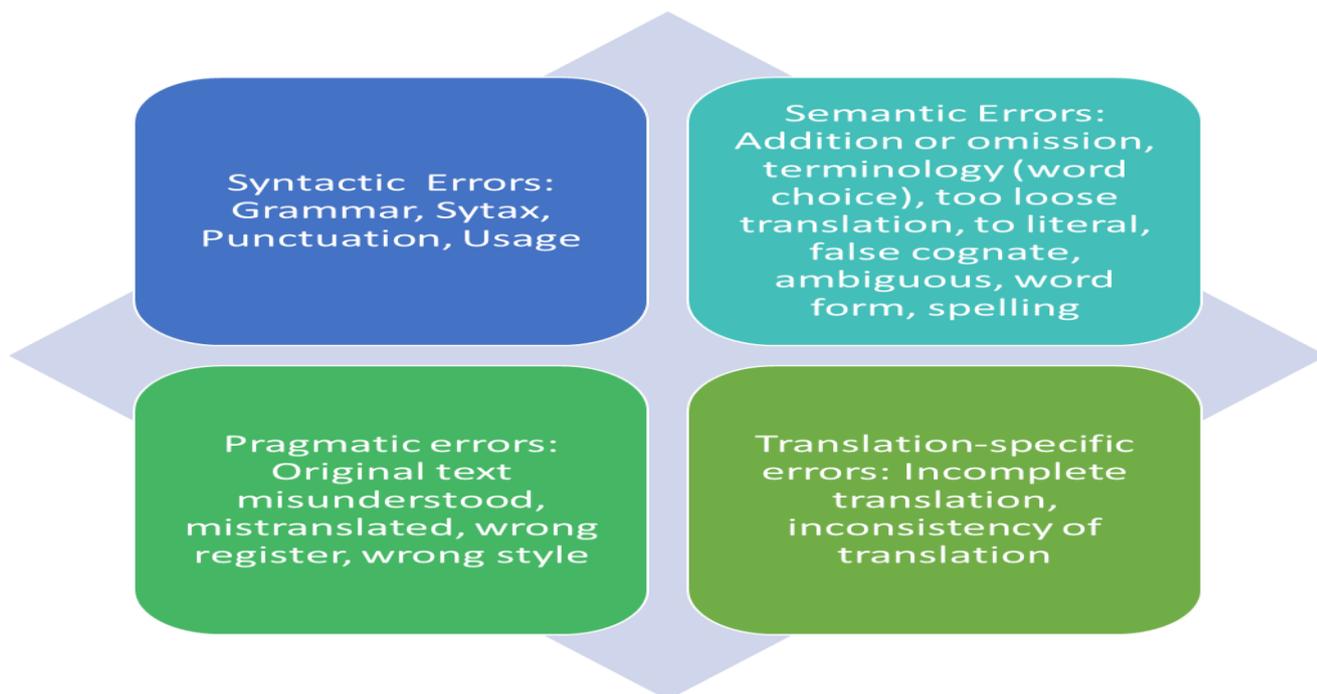
Upon closer inspection, one inevitably finds grievous flaws and gross mistranslations in any of these types of information. Now, over a quarter of a century after the changes which swept away Communism and opened Hungary to mass tourism, and thus necessitating the creation and printing of English-language tourist materials, why are so many translators getting it wrong? My experience suggests that the root of many of the mistakes encountered in the English translations of tourist brochures or restaurant menus may lie in the education of future tourism professionals. Indeed, the majority of the tourism students I encounter in the classroom lack travel experience, (inter)cultural communication skills, knowledge of the target customer cultures they will later encounter in their careers, as well as serious gaps in L2 competencies, especially as regard how different the Hungarian language works, compared to English.

Moreover, when one gives formal, state accredited ESP English for Tourism language examinations to these students, one cannot but recognize the scope of the tourism education system’s failure to provide such students with the requisite understanding of the consequences of miscommunicating across languages and cultures. As Tar (2006) posits, “Most importantly, the way we interpret different ways of communicating varies from one culture to another.” Yet, in order to truly become qualified as a professional in the tourism sector, it is precisely the ability to communicate properly with those who think, act and speak differently than oneself which is of direst need. Content, therefore, needs to be re-evaluated and adjusted in the training of future tourism students. As Czeller & Hajdú (2014: 159) write, “New demands in the economy and society have ushered in changes in the content of education. While the grammar-translation method was mainly based on translating pieces of literature, today’s language tuition places the focal point on Office English or Business English when teaching students or adults.” Of course, the focus of Bachelor’s degrees in Tourism is not on translation, intercultural communication or even foreign languages. Programs are generally based on a degree in economics, and are therefore focused on microeconomics, statistics, marketing and business management. However, as companies’ own research tells us, leaving out the so-called soft skills of L2 competency, and one risks graduating the next generation of

employees who will also fail to deliver the requirement of all globally-focused business: the ability to reach and garner ever increasing percentages of their market niches, worldwide. Dajnoki (2013: 103) argues that it is “absolutely necessary” in order to have an “effective and successful organization, that the employees possess appropriate competencies.” Communication, seen as the key soft skill by many organizations, has become so crucial in the information and IT-driven business world that, as Mohácsi (2012: 227) writes, “the significance of communication management has increased”. In other words, communication is a formal process, requiring formal actions. According to the OECD, in its *Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) Project*, of ‘competency,’ a competency is [for] “example, the ability to communicate effectively ... that may draw on an individual’s knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating” (OECD, 2005, 4). Garcia-Aracil & Van der Velden (2008) highlight the importance of L2 competencies, combined with oral and written communication and intercultural competencies.

Just why does one encounter all the poor translation and miscommunication in the tourism sector? There are numerous reasons. Below is a table of the most typical errors made in translating texts for tourist use, categorized by type:

Table 1. *Typical Translation Errors in Tourism Translations, by Type*



Before we explore these errors on the basis of actual examples found around the country, one needs to understand what has happened to L2 education here. In Hungary, most general English and ESP language classes no longer involve translation practice. This is simply due to the changes in the state accredited language examination system, which heavily favours examinations which are single language in nature. Until a decade ago, examinations often involved testing the abilities of examinees to analyse in English the content of a Hungarian text or to translate from Hungarian into English and/or vice-versa. Now no longer a requirement, this vital skill in expressing oneself properly to reflect the culture and thinking of a target language is being lost. Thus, most students do not acquire adequate experience in this skill even in dealing with non-specialist texts, much less with the intricacies of translating tourist texts.

All the errors in the table above are found in actual tourist texts and often in the most bizarre combinations. This latter problem reveals a deeper crisis in the management of communication with tourists: a lack of seriousness by those requesting texts for tourists in English. With some, one discovers that Google Translate was relied on, with horrific outcomes. Hungarian to English and vice-versa simply do not work with this program. The languages are too different and much work remains to be done on such programs before any success can be seen. Obvious as well is how many companies and organizations are failing to engage experienced translators and proof-readers at all. The examples below are given in evidence:

Image 1: *Incomplete translation, wrong terminology, poor grammar, mistranslated text*

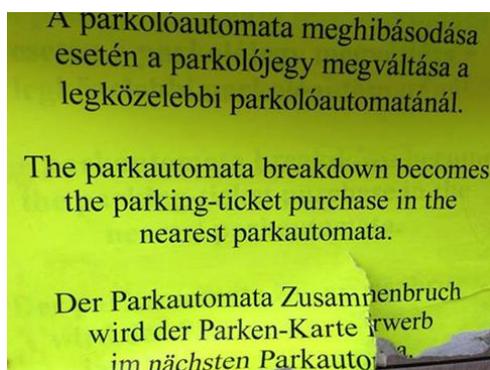


Image 2: *Literal translation, mistranslation: “dob” in Hungarian can mean ‘a drum’ or ‘to throw’. Here, these should be chocolate ‘drums’*



Image 3: *Literal translation, wrong terminology, mistranslation into racist and racy language*

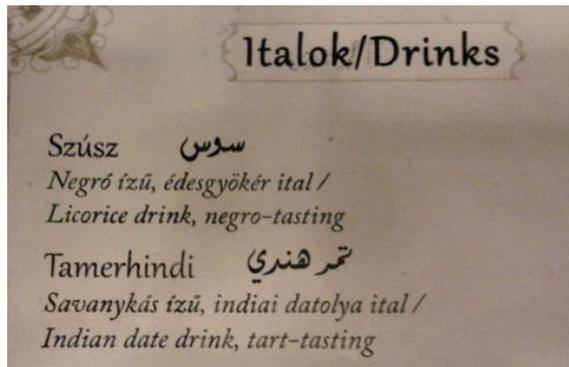


Image 4: *Grammar, punctuation errors render this sign morbidly humorous*



Images 6 & 7: *From the same horribly mistranslated menu. The examples speak volumes.*

Görögsaláta	Griechischer Salat	500.-
Camambert sajt rántva diós bundában sült almával, áfonyával	Camambert gebraten, Bratäpfel mit Nuss, Heidelbeeren In crumbs camambert with baked apple diós in a	800.-
Sült gomolya párolt zöldségekkel	Quarkkäse gebacken mit Gemüse His ball was frying with stewed vegetables.	800.-
Rántott gombafej, tartármártás	Gebraten Pilz mit Tartarsauce Mushroom head in crumbs with tartar sauce.	600.-
Rántott sajt tartármárással	Käse gebraten mit Tartarsauce Cauliflower in crumbs.	800.-
Rántott cukkini	Zucchini gebraten	700.-

Bárány és vad ételek Wild gerichte		
...	Lammgulasch mit einer Dill-Nudel mit Bryndza Lamb stew hungarian style with a dill noodle with bryndza	1300.-
Gombás szarvas pörkölt vörösborban áztatott aszalt szilvával, cipóban tálalva	Hirschgulasch mit Pilz mit Dörripflaume in Rotwein mit in Brötchen. Fungal deer with a french plum soaked in roasted red wine loaf serving.	1500.-
Szicíliai vadragu batyuban	Aus Sizilien Wildragout in Kartoffelplate. Sicilian game stew in a bundle.	1800.-
Vörösborban párolt szarvas comb szedresmártásban, házi burgonyafánkkal és mézes gesztenyepürével töltött sült almával	In Rotwein dünsten Hirschkeule in Brobeersauce mit Kartoffelkrappfen. Deer steamed in red wine thigh in blackberry sauce with home-made baked apple filled with our potato tree and honeyed chestnut.	1990.-

Image 8: *Mistranslation. The ticket controller becomes a tax auditor. What is a tourist to make of this?*



Images 9 & 10: *Grammar, syntax, register, terminology, too literal – too confusing!*

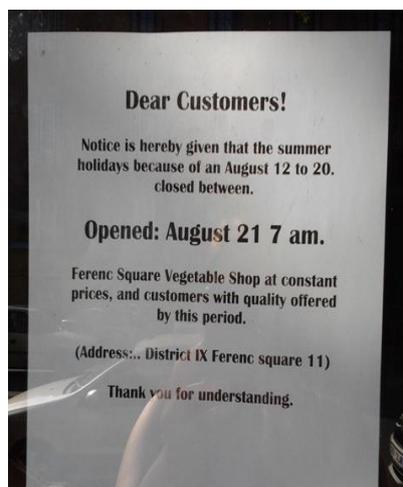
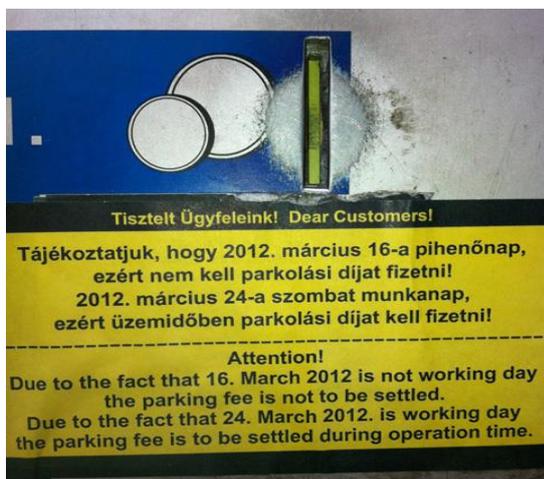


Image 11: *This sign is supposed to direct customers to one of the government-regulated and licensed Hungarian National Tobacco Shops, but the poor translation makes one wonder whether the cigarettes are actually smuggled in using the '6th truck'. Grammar error and mistranslation of the Hungarian 'vágány', which is actually a platform at a train station.*



Image 12: *Here, the mistranslation of 'p.' or 'perc' in Hungarian into 'sec.' or 'seconds' in English, will make the usage of the Internet in this café extremely expensive for foreign guests who do not understand Hungarian. Is this a case of malicious intent or gross incompetence?*



7

Image 13: *The poor tourist seeking bodily relief will suffer trying to decipher this one.*



Image 14: *When a university, a place of higher learning, cannot employ a language teacher/professor to translate signs on campus, one quickly recognizes in what low esteem international students, and indeed language educators, are held by some who make the decisions.*



Image 15: *Every mistake one could possibly make. Poor foreign guest.*



Image 16: *The sign wants to say that the locale will not give change for bank notes, but ends up summarizing best the true nature of the problem this paper treats.*



A quality assessment of tourist brochure translations was done by Vincze (2013), and reflects similar assessments by authors publishing in specialized translation studies. All these studies show how tourist texts worldwide suffer from a lack of professional rigor (compare Vincze, 2013, Dann, 1996; Snell-Hornby, 1999; Federici, 2006; Bellos, 2011). As I have suggested previously, in discovering the horrible examples imaged above, the texts themselves reveal the extent of how widespread the practice of failing to engage experienced, licensed translators, proof-readers and copywriters is in the tourism and commercial sectors. Businesses prefer to use the free stop-gap measures of asking one of their employees who 'speaks a little English' or has Google on their Smartphone to do their translating, regardless of the damage to reputation, potential loss of income or insult such practices may and do cause. The source texts are not studied for potential translation problems and difficulties, such as the inclusion of slang (often seen at cultural events), in-house jargon (restaurant menus are typical examples). Nor are the texts adapted to the target readers' needs (culturally or linguistically, as the racist-reading mistranslation in Image 3 above highlights). Furthermore, crucial post-translation activities for quality control, such as professional proofreading are also usually neglected, if not outright ignored (compare Vincze, 2013). Businesses will provide a variety of excuses for these problems; none of them reveal any customer-oriented thought processes. I asked the businesses providing the examples above for comment. Money is used as the biggest excuse (no available budget), followed by personnel excuses ('the employee said he could speak English and I believed him') and time constraints ('the decision to close for the day was made suddenly; what was I supposed to do?'), a failure to understand

how important correct and proper communication with foreign customers/visitors/guests is ('they know what I meant') and the realities of just how difficult proper translation work is. One common falsehood is the attitude that tourists do not require better translations, as they are 'perceptive enough' to figure meanings out on their own. This fallacy has even been reflected in the literature, in which the translation of tourist texts has not even been considered to be an example of specialized translation since the professional discourse on tourism had not been regarded as specialized discourse until recently (Muñoz, 2011). The reality shows otherwise: fact is that the translation of any text for tourists is a form of often highly specialized translation, involving a wide range of topics - from public safety to security, from public administration to transport, from hospitality and catering to health care and insurance, to name but a few.

Tourist text translations therefore do pose significant challenges, especially translations from Hungarian into English, because the tourist readership is not solely made up of native speakers from the UK or the USA, but from tourists from practically every non-English and non-Hungarian speaking country who show up in e.g. Budapest, Debrecen or Eger. English is the method of communication employed by these visitors and even they are often not proficient in its proper use. Therefore, tourism-related businesses need to start working on the rapid improvement of these problems and Hungary can start by reforming how it educates its tourism students. Change can be made in the classroom. In Hungary, the accessibility and syllabi of language courses and courses related to e.g. English for Tourism, Business English or Intercultural Communication vary greatly among institutions offering degrees in tourism. Yet, just such would provide students with ideal opportunities to understand their impact on their foreign guests, once they start their careers. Additionally, higher education here needs to adopt a more aggressive, serious approach to the inclusion of ESP/LSP classes in their degree curricula. Tourism students, by definition, cannot be continuing to receive their degrees without ESP/LSP proficiency, and such proficiency must include some competency development in translation of texts in their chosen fields. Moreover, the foreign language education offered by Hungarian universities and colleges to tourism students is often criticized by them as being insufficient. Some faculties offer LSP only in the form of pay courses; others only in limited semesters and hours.

In conclusion, English takes quite a beating in many forms, whether in the instructions we find in boxes of items we have purchased, on restaurant menus or official notices in towns and cities around the world. Indeed, it is frightening how poorly texts directed specifically at tourists tend to be. Whether the problems behind such horribly mistranslated texts stem from a lack of professionalism or simply a bad attitude towards the importance of proper translation is a matter for debate. Regardless, the proliferation of unintelligible English documents for international tourist consumption seems to be a common practice. Perhaps the availability and training of professional translators specialized in tourism will improve the situation, but only once the tourist industry finally takes note of intercultural sensitivities and decides to act aggressively.

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