The translation of tourism-related websites and localization: problems and perspectives.

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1. Introduction

Over the years, Translation Studies have evolved with the evolution of media. The rich scientific debate derived from the obstacles, with which practitioners and scholars are faced on a daily basis, has led to remarkable insights and positive advancements both in translation theory and practice. The technological advances in the computer sciences of the past few years, and the increasing circulation of multimedia and hypermedia have provided Translation Studies research with new thorny questions and new “knots to untie”. Much attention has been devoted to the translation of audiovisual texts both in terms of dubbing and subtitling (Gambier 1994; Heiss and Bollettieri Bosinelli 1996; Pavesi 2005; Bruti 2007) and to the translation of CD-ROMs and other multimedia materials (Agorni 2000; Gambier and Gottlieb 2001). Computer-assisted translation is also widely discussed (Quah 2006), especially by reason of the growth of the Internet and the consequent, often-mentioned globalization, which makes geographical and cultural boundaries thinner and thinner. In such a world, Bassnett (2002:10) claims, the significance of translators’ work as well as the debate about crucial issues are destined to grow steadily. Despite the author’s insightful remark, however, and despite the fact that the web has indeed expanded and that the number of non-English-speaking users is steadily growing, web content translation has not as yet received a systematic treatment.
Translators for the web cannot rely on the amount of theoretical support on which translators of literary or technical texts can rely. Nor does there seem to be any clear criteria to assess the quality of web translations, and yet, in a world where some businesses depend predominantly upon their presence on the World Wide Web, a good translation of the content of their websites is often responsible for their successes and failures. Tourism-related businesses certainly fall into this category of industries, but nevertheless many websites are badly translated.

The following sections tackle some questions relative to web translation, in particular to the translation of the textual content of tourist websites. The purpose of this article is not to provide clear-cut answers but to raise questions and to encourage the discussion on this topic.