WEBSITES REPRESENTING LITHUANIA IN ENGLISH

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Introduction

The substantial growth of tourism activity marks tourism as one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the past century. Lithuania, as well as other "emerging tourism countries", has invested much effort in becoming an important tourist-receiving country of the region. Parallel to the growth of tourism activity, technological achievements have enabled professionals to create websites, a user-friendly medium of advertising space, or tourism online. But is this extension of print advertising always user-friendly? Does the structure of material presentation meet expectations of a potential audience? Does this kind of medium demonstrate universal features of content presentation across languages and cultures or is it language-specific?

With this wider context in mind, the present paper aims to report the results of a small-scale study which explores the informative-promotional nature of tourist writing. Part of a wider project, it concentrates on the analysis of the descriptive content and genre conventions of tourist texts as manifested in English and Lithuanian websites that are devoted to the presentation of specific towns. The starting point of the analysis is Mason's (Mason 2004, 11) view that tourist literature is a "semi-universal genre across languages and cultures". Genres are understood here as "conventionalized forms of language in use, each with its own function and goals adopted by a given community of text users or socio-cultural grouping to cater for a particular social occasion" (Hatim and Mason 1997, 31).

The corpus of data

Following Mason's claim quoted above, it can be presumed that the Lithuanian language websites chosen for the analysis and the translated texts in particular, will follow the basic structural and informational features of the English language websites.

Both, the English and the Lithuanian data come from randomly selected websites. The English corpus is made up of texts describing 17 British towns in 27 websites; the corresponding Lithuanian corpus includes material on 17 towns found in 19 websites. In addition, the 19 websites provided texts in English which are translations of the relevant material from Lithuanian.

Tourist writing: genre conventions

Most scholars agree that tourist literature is a recognizable genre, the cross-cultural similarity of which is evident in the format, layout and general design (Mason 2004, 157). In addition, texts of the kind aim to present "a specific self-image to the outside world" (Schäffner and Wiesemann 2001, 201). In other words, such texts are consumer-oriented.

With respect to English, Fairclough (2003, 75) points out that if a tourist text has the aim of promoting a town, it usually starts from the region and works towards the town itself; he also notes (Fairclough 2003, 35) that such texts are often "thematically organized according to the conventions of tourist literature (buildings, squares, etc of architectural or historical interest, geographical location, cultural life, etc)". In Mason's (2004, 160) view such distribution of information is "fairly stereotypical" but not fixed due to the culture and language differences. It is also related to audience design, which influences "not only the *way* in which something is said, but also *what* is said (informativity)" (Mason 2004, 162). In terms of genre, tourist writing is hybrid and multifunctional; text-building techniques "are designed and employed to persuade and impress people" (Dyer 1982, 158).

The reason why Lithuanian websites are analyzed in the light of the requirements for tourist writing in English is the fact that the target text addressees are usually potential visitors; as is pointed out by Schäffner and Wiesemann (2001, 201), "tourist information may [...] be read inside the target culture itself, e.g. before a visit is made as part of the preparation, or out of general interest for the place, or for various other purposes".

In order to evaluate the English translations from Lithuanian, one has to be aware of the 'cultural gap between the reader of the source text and the reader of the target text" (Kelly 2000, 158). Viewed from this perspective, the translator's task is to reduce the gap between the two cultures, or, in our case, the translator has to follow a conventionalized text-building pattern of tourist writings.

Informativity of English and Lithuanian websites

The analysis of the 46 websites showed that while presenting a town, the information offered for the respective audiences (English and Lithuanian visitors of the websites) covers the same areas. Specifically, it provides a general introduction, a historical overview, and presents the objects or places of interest. However, the analyzed English and Lithuanian websites exhibit the following differences:

(1) Only four (out of 19) Lithuanian websites inform how to arrive in a particular town, even though most of the websites include a very detailed description of the geographical position of the place (such as the latitude and the longitude, the distance to the capital city, and the information about the neighbouring countries). The English websites, on the other hand, often inform how to reach a specific town (12 cases out of 27).

(2) The Lithuanian websites display offers of excursions/sightseeing tours inside and outside the town (7 cases out of 17), whereas most English websites provide a list of objects worth visiting; only 4 websites advertise trips and excursions. This state of affairs may be related to a general pattern of services provided in the respective country, i.e. Lithuanians cater for an organized visitor, whereas English respect individual interests of visitors.

(3) The next difference concerns the provided references, i.e. mentioning of the text producer or the sources used. In 8 Lithuanian websites the source of information or the author's name is found at the end of the text. In contrast, only 1 English website informs about the origin/source of facts. In addition, 5 Lithuanian websites acknowledge the photographer, while the English websites do not share this tendency.

(4) The fact which immediately strikes a visitor of a Lithuanian website is a monotonous visual appearance of the Lithuanian headlines, the largest part of which are given in black small-size letters. On the other hand, the headline often appears next to the coat of arms, which adds vitality and originality to the page. The coats of arms accompany 90 per cent of the Lithuanian websites. This feature, therefore, can be considered a purely Lithuanian pattern.

(5) It should be added as a final note that the information in Lithuanian websites is extremely scholarly and all-inclusive in character. There is a tendency to provide as much factual information as possible disregarding the immediate needs of a potential visitor. Conversely, the English websites under analysis presented only essential facts.

Stylistic characterization: use of descriptive vocabulary

Adjectives are often claimed to be "the most useful linguistic feature" (Bhatia 1993, 28) employed in a positive description of a product. This strategy is amply exemplified in the web-texts of both languages.

In terms of their semantic content, the adjectives found in the corpus are quite varied, and this is especially prominent in texts promoting Lithuania. One reason for this state of affairs could be that, as noted before, Lithuanian authors seek to give a very exhaustive description of the topic. Adjectives in Lithuanian texts refer to size, material, time period, colour and form of the objects they modify. Table 1 below summarizes the frequency of five most common adjectives found in the web-texts.

Table 1. Most frequent adjectives in English and Lithuanian websites

English websites		Lithuanian websites		Translated websites	
Adjective	Number of occurrence	Adjective	Number of occurrence	Adjective	Number of occurrence
famous	15	medinis	70	famous	110
beautiful	14	naujas	48	old	80
excellent	10	didelis	39	cultural	66
fascinating	9	istorinis	37	wooden	64
Victorian	9	įvairus	36	small	56
Total	**57**		**230**		**376**

The authors of the English texts seem to be less particular and prefer texts of a more general character. Thus, adjectives in the English websites are less in number, approximately, a hundred of different adjectives (types) in the English websites versus several hundreds in the Lithuanian websites.

The data immediately pose a serious question: why is there a difference in the frequency of adjectives (both, in terms of type and token) in the Lithuanian texts and their respective translations? Clearly, this issue deserves a closer investigation.

According to Hickey (Hickey 2004, 64), superlative forms of adjectives "may state facts or express opinions, in the latter case implying a human mind behind an otherwise impersonal text". The most frequent superlative forms of adjectives in the three sub-corpora are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Most frequent superlative forms of adjectives in English and Lithuanian websites

English websites		Lithuanian websites		Translated websites	
Superlative form	Number of occurrences	Superlative form	Number of occurrences	Superlative form	Number of occurrences
largest	25	didžiausias	45	oldest	33
finest	12	seniausias	21	largest	33
best	3	svarbiausias	13	biggest	22
Total	**50**		**79**		**88**

The corpus of data exhibits a fairly big amount of superlative adjectives: 90 instances were found in the English and 175 in the Lithuanian websites. The total amount of occurrences in the translated texts is 305. The most frequent is "largest" (in English websites) and "didžiausias" (in Lithuanian websites). Comparative forms, on the contrary, are less common (6 found in the English websites, 25 in Lithuanian, and 72 in translations). The data in Table 2 also show that while translating the Lithuanian material into English the semantic value of adjectives was changed in a number of cases; in addition, more evaluative items, as compared to the original, were added. This translation strategy can be related to the fact that the superlative forms of adjectives carry positive connotational values: they claim that something is the nicest, the biggest, or the most beautiful and, consequently, worth visiting; intuitively, in the process of translation Lithuanian native speakers follow this pattern.

Audience design

The analysis of audience design is based on Hatim and Mason's (1997, 6-7) perception of text addressees.

Text producers send signals to text receivers about the way they view the world. The Lithuanian web-texts seem to suppose that "what speakers/writers assume, hearers/readers are likely to accept without challenge" (Hatim and Mason 1997, 12). Viewed in this light, the target readership of a Lithuanian website is expected to be an expert in various fields, such as art, architecture, medicine, and biology, to name a few. The abundance of scientific terms or instances of expert-to-expert talk, as a result, deepens the gap between text producer and text receiver. On the other hand, English texts maintain a formal tone, but the distance between the writer and the reader seems to be less marked.

The three sub-corpora show preference for the third person reference and the general use of the lexical items "tourist", "traveler", or "visitor". However, some instances of person-to-person dialogue are also found. This aspect is manifested through the use of the personal pronouns "you" /

"your" and a less commonly employed "we", for example, *Here you will find everything you can expect (Vilnius 1)* or *We have made available… (Vilnius 2)*. Another important feature is the preferred communication channel with the reader, and that is the use of imperatives. They are particularly frequent in the English websites (47 instances), of the type *Come and discover*. In the Lithuanian websites, this technique is used in a more limited way (18 occurrences in the Lithuanian language texts, and 24 instances in the translations). Again, these results call for a closer investigation, especially the translated texts, to see whether the use of imperatives in Lithuanian web-texts was influenced by the generic constraints operating in English language texts.

Concluding remarks

The analysis of the websites allows us to make the following generalizations:

(1) It should be stated that the Lithuanian websites imitate the English ones in the type of information provided and the types of topics taken up. In addition, the strategies used to promote a town (e.g. the use of descriptive vocabulary) coincide in principle in both websites.

(2) The greatest difference between the two websites is the amount of expert vocabulary. Though the English text producers hold that their readers have some expertise in art and architecture, the amount of such information is much greater in Lithuania promoting websites. Compared to the English websites, the Lithuanian ones are overcrowded with facts and remind of scholarly treatises rather than town-promoting texts. It can be stated then that a high level of factual material is a crucial feature of the analyzed Lithuanian websites

(3) Translations of Lithuanian texts into English deserve some special comments.

Comparison of the websites in Lithuanian and their translated variants reveals that there occur discrepancies in the content of information provided in them.

(4) Compared across websites, translated texts differ in dealing with pragmatic translation problems, for example, presenting proper nouns, measurements, dates, etc.

(5) The analyzed translations from Lithuanian into English demonstrate mistakes in grammar and syntax. One explanation of this state of affairs may be that more or less well-qualified amateurs but not professionals might have carried out the translations. In fact, it is actually impossible to find out who made the translation in question since none of the websites include information of this kind.

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TURISTINIAI TINKLAPIAI PRISTATANTYS LIETUVĄ ANGLŲ KALBA

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Santrauka

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