

## From Pro Loco to Pro Globo

Translating into English for an International Readership

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**Abstract.** *The status of English as an international language means that in language learning and translational contexts it has become a moving target. Within translational contexts the issue is especially relevant to translations into English where the envisaged readership is international. This paper discusses issues which arise from translations of Italian tourist texts into English submitted by a group of advanced-level Italian university students. Translation of this nature entails a transition from the local to the global for the benefit of mostly non-native speakers of English, but such a shift is not without complications. One of these is that from an early age Italian students are nurtured on Standard British English and that codified target-language parameters are easily accessed for Standard British English, but not for English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). At the same time, knee-jerk insistence on a major variety of English has its pitfalls; the translator must be sensitive to the fact that the envisaged target readers, extremely heterogeneous on account of their vastly different levels of linguistic and cultural competence, may read off diverse meanings from a single text, or at least react to it in diverse ways. The second half of the paper provides a range of examples of student translations into English for an envisaged international readership.*

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**Keywords:** Translation into a foreign language, British English, English as Lingua Franca (ELF), Tourist texts, Translation assessment, Heterogeneous readership.

### Introduction

The status of English as a global language means that in language learning and translational contexts it has become something of a moving target. Within translational contexts this situation is particularly germane to non-specialist translations into English where the target readership (i) is international and (ii) comprises a vast array of levels of English. The question becomes more involved if those doing the translating are translation trainees whose mother

tongue is not English, and more involved again if, as in my case, you happen to be their teacher.

Operating within this scenario, the present paper will discuss questions arising from translations of Italian tourist texts into English submitted by university students with advanced-level English language skills but with little previous training in translation, almost all of Italian nationality and in any case all non-native speakers of English.

Every year Italy receives huge numbers of visitors from all over the world, who are usually keen to explore local realities and traditions. It is clear that the translation work required to publicize these is prodigious, and it is also clear that English is the most widespread vehicular language adopted to achieve this goal. Translation of this nature entails a transition from *pro loco* to *pro globo* – from orientation towards the local to orientation towards the global (Torresi 2010:76, 109) – for an audience of multifarious degrees of culture, education and level of English, a situation which represents a recurrent professional translation dynamic (Thelen 2005:249). Torresi (2010:102) asserts that in this context

the target of the source text ... is more often than not assumed to be national tourists, while you need to produce a text that is functional for a foreign pool of (prospective) tourists who may well have expectations that differ from those of national tourists.

It is precisely within the framework of environments such as the Italian classroom described above, one would surmise, that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) should come into its own, but this scenario is not without its complications. One of these is that Italian students are nurtured on Standard British English from an early age, and indeed in Italy almost all English as a Foreign Language teaching materials are based on British English, with American English variants provided where appropriate. As a result, almost all Italian students of translation axiomatically adopt Standard British English as their parameter, perhaps without even realizing that they are doing so. Of course they can be urged to steer clear of country or culture-specific usage (see section 4.1 below for discussion) in order not to hinder comprehension for an international readership, but one must not lose sight of the fact that it is crucial for translators working into a foreign language to have clear target-language parameters within which to work. Such parameters are easily accessible for Standard British English, but not for English as a Lingua Franca.

There appears to be agreement that English as a Lingua Franca is not a simplified form of English but a vehicular language that focuses on the clarity and coherence of the message and avoids culture-specific expressions and idioms (Taviano 2010:90). However, in the absence of specific language parameters, students who try to adopt a more internationalized variety as their target may find themselves in a quandary when confronted

with certain translation choices. One of the most obvious dilemmas is the choice between British and American usage, but surely the greatest stumbling block in the scenario described here is that the translator must be sensitive to the fact that the international readership envisaged potentially comprises just about anyone who is able to read English. The main variables are that the readers may be of any nationality and native language, that they may have an advanced or basic educational background, and that they may be native or non-native speakers of English. In short, people whose linguistic and encyclopaedic skills will vary radically, and who might well interpret target-text sequences in highly contrasting ways, perhaps misunderstanding the referential or pragmatic meaning as a result.

Furthermore, this vast array of readers may have divergent ideas about what is appropriate or elegant. Usage which has wide currency among non-native speakers may seem clumsy to native speakers and consequently engender unsought reactions to the translated text, a particularly important point if we consider that tourist texts are intended to be not only informative but also persuasive and appealing.

As Taviano (2010:ix) points out, translation-oriented research into the new status of English as a global language has so far been scarce: “Very little is known about the implications that the new role of English as *Lingua Franca* is having on the translator’s profession, and consequently how this should be taken into account in translator training programmes” (see also Campbell 2005). The present paper aims to help bridge this gap by considering and evaluating solutions produced by Italian students translating tourist texts into English as a language of international communication, and by outlining the increasing difficulties faced by the trainer when assessing such translations. The solutions offered are drawn from the textbook *Translating Tourist Texts from Italian to English as a Foreign Language* (Stewart 2012).

### 1. A moving target

Perhaps the most striking feature of translation into English for an international readership is one which is not actually present, i.e., that there is no specific target culture (Torresi 2010:54). According to traditional definitions we have a target language (English) and we produce a target text (the translation), but there is no point in thinking in terms of a target culture when your potential readership ranges over hundreds of countries. And within this dynamic even the notion of *target language* is problematic, since the internationalization of English has turned it into a Protean, multi-faceted phenomenon which is becoming ‘all things to all men’, with the result that it is no longer clear what the target is. Further, if one really wishes to split hairs, even the notion of target *text* can be misleading, since there are numerous texts which are transformed into another language without managing to hit a target at all.

It goes without saying that within the context of translating into English for an international readership, the question of what translators should strive for can be a complex one. The ‘can be’ of the previous sentence is carefully chosen: an international readership does not necessarily mean a heterogeneous readership. If I translate a scientific text into English for a multinational automobile company whose intended readers are all employees of that company, I may be able to assume a given level of English and familiarity with most sector-specific lexis, and I should be able to assume that my intended readers will be reasonably conversant with the subject matter (Torresi 2010:69), but it is a different matter altogether if, say, I translate a tourist website for international consumption. This is because, as stressed above, the intended reader could be almost anyone who can afford to travel – not only of any nationality but also of any native language, of any level of English, of any degree of education and culture, of any degree of prior knowledge about Italy, and so on. This is an elusive target which never keeps still.

## **2. Delivering the package**

In the absence of a well-defined target readership it is the function of the text which becomes crucial, and which ultimately determines what type of translation one should aspire to. The tourist texts I use in class are designed, as one would expect, to inform, to stimulate, to persuade and to appeal, but in view of the hugely diverse readership it is perhaps the informative function which requires slightly more attention in this type of translated text for international consumption, or more specifically the clarity of the message, i.e., the bottom line is that the information is delivered clearly and accurately.

This emphasis is controversial – many would argue that in tourist texts the persuasive function deserves just as much attention as the informative, whatever the context – and is no doubt strongly influenced by my personal experience as a translation trainer, in that my students are all non-native speakers of English, almost all Italian but with a few other nationalities, mostly Romanian and Albanian. In the classroom my objective is first and foremost to provide students with the resources and know how to produce a translation with sound grammar, acceptable lexis and a clear message. Finer pragmatic considerations tend to be discussed once these have been achieved. One thing worth pointing out here is that while it seems obvious that non-native speakers of the target language will not have the resources and instincts of native speakers of the target language, in the present case this palette of fewer colours may well turn out to be an advantage in terms of delivering unequivocal, manageable information for a vast and heterogeneous readership (see Stewart 2000:217 for discussion).

### 3. Which English?

If the potential readership is Mr and Mrs Anybody, if the emphasis is on conveying clear information, and if the translators themselves are non-native speakers of English, then the most pressing question at this stage concerns which English should ideally be used in translation, and more specifically, which English should my mostly Italian students adopt in the translation classroom. Is it best to refer, for instance, to a wide-reaching and well-known variety of English such as British English or American English, or to a more globalized *koine*, i.e., ELF?

Ife (2005:286) defines ELF as “a language used as a common language by speakers whose mother tongue it is not”, while the definition offered by Jenkins (2007:1) is along slightly different lines: “a contact language used among people who do not share a first language, and is commonly understood to mean a second (or subsequent) language of its speakers”. Taviano (2010:ix) makes it more explicit that native and non-native speakers of English can be involved: “a contact language used mainly, though not exclusively, by non-native speakers”. At first sight the latter two definitions seem ideal, since the translation dynamic described in this paper consists of people – both readers and translators – of various native languages, native and non-native speakers of English, sharing communication through a single language. In other words, what Ife (2005:287) describes as a “mixed mother-tongue/second language” scenario. Further, the emphasis in these definitions is on cross-cultural comprehensibility rather than 100% linguistic accuracy, a factor which happily embraces translation into a foreign language, where encoding errors are more probable than in translation into a mother tongue.

However, advocating the use of English as a Lingua Franca within this framework can muddy the waters. As stressed in the Introduction, Italian university students have been taught since primary school in accordance with the parameters of Standard British English. English-language teaching materials in Italian schools and universities are as a rule British-based, and indeed nearly all of these take Standard British English (as opposed to Standard Scottish English, Standard Irish English, etc.) as their yardstick. English dictionaries, Italian-English dictionaries and English grammars and textbooks recommended in language curricula in Italy unequivocally follow Standard English parameters. And this is true not only of lexis and grammar but also of pronunciation. For instance, the phonemic transcriptions supplied in these works for words such as *pass*, *mask*, *harm* and *heart* are respectively /pa:s/, /ma:sk/, /ha:m/ and /ha:t/, despite the fact that these particular transcriptions are applicable to only a small percentage of the native English-speaking world, in particular the south-east of England. It is true that the major British-based dictionaries supply Standard American English pronunciation and usage too, but it is the Standard British English elements

which are given pride of place. As a result, almost all the students who sign up for my translation modules have always taken Standard British English as their parameter,<sup>1</sup> even without being fully aware that they have done so.

Whether this state of affairs is defensible or not has been and continues to be debated. As Ife (2005:292) points out, in a language situation where the majority of the participants are non-native speakers of the language being adopted, why should it be native norms which prevail? The most obvious answer to this is that native varieties, in particular British English, are considered more prestigious than non-native varieties. As Seidlhofer (2011:41) puts it:

there is a deep-seated assumption shared by both scholarly and popular opinion, across the whole spectrum of linguistic laypersons, linguists, activists, and governmental institutions that the only proper English is the English of its native speakers (ENL).

Moreover, teachers and students tend to prefer standard varieties, as documented, for example, by Jenkins (2007).

Be this as it may, it clearly makes sense for teachers and students to operate within definable boundaries, and for an Italian-based teacher of translation into English as a foreign language such as myself, the most obvious boundaries are those of Standard British English. If during their school career my university students have been taught Standard British English, and if almost all English as a foreign language materials in Europe adopt that standard as a parameter, then it does not seem unreasonable to ask or expect those students to adopt that standard as their basis, or at least as their point of departure, when they translate into English for an international readership. As I see it, a translation trainer not only assesses students' ability to employ suitable translation strategies, to refine their research methodologies, etc., but also tests their ability to make good use of the linguistic resources most commonly available to them.

Indeed, as a translation trainer I can testify to the fact that the assessment process is greatly facilitated by the presence of tangible linguistic parameters to which both students and teachers can refer, parameters which are far less accessible and far less codified in the case of ELF (Buckledee 2010:142). As Anderman and Rogers (2005b:4) stress with regard to the European situation, "in the case of English as the *lingua franca* of Europe, there appears to be little available data on the characteristics of this variety of English for purposes of cross-national communication". Maley (2010:36), whose focus is on English language teaching but whose observations are of obvi-

<sup>1</sup> To avoid confusion I shall henceforth refer to Standard British English, though as mentioned above the point of reference in English-language materials is often more specific.

ous relevance to the present discussion, points out that teachers tend to use established varieties of English because

there are no substantive models or materials available to them, were they to wish to change in the direction of ELF. Even were they broadly supportive of the ELF concept, what precisely would the practical implications be for their teaching, other than a vaguely-formulated, more tolerant attitude towards learner ‘errors’?

Within the domain of English language teaching there are many who espouse the above view. Hartle (2010:96) stresses the need for learners “to have a clear picture of the subject being studied”, while Mollin (2007:52) takes the view that ELF is an unsuitable teaching standard because it is not a “stable variety”.

What I am advocating in this paper is of course far from ideal because tainted by a paradox, inasmuch as it entails promoting the use of what is basically British English for a global readership, and indeed in the examples provided in the sections below there is evidence of potential conflict in this sense. One of the most obvious hazards is that of using lexis or realia which would *only* be understood by a British readership. Another is that a single word or expression may be understood in conflicting ways by British and non-British readers. But let us now turn to some concrete examples, reflecting upon translation solutions suggested by my advanced-level students for an international readership.

#### 4. Examples of student translation solutions

##### 4.1 Country- or culture-specific usage

One of the most salient risks of counselling the use of standard British English is that students may inadvertently adopt usage specific only to Britain, or perhaps only to Britain and just a few other countries. Such solutions are inappropriate because potentially disorienting for the international readership envisaged. **Here are two examples.**

The first example is *bank holiday*, as in

La villa è visitabile **tutti i giorni festivi**, nei seguenti orari:

You can visit the villa **on Sundays and bank holidays** at the following times:

The collocation *bank holiday* is labelled ‘British’ (i.e., only adopted in Britain) in dictionaries, and indeed the term is likely to generate a degree of confusion (a holiday only for banks?) among readers across the globe. The

expressions *public holiday* or *national holiday* would be preferable in view of their greater transparency.

The second example is *A-road*:

Il Lago di Braies ... è facilmente raggiungibile grazie ad una comoda strada che collega il lago **alla statale pusterese** tra Monguelfo e Villabassa.

You can easily reach Lake Braies thanks to a main road linking the lake to **the Pusteria Valley A-road** between Monguelfo and Villabassa.

Once again *A-road* has a very British flavour, and although its meaning is perhaps deducible in the context, a less culture-bound term is advisable. Wagner (2005:218) provides similar examples when, in the context of an advert at Copenhagen Airport, she commends the use of the more transparent (i) *liquor* and (ii) *city prices* rather than the more British-sounding *wines and spirits* and *high-street prices*.

#### 4.2 Translation solutions: readers with different native languages

Many **proper nouns**, particularly place-names, have semantic meaning as well as referential meaning, and this semantic meaning may be crucial to understanding the text. For example:

Un indovinello popolare chiede quale sia la città che ha ‘un prato senza l’erba, un bue senza corna, un caffè senza porte ed un santo senza nome’. La risposta è Padova. Infatti **il Prato della Valle** è un ampio spiazzo nel centro della città che il podestà veneziano Andrea Memmo fece bonificare dove c’era un terreno paludoso. ...

A traditional Italian riddle asks which city has a meadow with no grass, an ox with no horns, a café with no doors and a saint with no name. The answer is Padua. In fact **Prato della Valle** is a large area in the town centre which used to be marshland, subsequently drained by order of the Venetian patrician Andrea Memmo. ...

Most international readers would not know that the *prato* of *Prato della Valle* means ‘meadow’. Since the place is described as ‘a large area in the town centre which used to be marshland’, the connection with the first part of the riddle – which city has a meadow with no grass – remains obscure, and comprehension of the riddle is thus jeopardized. It therefore seems sensible to include a literal gloss after *Prato della Valle*, perhaps in parentheses, such as ‘literally Meadow of the Valley’. Having said that, for the large number of

readers who are native speakers of Romance languages (and this of course includes the whole of South America) the gloss is superfluous since *prato* would be understood anyway – indeed the irony of this is that Romance language speakers are much more likely to understand the original than the gloss. The following is a similar case:

Da Braies un servizio di navetta porta a Pratopiazza. Fra le attrattive maggiori nominiamo: la grotta dell’ “**ursus speleaus**”, la costiera rocciosa del Ciavàl e l’ospizio di Santa Croce, il “**buco da chiudere**” con i suoi camosci, il “parlamento delle marmotte” ...

A shuttle bus service operates between Braies and Prato Piazza. Definitely worth seeing are the cave of the **ursus speleaus**, the Ciavàl rock face and the Santa Croce hospice, the **Buco da Chiudere** with its chamois, and the Parlamento delle Marmotte (literally the marmots’ parliament) ...

As often happens in tourist guides, here we are presented with a list of places to visit, some of which are endowed with very local and colourful names. Once again, for speakers of Romance languages the meaning of the Latin *ursus speleaus* would probably be obvious, but a gloss such as ‘or cave bear’ is essential for almost all other readers. Some speakers of Romance languages might also grasp the literal meaning of *Buco da Chiudere* (literally ‘hole to close’), but since the meaning is impenetrable without qualification even to Italian readers, it would seem justified not to translate it at all.

Thus in situations such as these some type of pragmatic explication could be included in consideration of the international readership, but more importantly the occurrences cited seem to me arresting examples of how levels of comprehension of a single text can vary considerably among readers of different languages. For an interesting discussion of the meaning conveyed by place-names in translated texts, and of how readers of translations react to these, see Navarro Errasti (2004).

#### 4.3 Translation solutions: native and non-native speakers of English

Perhaps the most frequent conundrum for translators who work into English for a non-specialist international readership concerns the fact that the end users consist of both native and non-native speakers of English, with hugely varying English-language skills. It goes without saying that it would be counter-productive to adopt, for example, complex syntax and/or uncommon, ambiguous or very colloquial expressions, since these may escape readers with lower levels of English, but what is particularly worthy of consideration in the present context is how native or near-native speakers of English might react to language use which *they* feel is not quite correct or appropriate,

perhaps as a result of the translator using a more internationalized *koine*. For instance, a tourist text describing the town of Gallipoli mentions

*una strada panoramica che consente di godere di fantastici scenari,*

which some of my students translated fairly literally as

a panoramic road which allows to enjoy fantastic sceneries.

This apparently innocuous-looking sequence throws up a number of discussion points – lexical, collocational and grammatical – which are of relevance here. I shall present each of these points and then discuss them together at the end of this section. Let us begin with a lexical question.

#### SCENERIES

*Scenari* is a plural form which may simply be translated with *views*, but what of the solution *sceneries*? The problem is that *scenery*, along with other words like *research*, has traditionally been regarded as an uncountable noun, whatever meaning it conveys. It is still listed as uncountable in British-based learner dictionaries, and whereas a Google search for the plural will turn up 17 million hits, there is only one occurrence of *sceneries* in the British National Corpus, with the singular form *scenery* occurring 744 times. And at the time of writing there are just three occurrences of *sceneries* in the huge Corpus of Contemporary American English, while the singular form is attested nearly 2500 times.

#### PANORAMIC ROAD

Now let us turn to the collocation *strada panoramica*, which almost all of my students rendered with *panoramic road*. Once again this combination is barely attested in the BNC (1 occurrence) and COCA (no occurrences), and yet a Google search retrieves over 105,000 hits. Not surprisingly, many of these derive from Italian tourist websites, from which it might again be inferred – in consideration of the fact that large numbers of people throughout the world consult Italian tourist websites – that on an international level the collocation in question is now becoming familiar. Like *sceneries*, the meaning of *panoramic road* is transparent in the context, so that potential problems of incomprehension are absent – it is simply that the respective solutions sound non-native.

#### ALLOWS TO ENJOY

The grammatical question here concerns the translation of *consente di godere*. Examples from British-based learner's dictionaries suggest that *allow* in the

active voice must have a grammatical object before a ‘to + INFINITIVE’ (‘allows visitors/us to enjoy’), and this is backed up by corpus analysis. A search for ‘[allow] to enjoy’ (i.e., any form of ‘allow’ immediately followed by ‘to enjoy’) in the BNC retrieves only passive forms of *allow*, e.g., ‘they will be allowed to enjoy a celebratory drink’. This is true of other following verbs too, though there are some occurrences of active relative structures, e.g., ‘in the same way as you are insured, we will insure any person you allow to use your caravan’. Investigations in the COCA produce similar results.

#### REACTIONS OF NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

Very few non-native speakers of English would object to ...*a panoramic road which allows to enjoy fantastic sceneries*, since the meaning is crystal clear and there are no dramatic blunders. But what would native or near-native speakers of English make of it? The answer is elusive. In the past I have subscribed to the view that visitors to Italy, in search of the exotic, in search of something novel and stimulating, would accept, expect and perhaps even welcome linguistic oddities as part and parcel of the alterity they seek, but as English firmly establishes itself as a world language it could well be that higher standards are now expected. And it may be that something which sounds unintentionally odd or sloppy to native or near-native speakers of English will be off-putting or irritating, perhaps interpreted as mirroring sloppy service, with the result that some readers may decide to look for a holiday elsewhere.

This is an open question which merits empirical investigation, but ultimately it may depend on how obvious the flaw is. Taviano (2010:73) reproduces an extract from a website about Sicily, which begins “Do you want to learn about Greece? So come to Sicily. It is a paradox, for sure, but only to a certain extent”. In this case you can ‘hear’ the Italian text behind the English one, but I personally have no major objections to it if the readership is international, inasmuch as there are no errors as such, unlike in the *strada panoramica* example cited above.

The ‘sloppy language = sloppy service’ argument could be countered by considering firstly that when all is said and done only a fairly restricted percentage of potential readers from all over the world risk being irked by *a panoramic road which allows to enjoy fantastic sceneries*, and secondly that only confusing information and highly visible errors are likely to get on people’s nerves. But there is no doubt that the native English-speaking world has a long-standing fascination with Italy, so the questions raised are perhaps worth bearing in mind. After all, this is the age of huge ranges of options, immediate availability of choice and real-time one-click bookings, and it does not seem unreasonable to posit that linguistic aspects may have some bearing, subliminal or otherwise, upon the concluding click.

## HOW TO REACT AS A TRANSLATION ASSESSOR

Over and above hypotheses concerning the reactions of native and non-native speakers of English, my reaction as a translation assessor to ...*a panoramic road which allows to enjoy fantastic sceneries* will again depend on the criteria and objectives previously agreed. If I have made it clear to my students that, for better or for worse, the parameter is Standard British English or Standard American English, then I might well be justified in penalizing the use of *sceneries*, *panoramic road* and *allows to enjoy* because they are barely attested in the Standard British English or Standard American English language resources I have recommended to them. At the same time it could seem churlish to reject forms which appear to be adopted on an international level, especially since the texts to be translated are after all intended for a worldwide readership; in consideration of this one might feel inclined to be flexible and accept them.

However, such flexibility, for example the acceptance of the plural *sceneries*, has its drawbacks. The most telling drawback from a pedagogical view is that the assessor fails to distinguish between on the one hand the outcome of Student A, who has opted for the singular *scenery* or for *views* after consulting the resources recommended and deciding that *sceneries* is inappropriate for the language parameter previously agreed, and on the other hand the outcome of Student B, who may simply have translated literally from the Italian, making the equation “the Italian plural *scenari* = the English plural *sceneries*”, without consulting the resources available and perhaps without even contemplating the albeit frequent circumstance whereby a noun which is countable in Italian may not be countable in English.

The second drawback is that this type of flexibility takes us very close to a kind of ‘anything goes’ assessment, because Google searches can turn up almost anything, with the result that virtually any outcome could be misguidedly defended beneath the banner of English as an international language. As pointed out above, a Google search for *sceneries* produces around 17 million hits. However, students must be sensitized to the fact that the total number of occurrences needs to be verified by checking some of the listed websites. Such verification will soon disclose that this high figure includes (i) occurrences of *scenery* in the singular (including dictionary definitions), (ii) occurrences related to the use of a specific software, and (iii) the description of ‘sceneries’ in Chinese and Hawaiian websites, among many others. It is clear that although the plural appears to be current on an international level, the number of hits needs to be contextualized.

I would therefore take the view that, while we need to be open to linguistic diversity and sensitive to linguistic change, we also need to acknowledge the usefulness of definable boundaries within which to operate. As with all forms of assessment, if one clarifies from the outset where the goalposts

are, or what the parameters are, students can make informed choices and understand that they will be penalized if these parameters are not respected. Otherwise both students and assessors will be entitled to move the goalposts whenever it suits them.

### 5. When British English confuses the issue

As alluded to above, taking British English as one's yardstick has certain drawbacks. Particularly interesting in this respect are those cases where non-native speakers of English may understand each other well enough but British English compromises the communicative flow.

The first example is *country house*, as in the following:

Attraversando i paesi della Val di Fiemme, lungo i trentacinque chilometri che separano Trodena da Moena, non è difficile scorgere, ancora ben conservate, accanto alle **case rurali** ed alle abitazioni caratteristiche della montagna, architetture rinascimentali e barocche che testimoniano la ricchezza e i privilegi di questi luoghi anche nei secoli passati.

When you pass through the villages of the Val di Fiemme along the 35km from Trodena to Moena, you will see, beside **country houses** and houses typically found in the mountains, many well-preserved Renaissance and Baroque architectures which testify the wealth and privileges of these places in past centuries.

This is another sentence which presents a series of issues pertaining to the translation dynamic described in this paper, raising questions such as: (i) is the plural form *architectures* appropriate, in that *architecture* is classified as uncountable in British dictionaries save when the reference is to computers?; (ii) British English appears to prefer *testify to the wealth* over *testify the wealth* (though there is some ambiguity in this respect in British English dictionaries, many of which categorize *testify* with this meaning as both transitive and intransitive but supply examples only of its intransitive use). Here, however, I want to focus on the collocation *country house*, whose definitions in British English dictionaries can be summarized as follows: '[British English] a large house of historical interest in the countryside, owned by a rich and important family, often for many generations'.

A good number of my students privileged this solution here, yet since the Italian *case rurali* (literally 'rural houses') suggests something very simple and quaint, certainly not a country manor, my instinctive reaction as a British native speaker is to reach for my red pen, but would this be fair? Once again, the translation is intended for a large cross-section of readers from across the world, the great majority of whom will probably not be aware that *country house* carries such grand connotations in British English. On the contrary,

it could well be that the great majority of readers who come across this text would more readily interpret *country house* as any type of house located in the country, and they might also assume that it is a fairly simple building, which is precisely what the source text intends. This is important because the source text in question alludes no further to these houses, so this is the only information the reader has. Compare this with another text concerning Napoleon's exile on the Island of Elba:

Durante il suo soggiorno all'Elba Napoleone ebbe una residenza cittadina, la palazzina dei Mulini, e **una di campagna**, villa S. Martino.

When Napoleon was in exile on the Island of Elba he had both a town house, the Palazzina dei Mulini, and a **country house**, Villa San Martino.

Here the primary emphasis in the source text is on the fact that Napoleon had two houses, one in the town and one in the country, but since Villa San Martino is described later in the text as a grand building well worth visiting, in this case the British English definition fits the bill.

In this second example, the use of *country house* seems appropriate for most readers, but the first example is more complex. One could argue that *country house* is just one more instance of country- or variety-specific usage like *bank holiday* and *A-road*, but the impression is that it lies upon a separate axis. It was pointed out above that *bank holiday* is potentially confusing, but non-British readers would at least be put on their guard by the bizarre notion of a holiday only for banks, and the meaning of *A-road* is conjecturable, but in the case of *country house* it could be that most non-British readers would automatically assume the meaning (i.e., a simple dwelling in the country such as a cottage) actually intended by the source text, while British readers might go off in search of stately homes amidst the mountains of the Val di Fiemme. The example suggests that translators and readers who are not native speakers of English can sometimes communicate with each other perfectly well in English until native speakers come along and upset the equilibrium. Ife (2005:291) alludes to "research results that suggest that second-language speakers are more at ease if no native speakers are present". The situation reminds me of when I used to teach English in a multinational pharmaceuticals company, where my students were often involved in meetings – all in English – involving company employees from various parts of Europe and from the US. The students used to tell me that sometimes they secretly hoped that native speakers of English would not be present at the meetings, because while communication generally flowed unhindered between the non-natives, many of the native speakers had difficulty not only following the discussion but even making themselves understood.

The second example to be discussed here is *house of worship*:

Tra i moderni edifici si intravedono in lontananza le sagome dei campanili delle chiese di San Zeno e San Bernardino, due tra i più importanti **edifici sacri** della città.

In the distance among the more modern buildings you can make out the bell-towers of the churches of San Zeno and San Bernardino, two of the most important **houses of worship** in Verona.

The presence in the source text of the combination *edifici sacri* (literally ‘sacred buildings’) probably springs simply from the wish to avoid repeating *chiese* (churches), used earlier in the sentence, in the name of stylistic elegance. However, three of my students came up with *houses of worship*, which in many parts of the world appears to be a generalized term used in a number of religions, something which is supported by its albeit restricted occurrences in *The Times* archive. An American colleague tells me that the combination is reasonably common in the US within the context of Christian denominations (there are 270 occurrences of the expression in the Corpus of Contemporary American English), and a Malaysian colleague tells me that it is a standard term in Malaysia and Singapore. In British English, on the other hand, *house of worship* is unusual – there is only one occurrence in the BNC concerning a tribe of mendicants in Bengal – and some of my British informants were not even sure they had come across it before, asking me if I was not getting mixed up with the more familiar *place of worship*. Other British informants perceived distant echoes of the dissenting religions such as Quakerism and Methodism, which started off by meeting in people’s houses. My impression is that in British English the expression is marked in some way (the unmarked equivalent being simply *church*), but this could be because I was brought up a Catholic – where I used to live, not far from London, it might have sounded risible and/or ironic to refer to my local church as a house of worship. Indeed if I were to run across *houses of worship* in a text about Italy I might even assume that the reference is to non-Catholic churches.

So much for native speakers of English, but how would non-native speakers of English react to *house of worship*? I imagine that even those with a reasonably good level of English may well not have seen this combination before and therefore it would carry no specific associations for them. Indeed those readers with low levels of English may not even be familiar with the word *worship*, while others may be disoriented by *house*, notwithstanding the widespread notion of *the house of God*.

These are invidious situations for the translation assessor. As regards *country house*, if it has been made clear to the students that they should stay clear of country- or culture-specific terms because the envisaged target readers come from all over the world, then the language flag [BRITISH ENGLISH] assigned to *country house* in dictionaries should already justify penalization.

The counter-argument is that the collocation *country house* may in the minds of most potential readers correspond precisely with what the source text intended, so there may be a curious injustice in marking it wrong.

As for *houses of worship*, if the target is basically British English alone then the assessor might regard it as a mistake, because in British dictionaries and corpora the expression is barely attested, but one would be more justified in taking marks off for the use of a relatively infrequent expression, above all with low-level non-native readers of English in mind, when a very frequent alternative (*churches*) is available.

## 6. Pro loco, pro globo

In the light of what has been examined so far, it may be contended that the *pro loco/pro globo* dichotomy raises issues on two distinct axes. The first and most obvious of these could be categorized as the ‘source-target axis’, where something which is intelligible to source text readers (Italians speakers in the present context), for example local traditions or cuisine, has to be rendered meaningful to a global readership. The second axis, which has been the chief concern of this paper, has been what might be termed the ‘target axis’, on which we find at one end target language usage which is suitable for a global audience, and at the other target language usage which is only comprehensible more locally, i.e., for particular countries or cultures (*ursus speleaus*, *country house* etc.), though as this paper has tried to illustrate, there are endless grey areas and borderline cases. A final and more playful example, inasmuch as it ties in with the title of this paper, is the following fragment, included in a description of the town of San Severino in the Italian region of Le Marche:

Si chiama “San Severino Marche Walking” ed è la nuova proposta, rivolta in particolare agli appassionati di trekking urbano, pensata dall’ufficio turismo del Comune in collaborazione con **la Pro Loco**.

“San Severino Marche Walking” is the name of a new initiative in San Severino for urban trekking enthusiasts, organized by the local tourist office together with **the Pro Loco**.

In Italy the *Pro Loco* is a local information centre, generally run by volunteers and independent of the local council, but it is most unlikely that visitors to San Severino would be interested in knowing that the tourist section of the council of San Severino on the one hand, and the *Pro Loco* on the other, put their heads together in order to come up with the idea of a walk through the town. It may be that some local dignitary wished this to be made explicit, but for an international readership it is redundant. Further, most non-Italian visitors will not have the remotest idea what the *Pro Loco* is, so all in all

there is no real need to translate it unless the commissioner of the translation insists upon it. A source language element may be so *pro loco* that it resists translation for an international readership, so much so that the most efficient solution *pro globo* could be either to leave it as it is (*Buco da Chiudere* in section 4.2 above) or to omit it altogether, as in the present case.

## 7. Conclusions

The main thrust of this paper has been that both students translating into English as a foreign language and their teachers require established and well codified target-language parameters in order to perform and to evaluate translation assignments, a requirement that would already exclude advocating ELF as a target. In the Italian classroom situation described, the target recommended is British English, principally because this is the variety which has best established itself in pedagogical settings within a European framework.

Nevertheless, the translator's task remains a delicate one because the envisaged readership is international and extremely heterogeneous. Indeed it can at times transform into something of a damage limitation exercise, in that very different readers are liable to read off very different meanings from a single text, particularly native speakers of English vs. non-native speakers, but in any case readers with different native languages and disparate levels of competence in English, and this confounds the issue of identifying suitable translation choices. Further, the heterogeneity of the target readership discountenances blind insistence on British English, above all because usage which is specific to British English may wrongfoot international readers or at worst convey misleading information.

In short, the path from *pro loco* to *pro globo* is beset with snares. The translator is required to negotiate and reconcile the possible variances attendant upon the need to acknowledge the usefulness of operating within codified boundaries, and to be open to linguistic diversity, accommodating as far as possible the sundry requisites of the target readers.

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