

# Human Intelligence Vs Artificial Intelligence in Translation for Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the analysis of translation work carried out by students attending the English language module on translation for tourism at the MA Course in Foreign Languages, Literature and Cultural Tourism at the University of Trieste. Offering students practice in translation from Italian into English has proven to be an excellent means to teach language competence, as it favours a contrastive comparison between L1 and L2 at different levels. In addition, specialized translation allows students to further expand their linguistic knowledge and achieve proficient language skills in a professional field by learning sector-based jargon, style and discourse. Having taught translation of tourist texts for many years at university level, I could not overlook the improved output of Machine Translation software (MT) and the advent of AI, which have changed the way in which translations are processed and delivered. The introduction of these tools has inevitably called for a new approach to teaching translation. This paper aims to show how MTs and AI perform with the translation of tourist texts and compare their output with the

work of students to assess whether those tools can outrun human intelligence and irreversibly replace humans in the translation process.

## KEYWORDS

AI in Translation, Translation for Tourism, LSP and Translation, Italian-English LSP Translation

### 1. INTRODUCTION – TRANSLATION, SPECIALIZED TRANSLATION AND MACHINES

This paper is based on the analysis of translation work produced by postgraduate students attending the English language course of the Master's Degree in Modern Languages, Literature and Cultural Tourism at the Department of Humanities, University of Trieste. The course includes a module on specialized translation from Italian into English for the tourism sector.

Offering practice in translation from Italian into English to advanced students has proven to be an excellent means to teach language competence, as translation favours a contrastive comparison between L1 and L2 at different levels, which can be effective in fostering the conscious learning of a foreign language (Kopczynski in Randaccio 2012, Pym et al 2013, Nguyen 2024). Through translation students become more aware of differences in vocabulary use, grammar structures and stylistic devices between the source and target languages (Randaccio 2012). In addition, specialized translation allows students to further expand their linguistic knowledge while achieving proficient language skills in a professional field that may be useful in their future career (Cook 2010). By focusing on idiomatic expressions, subtleties in word choices as well as sector-related jargon and discourse, students develop a stronger command of the English language whilst also strengthening their cross-cultural awareness (CEFR in Gandin 2016, Pym et al 2013).

However, the improved output of Machine Translation tools (MTs) and the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have changed not only the way in which translations are processed and delivered, but also the way in which translation is perceived by most - including students - thus calling for a new approach to both teaching and explaining this activity. The ease and speed with which MTs and AI translate any type of text may raise questions as to the need for a module in translation, particularly one focusing on texts for tourism whose language may not be that difficult after all.

## 2. THE LANGUAGE OF TOURISM – EASY TO TRANSLATE, OR IS IT?

The language of tourism may be regarded as a fairly simple language because it employs general language items and is somewhat straightforward, accessible to everyone and succinct, especially in the English language. Nonetheless, the language of tourism is a specialized form of discourse as it incorporates terms, expressions, structures and functions that are specific to that field (Gandin 2016, Maci 2010, Pierini 2007).

Tourist texts have distinctive linguistic features that are employed to fulfil their expressive and persuasive functions aimed at catching the reader's attention with the use of highly descriptive, emphatic and evaluative language (Dann 1996, Gotti 2006). With these features in mind, students must become aware of the adjectives and collocations that are most commonly used in the target language (TL) – English in this case – and how these may differ from the source language (SL), that is Italian. Some examples of typical English collocations in tourist texts are *a staggering natural backdrop, rolling hills, lush vegetation, clear blue skies, bustling markets, soaring skyscrapers, grand architecture, awe-inspiring cathedral*, just to name a few.

Other prominent linguistic features of tourist texts include calques and loanwords, where foreign words are either translated literally or kept in their original form in the TL, with the aim of conveying an exotic flair to the text (Dann 1996). Some Italian calques used in English tourist texts are, for example, *aperitif, agritourism* or *to eat al fresco*, which are adapted to the TL, even though the terms may not be commonly used in the TL or may not have a clear connotation for the target reader (e.g. the idea of *agritourism* does not exist in English-speaking countries and the choice of *tourism* may be misleading as the Italian word refers to a place and not an act). As for loanwords, such as the Italian *bottega, apericena* or *la dolce vita*, they are generally left in their original version either because they sound more appealing or because a translation for that word/phrase has not been created yet. The difficulty of translating these words lies in the fact that they are often culture-related terms. In some instances, an invented translation or an adapted loanword (e.g. *bottegas*) may just be the right solution, which is when the translator's imagination can come into play.

In terms of style, conciseness is key in tourist communication (Maci 2020, Gotti 2006). Concepts are expressed in the shortest possible form with a reduction in textual surface through shorter sentences, adjectivisation and compound nouns. For Italian students who are learning to translate into English it is key to understand that the English language values concision and shuns redundancy (Hurley 2013), requiring practice on the use of adjectives and compound nouns to learn to reduce the number of words compared to the Italian.

In addition, compared to other forms of specialized discourse, the language of tourism is filled with emotive connotations and requires a high degree of creativity to pursue its objective of persuasion and fascination. The same creativity needs to be transferred to the target text (TT) - the translated text - because there is nothing worse than a literal translation that turns the description of a marvellous travel experience into a cumbersome read for native-speaker tourists.

### 3. ARTIFICIAL TRANSLATION – THE WAY FORWARD: THE BEST, THE RIGHT OR THE ONLY WAY?

In this time and era, the question arises as to whether MTs and AI have both the accuracy and creative touch needed to help us in the translation of tourist texts. This part of the paper will try to evaluate this aspect by presenting and comparing translations produced by MTs and by postgraduate students, hoping to provide some food for thought on the matter.

When MTs such as Google Translate were in their early stages (early 2000s), the translations they provided were either inaccurate, non-sensical or flawed and they were thus generally snubbed by both professional translators and instructors/educators. They functioned mainly as instant dictionaries to translate single words or very short phrases. Early examples of MT translations turned out to be completely incomprehensible, as shown in the table below, where some notices were translated from Italian into English using machine translation tools.

Source Text	Translation by Google (early 2000s)
La gentile clientela è pregata di comunicare l'ora di partenza alla reception	The kind guests are begged to communicate the time of departure to the reception
Fare attenzione. Viale dissestato	Be careful! Way Uncomfortable
Piatto del Giorno	Flat of the day

Table 1: Translation by Google in its early stages<sup>1</sup>

As time went by, noticeable improvements in MTs occurred, followed by the development of other similar tools, such as DeepL (2017), and the more recent advent of AI (2022), all of which have paved the way for a new era in translation. Not only do these tools continue to offer instant translations facilitating

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://inglisc.wordpress.com/the-gallery-of-wrongness/gallery-of-wrongness-7>

communication in a fast-paced age, but they are overall increasingly accurate, also in the translation of longer passages. Let us compare a sentence translated with Google Translate in 2010 and again later in 2024; initially, I created this sentence and used its machine translation to show students the tool's (un)reliability.

I leader dei vari governi europei si sono impegnati a garantire la sicurezza del materiale nucleare con misure proprie e responsabili e con una collaborazione internazionale decisa ed efficace (Source Text)

The leaders of the various European governments are committed to guarantee the safety of nuclear material through their own and responsible measures and with a strong and effective international collaboration (Google Translate, retrieved in 2010)

The leaders of the various European governments are committed to guaranteeing the safety of nuclear material with their own responsible measures and with decisive and effective international collaboration (Google Translate, retrieved in 2024)

The advancement between the first and second version is evident: the major grammar mistake (*are committed to guarantee*) and some language inaccuracies (*through their own and responsible, with a strong collaboration*) of the 2010 version are resolved in the 2024 version. Overall, however, the translation still remains fairly literal. Interestingly, the version of the same sentence generated by DeepL in 2024 (below) – which is allegedly the most outperforming MT available (Macketanz et al. 2018) – goes a step further showing a valid choice of vocabulary and more precise punctuation: the verb *pledge* replaces committed, *ensure* is used instead of *guarantee*, *security* in lieu of *safety*, *collaboration* becomes *cooperation* and a comma is introduced to separate coordinate adjectives.

The leaders of the various European governments have pledged to ensure the security of nuclear material through their own, responsible measures and through decisive and effective international cooperation (DeepL, retrieved in 2024)

Poor MT quality in the early days was the reason why MTs were widely ignored for teaching or training purposes, but as the technology matures the time has come to introduce them in classwork for students to be able to analyse and evaluate the extent of their effectiveness and usefulness in translation work. This is the direction I decided to take in the academic year 2018/2019, when I started teaching tourist translation from Italian into English. During the first semester, students were introduced to the language of tourism, translated various types of texts and learnt to identify general features, typical collocations and structures of this LSP and pinpoint possible challenges and

difficulties in the translation process. Once students had grasped the basics of translation in this sector, I brought MTs into the classroom and started a lesson by entering part of an Italian tourist text on Google Translate. My purpose was to ask students their opinion about the translation offered by Google Translate and work from there. One of the texts I used was the opening paragraph of a tourist description of the north-eastern Italian city of Udine, taken from a printed tourist guide.

Udine non è città che si offra con immediatezza al turista, preferendo invece di lasciare a lui il piacere della scoperta personale di quel suo volto celato entro palazzi e chiese. Udine è un luogo che incanta, fatto di angoli suggestivi rimasti intatti nel tempo; di strade e piazze dove il passeggiare è possibile; di quella dimensione umana che fa respirare aria di casa e mettere a proprio agio. (Fachin, 2010: 138)

The version by Google Translate read as follows:

Udine is not a city that offers itself immediately to the tourist, preferring instead to leave him with the pleasure of personal discovery of that face hidden within buildings and churches. Udine is an enchanting place, made up of evocative corners that have remained intact over time; of streets and squares where walking is possible; of that human dimension that makes you feel at home and feel at ease. (Google Translate, retrieved in 2018 and 2024)

Students were asked to evaluate the translated version as a class and discuss its strengths and weaknesses. The main point made was the high adherence of the TT to the ST with a word-for-word transposition of exact wording and structures: “*offers itself immediately to the tourist*”, “*preferring to leave him*”, “*discovery of that face*”, “*where walking is possible*”, “*of that human dimension*”. Other remarks regarded the lack of some tourist language features that were introduced in the first semester, such as coherence, gender neutrality and punctuation. Students noted that the MT version was not coherent because it uses an impersonal style at the beginning by referring to “*the tourist*” and later turns to a more personal tone at the end of the paragraph where it addresses the reader directly with “*you*”. Moreover, students highlighted how the MT version uses the singular “*tourist*” rather than the more common plural form “*tourists*” and the subsequent pronoun “*him*” which is not gender neutral as it refers to a masculine subject only (literally transposing a typical Italian structure). Finally, the punctuation in the last part was said to be inadequate for an English text and corresponded more to an Italian structure with a list of phrases introduced by the same verb (“*made up of*”), separated by semi-columns and introduced by the repetition of the preposition

“of”. Surprisingly, despite advances, the MT translation of this sentence has remained unchanged to this date.

Following this text analysis, students were asked to work in small groups and provide a more original version which not only encompassed the key features learnt but also focused on the overall meaning of the ST rather than the wording. Students were also encouraged to move information around, if possible, without affecting content. The aim was to deliver an appealing translation for prospective tourists. Below are three versions of the same paragraph created by three groups of students:

1) Udine’s charm hides within its churches and buildings, leaving tourists the pleasure of exploring the city at their own pace. The city’s beauty resides in its untouched, evocative corners. Strolling along its streets and in its squares, tourists can relax and feel at home.

2) Udine is a hidden gem of a town, filled with charm that visitors can discover at their own pace. Strolling in the city’s streets and squares, tourists can admire its churches, buildings and suggestive corners untouched by time. The city’s warmth crowns any visit, making all tourists feel at home and at ease.

3) Little is known about the city of Udine and the pleasure of discovering its hidden gems is all yours. Plunge into Udine’s enchanting atmosphere and wander around its timeless and suggestive corners. You will feel at home and breathe a friendly atmosphere among its historical buildings and churches.

The students’ versions are diverse and all pleasantly manage to capture the readers’ attention and raise interest in this tourist destination. The difficult idea expressed at the very beginning in the ST is rendered by students using typical tourist words/phrases such as “*hidden gem*”, “*unique destination*”, “*pleasure of discovering*”, “*discover at one’s own pace*”. Other catchy words they have resorted to are *charm*, *warmth*, *wander*, *stroll*, and *timeless*. In some instances, students have also slightly changed the order of information for a better flow of information and in the last example the students have opted to address the reader directly with “you” and the imperative forms, another feature of English tourist texts. Comparing these versions with the Google translation, some have kept some translation options given by the MT such as “*enchanting*”, “*evocative corners*”, “*to feel at home*”, “*to feel at ease*” – which are perfectly correct and do not necessarily need to be changed.

The source text continued as follows:

Accettata la sua realtà di tranquilla, ordinata città di provincia, Udine saprà anche riservare al visitatore attento sorprese piacevoli. Da Piazza Libertà, da molti

definita la più veneziana d'Italia dopo quella lagunare, caratterizzata da un armonico insieme di edifici e di monumenti del periodo rinascimentale, può partire l'itinerario volto alla scoperta dei luoghi d'arte. La piazza è il cuore indiscusso di Udine: situata ai piedi del colle del Castello, è la zona più famosa e più turistica della città ma al contempo tra le più frequentate dagli udinesi. (adapted from Fachin, 2010: 138)

Google Translate's version read:

Having accepted its reality as a quiet, orderly provincial city, Udine will also be able to reserve pleasant surprises for the attentive visitor. The itinerary aimed at discovering places of art can start from Piazza Libert , defined by many as the most Venetian in Italy after the lagoon one, characterized by a harmonious ensemble of buildings and monuments from the Renaissance period. The square is the undisputed heart of Udine: located at the foot of the Castle hill, it is the most famous and most touristy area of the city but at the same time among the most frequented by the people of Udine (retrieved in 2018 and 2024)

Translation difficulties in this text include length of sentences, the ideas of "*provinciale*" and "*lagunare*" and avoiding word-for-word versions. These are three of the students' solutions.

1) Despite its simple and tranquil atmosphere, Udine can pleasantly surprise visitors who can start their tour from Piazza Libert . Surrounded by harmonious Renaissance buildings and monuments, this Piazza is often considered the most Venetian square in Italy after St. Mark's Square in Venice. Located at the very foot of the castle hill, the Piazza is the centre of Udine. Not only is it the most famous tourist spot, but also the most loved gathering place for locals.

2) Udine's quiet atmosphere will not prevent visitors from enjoying many pleasant experiences. The artistic tour of the city can start from Piazza Libert  - one of the most Venetian squares after St Mark's square in Venice - set against an harmonious, balanced backdrop of Renaissance architecture and monuments. Piazza Libert , the beating heart of the city, is located at the foot of the Castle Hill, where tourists and locals alike enjoy spending their free time strolling about.

3) Despite its quiet and provincial halo, you will also be pleasantly surprised by Udine's artistic landmarks. Piazza Libert  ("*Liberty Square*") is the best spot for you to start discovering the city, with its Venetian aura and its Renaissance architecture. Located at the foot of the Castle hill, the square is the beating heart of Udine and appeals to tourists and locals alike.

Though the students' translations are not flawless, they denote creativity and mental flexibility in terms of choice of words and ability to move information and adapt the TT for an English audience. Students have chosen words

like “*simple, quiet, and tranquil*” for *provinciale*, “*St. Mark’s Square*” to explain the culturally-related word *lagunare*, “*beating heart*” for *cuore indiscusso*, and the last version goes as far as using semantically-related words like “*halo*” and “*aura*”. Once again, the MT can give the initial inspiration to spur a more creative process.

Another text that was used during the course is a description of the island of Madeira taken from an online travel agency magazine, and below is an excerpt:

Un cuore di colori, natura e arte incastonato tra l’Africa e l’Europa. Quanto le gettonatissime Canarie sono brulle, tanto Madeira – sia l’omonima isola che l’arcipelago – è lussureggiante, un paradiso terrestre ricco di fiori, foreste, e giungla, patrimonio protetto dall’UNESCO dal 1999. La perla dell’Atlantico, nel bel mezzo dell’oceano a 545 chilometri di distanza dalla costa africana, è in sostanza una sorta di microscopico continente che custodisce paesaggi meravigliosi e del tutto diversi tra loro. (adapted from Boscolo Magazine, 2023)

In this case, the students were shown the versions generated by DeepL and ChatGPT and were asked to compare the two translations.

A heart of colours, nature and art nestled between Africa and Europe. As much as the popular Canary Islands are barren, Madeira - both the island of the same name and the archipelago - is lush, an earthly paradise full of flowers, forests and jungle, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1999. The pearl of the Atlantic, in the middle of the ocean 545 kilometres away from the African coast, is in essence a kind of microscopic continent that harbours wonderful and completely different landscapes. (DeepL, retrieved in 2024)

A heart of colors, nature, and art nestled between Africa and Europe. While the ever-popular Canary Islands are barren, Madeira – both the island and the archipelago – is lush, a terrestrial paradise rich with flowers, forests, and jungle, protected by UNESCO since 1999. The Pearl of the Atlantic, situated in the middle of the ocean 545 kilometers from the African coast, is essentially a sort of microscopic continent that holds wonderfully diverse landscapes. (ChatGPT, retrieved in 2024)

As pointed out by students in their analysis of the TT, both versions offer a literal translation of the ST, but DeepL’s version is by far weaker as it also includes several mistakes. Firstly, both versions start off with the literal rendering of the first sentence with “*A heart of colours, nature and art nestled between Africa and Europe*”, where “*heart*” in English does not have the same connotation as the Italian and it would rather be used in other contexts to mean “the centre of emotions”, “a person’s character” or “the most important part of something”. Moreover, the sentence is translated without reference to the subject and without a verb, thus following a typical Italian emphatic

structure, which, however, is fairly unusual in the English language unless it is a headline, a slogan or an idiom. The other evident mistake both versions share is the literal translation of “*incastonato*” with “*nestled*”, which is semantically incorrect in the English text. “Nestled” would be used to refer to a place that is sheltered as in “nestled between the mountains” and the Italian choice of “*incastonato*” specifically collocates with the noun “*perla*” (pearl) used further down in the text and very common in Italian tourist texts. Other literal translations offered by DeepL include “*the island of the same name*” (instead of “bearing the same name”) and “*is in essence*” (where an adverb would work better in English). DeepL’s version also includes a major mistake with the translation of “*quanto*” with “*as much as*”, showing that the MT recognizes the literal grammar function of “*quanto*” to express a comparison of quantity, but does not grasp the meaning and use in this sentence.

Interestingly, ChatGPT’s translation is of a higher quality, despite a few inaccuracies such as the first sentence, the use of the prepositional phrase “*from the coast*” instead of “*off the coast*” and finally the choice of the verb “*holds*” to mean “*boast, offer*”. ChatGPT recognizes the meaning of “*quanto*” translating it with the conjunction “*while*”, and finally avoids the wrong translation of “*omonima*”, removing it from the text as if it has chosen to use the translation technique of *reduction*, that is removing words which are considered redundant in the target language. Overall, ChatGPT has managed to produce an acceptable translation, which, however, does not sound as captivating and enjoyable as the versions created by some of the students.

1) Madeira - lying between Africa and Europe - offers a wondrous spectrum of nuances, as well as natural and artistic attractions. Juxtaposed to the barren landscape of the Canary Islands, Madeira represents a lush paradise enriched by a vast variety of flower species, forests and jungle, and it was declared a UNESCO cultural heritage site in 1999. Considered a gem of the Atlantic Ocean, it lies 545 km off the African coast and it presents itself as a micro-continent characterised by an extraordinary variety of different landscapes and environments.

2) Madeira is an enchanting fusion of colours, art and nature. Situated between Europe and Africa, 545 kilometres from the African coast, Madeira is a true gem in the Atlantic Ocean. Compared to the more popular Canary Islands, which are quite arid, Madeira – both the island and the homonymous archipelago – is a heavenly place, rich in flowers, woods and jungles. Part of the UNESCO heritage since 1999, Madeira is a microcosm brimming with diverse and fascinating landscapes.

3) Madeira is a melting pot of colours, nature, and art, located between Africa and Europe. Its homonymous island, as well as its archipelago, looks like the Garden of Eden: green and fertile, with many flowers, forests, and its jungle, in contrast

with the more popular – but barren – Canaries. Having been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1999, the pearl of the Atlantic resembles a microscopic mainland right in middle of the Ocean.

The students have provided some brilliant solutions featuring a wide range of vocabulary (“*spectrum*”, “*fusion*”, “*melting pot*”, “*true gem*”), many beautiful adjectives (“*wondrous*”, “*enchanting*”, “*heavenly*”), and original ideas, such as the “*Garden of Eden*” or the “*microscopic mainland*”. In some instances, they have also shown their personal touch and flexibility by adding (“*green and fertile*”), reducing (no reference to the archipelago) or opting to change the order of information. These minor adjustments to the TT are counterbalanced by extraordinary sentences that show the extent to which students have put their minds and heart to the work achieving a pleasant effect that would be a perfect read for a tourist guide.

The examples analysed in this paper are only excerpts of some of the many translations students have worked on, but they suffice to point out the difference between human work and MT output and the role the latter can have in the translation process. MTs and AI provide translations that are immediately readable and in some instances seem acceptable, but only at first sight. A more in-depth read and analysis shows the language flaws and inaccuracies of their translations that need to be redressed to make the texts more attractive and pleasurable to read.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Translation requires a degree of flexibility and some fields, such as that of tourism, involve some form of creativity and artistry that is necessary to create successful, distinctive descriptions that engage the reader by raising interest and emotion.

MTs and AI have come a long way, advancing and improving the way translations are created. It cannot be denied that the quality of general language translations they provide is, by and large, satisfactory and, with their support, translation processes are streamlined as texts are automatically translated from one language to another in the blink of an eye. MTs and AI can indeed translate thousands of words in just a few seconds, where human translators would take much longer due to the time human work would dedicate to understanding, analysing, researching, thinking critically and producing a unique piece of writing.

It is the latter set of skills that artificial translation tools lack causing their translated texts to sound unnatural because automated translation mostly carries out a word for word translation, overlooking context, culture and subtlety in content or language. Moreover, accuracy in terms of grammar, structure and vocabulary is generally minimal as the translation encompasses the exact structure of the source text, preserving the original words and order of information. MTs and AI provide very linear translations and that is why they can be helpful for the translation of texts that are short or simple or provide instructions, but at this point in time they are not yet effective with the translation of highly descriptive and dense texts, such as tourist texts, because they lack the analytical skills and creativity required to work around texts and ultimately convey a better picture and emotion.

However, MTs and AI are here to stay and they can no longer be discarded or dismissed, neither in the training of future translators nor in professional practice. That is why a new approach should be adopted by incorporating these tools in the translation process where they can serve as a draft version for translators to gain a general idea of the text and the first immediate translation of vocabulary. This sketch could be the starting point for translators to further improve or embellish the target text, adding their personal human touch that would prevent any form of standardization and simplification of language and would instead render the final text extraordinary and unique.

Students in my course have proven that – once they have been taught the techniques, processes and discourse features of tourist texts – they deliver excellent translations, always outdoing MTs and AI.

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