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ENGLISH FOR TOURISM Using translated texts in the classroom to improve writing skills

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Abstract – The article reports on the preliminary results a project aimed at developing the writing skills of elementary and lower-intermediate learners of English for Tourism. Coursebooks for the global market include writing activities and resources, but they usually do not take into account the learners' L1 and their natural tendency to resort to it in the language classroom. As a consequence, in spite of progress in grammatical and lexical accuracy, learners' written production often remains largely influenced by their L1 syntax, vocabulary and rhetorical strategies. This may have a negative impact on their ability to communicate effectively in the professional domain. Translation has been successfully used with advanced learners of ESP to exploit this tendency to relate the L1 and L2 lingua-cultural systems. However, translating can be too challenging for low-proficiency learners. To overcome this difficulty and obtain the same benefits offered by translation tasks, learners were asked to work on two small comparable and parallel corpora of English and Italian guidebooks. The corpus-based, compare/contrast activities maintained a high level of interest in the learners and directed their attention towards the linguistic, stylistic and cultural features of the genre. Post-testing shows that this approach had a positive impact on both specialized and general proficiency in English.

Keywords: English for tourism; writing skills; translation; corpora; language teaching.

1. Introduction

For many years, the use of the learners' first language (L1) was considered detrimental to effective teaching with no place within the most popular communicative or functional approaches. However, recent research in cognition and second language acquisition has led to a significant change in attitudes towards bilingualism and the role of the learners' mother tongue in the classroom. Studies have shown that resorting to the L1 and translating are common and naturally-occurring activities in the language classroom (cf. Cook 2010; Hall & Cook 2012; Fernández Guerra 2014), and the use of the L1 in such context is essentially inevitable (Duff 1989). Research in second language acquisition and bilingualism provides support for the hypothesis that the linguistic systems of speakers of more than one language are integrated: different languages can be envisaged as one dynamic and integrated system where language transfer is pervasive (Cook 2007; Manyak 2004). These claims, in turn, have prompted a lively debate on the value and role of translation in language teaching (Ali 2012; Carreres 2006; Cook 2010; Duff 1989; Fernández Guerra 2014; Mogahed 2011). The use of translation in English language teaching (TELT) has been discussed in the literature as the ideal means to exploit this trend and to raise awareness of the differences between two lingua-cultural systems (Laviosa & Cleverton 2006). Supporters of communicative approaches have dismissed any attempt to use one's L1 (and translation) as potentially deleterious to language learning because of the risk of interference between the two languages (cf. Cook 2010). However,

resorting to translation “as a means” rather than “as an end of learning” (Cook 2010, pp. 73-74) has been found beneficial to the development of both lexico-grammatical accuracy and stylistic fluency (Laviosa 2014; Witte et al. 2009). Several studies have described its effectiveness in promoting language awareness, expanding problem solving capacities, and improving intercultural communicative competence (Cook 2010; Laviosa 2011, 2014), while “minimizing negative interference” and “maximizing positive interference” (Laviosa 2014, p. 2). Moreover, translation activities have been successfully used with advanced students (Machida 2011) to improve the acquisition of (specialized) vocabulary and culture-bound items in ESP courses (Hummel 2010; Micic 2008; Velasco Sacristán 2009).

ESP learners are usually adults (high-school or university students and professionals) who have often had at least a few years of English language instruction. Translation has been proven beneficial with these learners (Benabdallah 2013; Kavaliauskienė & Kaminskienė 2007; Laviosa & Cleverton 2006; Llácer Llorca 1997; Velasco Sacristán 2009 among others), because it helps them focus simultaneously on both form and function, as well as on the appropriateness and effectiveness of rhetorical strategies used in authentic specialized texts in two languages. In studies reporting on translation and ESP teaching, therefore, an intermediate or advanced knowledge of general English (EGP) is usually assumed and the focus is shifted onto various aspects of the specialized domain at issue. In the Italian university system, however, this is not always the case. Despite having already studied English for at least 5-8 years, many first-year students have an elementary or lower intermediate competence at the time of enrolment in vocational degree programs. As a consequence, the syllabus must usually include activities aimed at increasing proficiency in EGP while, at the same time, focusing on how language is used in individual specialized domains. For these students translating may prove too challenging at times and have a negative impact on motivation. The present study was designed to investigate possible ways to overcome these drawbacks, more specifically to find out whether the same benefits of translating texts could be obtained by working on translated texts through attention-focusing activities that exploit parallel and comparable texts.

The research project exploited translated texts for comparing and contrasting English and Italian travel guides. For this purpose, two small corpora were compiled for use in the classroom. Corpus-aided language pedagogy has become increasingly popular over the past two decades, as seen in the wealth of publications on the topic (Gavioli 2005; Sinclair 2004 among others). It has contributed to shifting the focus of language instruction from (mostly) deductive to inductive learning – or at least a mix of the two – in a way which makes foreign language learning closer to first language acquisition processes. Large and small corpora have been used in the classroom for discovery-learning tasks, as reference tools, as a source of authentic materials which could help learners acquire and restructure existing competences, and to foster learners’ autonomy (Bernardini 2004; Johns 1991). As in the case of TELT, the vast majority of the classroom experiences reported in the literature involve advanced learners (Bernardini 2004; Gavioli 2005). However, as Bernardini points out, “by providing access to authentic interaction [...], corpora offer an ideal instrument to observe and acquire socially-established form/meaning pairings” (2004, p. 17). It is, thus, reasonable to hypothesize that lower proficiency learners would equally benefit from corpus-based activities, if properly guided and assisted by the teachers. In designing the project, it was assumed that being able to search, compare and contrast authentic parallel and comparable texts would be very useful for the students, both in terms of language learning and in terms of developing critical

skills. This would enable them to identify the most relevant features of documents and genres in the foreign language, so as to produce new written materials which conform as much as possible to the cultural expectations of their intended audience: a crucial skill for tourism practitioners. Moreover, corpus-based activities were included to make the course more varied with the assumption that this would help engage the students' interest and keep them motivated.

2. Moving texts across cultures

Intercultural communicative competence is especially important for learners of English for Tourism, since the language of tourism attempts to persuade people and “convert them from potential into actual clients” (Dann 1996, p. 2). The tourism text needs to address the “culturally predicated needs” (Dann 1996, p. 2) of its target audience. Therefore, including in the syllabus awareness-raising activities aimed at developing this type of competence is of paramount importance. Teaching English for Tourism necessarily involves teaching learners to move texts across cultures. To do this, they need to expand their intercultural communicative competence because, as Manca points out, “this obviously implies changes in the language, as culture influences language and the way the message is organized” (2012, p. 50). Lower proficiency students might not be able to perform such a complex task through translation.

Research into the tendencies of different cultures towards specific ways of perceiving and representing reality (the so-called “cultural orientations” – see Hall 1990; Hofstede 1991, 2001; Katan 2004, 2006) indicates that English and Italian differ remarkably in terms of “informal culture”. Building on Hall's (1990) distinction, Katan (2006) classifies British culture as a “Low Context Culture” (LCC) and Italian culture as a “High Context Culture” (HCC). According to his analysis, in a LCC the information encoded is more important than the form used to encode it. In contrast, in a HCC, the form in which the message is “packaged” is just as important as the message itself, if not more so, and feelings and opinions play a role as crucial as the facts themselves. These preferences emerge in the linguistic structures of texts. Thus, texts produced within LLCs tend to be shorter and simpler. The main points of the argumentation are generally presented in a linear way to highlight cause and effect and to keep communication reader-friendly, direct and rather informal. Texts produced in HCCs tend to present information in large chunks, through longer sentences. Argumentation tends to develop in a circular way, with new details building on background information, and using a formal, indirect style usually associated with expert to non-expert communication (see Katan 2006 for a thorough discussion).

The investigation of parallel and comparable corpora of tourism texts confirmed these preferences in the two languages. Moreover, it highlighted their effects on tourism discourse and, consequently, on its production and translation (Cappelli 2007, 2008, 2012; Manca 2012, in press). Corpus-based discovery activities were therefore included in this project to direct the learners' attention towards such preferences and tendencies in the two languages.

3. Research Questions

The present study reports on the analysis of the written production of two groups of elementary and lower intermediate learners of English for Tourism who participated in a project based on the exploitation in the language classroom of parallel and comparable extracts from English and Italian guidebooks. The project aimed at developing the writing skills of the learners while, at the same time, promoting lingua-cultural awareness, and improving cross-cultural communicative competence and professional skills.

The courses taught in previous academic years (2008-2012) relied on existing teaching materials for the global market, and the final exam included a writing task modelled on the course book writing activities. More specifically, learners were asked to write a short text presenting a destination to a specific type of tourist. Their average performance showed that, even though the instruction offered by several commercial course-books of English for Tourism produced some improvement in their grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge, their written production remained largely characterized by inappropriate register choices and mixed levels of formality, and was heavily influenced by their first language's syntax and textual organization. In line with research on the use of the L1 in the language classroom, it appeared that learners were trying to "master the unknown" through what they knew well, that is, their native language and writing conventions.

The project was designed to overcome the limitations of developing learners' writing skills by relying exclusively on monolingual materials by popular international publishers. The latter are meant for a global audience, and thus do not take into account the L1 of the learners who happen to use them in the many countries where they are commercialized. Since the learners' L2 system seems to rely massively on their L1 system (cf. Cook 2007), a mix of discovery-learning and awareness-raising corpus-based activities followed by very simple translation activities and writing tasks was deemed a good compromise to exploit the participants' natural tendency to translate. At the same time, their attention was focused on the relevant features of tourist guidebooks in English and Italian and on the key differences. The rationale behind the new syllabus materials was the attempt to overcome some of the difficulties involved in using TELT with elementary learners, while at the same time obtaining the same benefits. The following research questions were addressed:

1. Do awareness-raising activities focusing on translated and comparable texts improve the written production of learners of English for Tourism?
2. If so, is such improvement comparable to that obtained through translation activities?
3. Does learners' proficiency increase in both EGP and ESP?
4. Does highlighting the cultural differences between English and Italian tourism texts have positive effects on the learning outcome?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The participants were two groups of first-year students in a degree program in Tourism Sciences. The first group included 63 students who attended the 12-week English for Tourism course in 2013 and the second group included 65 students who attended the same

course in 2015. They were all native speakers of Italian aged between 19 and 21 and had already studied EGP for 8 to 12 years. The expected proficiency level at the end of the course was the B1 (intermediate) level of English as described by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The proficiency level of the students was tested both at the beginning and at the end of the course with a placement test modelled on the Cambridge English Placement Test. The initial tests showed very similar results for both groups: the vast majority of the students could be classified as elementary or pre-intermediate speakers of English (Table 1).

	2013	2014
A2	3%	5%
A2+	58%	65%
B1	19%	15%
B1+	8%	6%
B2	11%	9%

Table 1
Distribution of learners per initial CEFR proficiency level.

4.2. Materials

Two small corpora were compiled for use in the classroom in 2013: a small parallel corpus of guidebooks including extracts from the English and Italian versions of *Florence and Tuscany* (Lonely Planet 2012 edition) and of *Florence & Tuscany* (DK Eyewitness Travel Guide/Mondadori 2009 edition) and a small comparable corpus of guidebooks in Italian including extracts from *Toscana* (Touring Editore 2013 edition), *Toscana* (Istituto Geografico deAgostini 2008 edition) and *Maremma e Monte Amiata* (Le Tartarughine – Erios Editore 2008 edition). A small comparable corpus of guidebooks for families and children was added in 2014. It included extracts from *Tuscany, Umbria & Florence with your family* (Frommer's With Your Family Series 2011 edition), *L'Italia per bambini* (Touring Editore 2001), *Divertimappa Scopri la Toscana* (Mediabooks 2014).

The corpus of specialized guidebooks was added to include materials which would prompt the students to focus more on some culture-bound features of the genre. Guidebooks for children and for families travelling with children have been popular in the English-speaking world for over fifty years, but they have only just appeared on the Italian market. Their informal, humorous style and highly multimodal format (i.e. illustrations, games, quizzes, etc.) clash with the style of traditional Italian guidebooks (Cappelli 2007; Maci 2013), and may pose significant challenges both to writers and translators of this rapidly expanding genre.

Some other texts were occasionally used in class, such as passages from the still unpublished professional Italian translation of the Frommer's Guide *Tuscany, Umbria & Florence with your family* and extracts from the English translation of the *Divertimappa Scopri la Toscana*, as well as from guidebooks not included in the corpora but which were useful to provide further input on specific issues (e.g. the Lonely Planet guidebooks for children of the "Not for Parents" series).

4.3. Procedure and instruments

The project consisted of three main phases: pre-testing, instruction and post-testing. Each of these phases was articulated into several steps as will be described in the following subsections.

4.3.1. The pre-testing phase

The pre-testing phase included a placement test and an uninstructed writing activity. The computer-administered placement test was modelled on the Cambridge English Placement Test and was meant to assess the learner's initial proficiency level in EGP. The second step of the pre-testing phase consisted in asking the students to produce a short written text of maximum 300 words for a bilingual guidebook. The participants were instructed that the text should be both in English and in Italian and should include a brief presentation of a city of their choice and recommendations for something special to do or see. In 2014 a further specification was added: the guidebook was designed for people travelling with children. The texts were produced in class in electronic format, without previous instruction, and the time allowed to complete the task was two hours. Students could not browse the Internet, but they were allowed to use bilingual and monolingual dictionaries of their choice. All the texts were collected and qualitatively analyzed to identify the most common mistakes, collocations, calques from Italian and stylistic preferences. The only quantitative data collected were sentence length and readability grade level values.¹ No feedback was given to the students at this stage.

4.3.2. The instruction phase

The instruction phase was the most complex and occupied the vast majority of the time allocated for the project. It mostly consisted of series of awareness-raising activities meant to focus the students' attention on the peculiarities of the genre at issue in the two languages and cultures. It also included regular progress assessment, feedback and remedial work. The corpora were exploited at this stage in order to retrieve, compare and contrast some of the most evident lexical and phraseological features of guidebooks in the two languages using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014), which allowed the students to retrieve frequent collocations and frequency word lists (see Figures 1 and 2).

Extracts from the guidebooks included in the corpora were presented in electronic or paper format for qualitative analysis. The actual guidebooks were made available to the students so that they could assess the contribution of the iconic apparatus to the textual material (e.g. images, maps, tables, etc.).

¹ The readability grade level indicates the number of years of education that a reader should have to read and understand a text without any problem. This measure is based on the US education system. The higher the number, the more complex a text is supposed to be (cf. Pitler & Nenkova 2008).

Query 26 > Sort Left 26 (81.30 per million)
file2707570 anyway in 1549. From then onwards, the <i>ducal</i> palace has been known as the Palazzo Vecchio (
file2707578 housed in part of the <i>fifteenth-century</i> palace of the Gonzagas and with thoroughly Tuscan
file2707577 Via della Vigna Nuova 18, was the <i>first</i> palace in Florence to follow the rules of classical
file2707570 build this <i>enormous</i> , forbidding-looking palace in 1457, but by the time it was completed
file2707570 build this enormous, <i>forbidding-looking</i> palace in 1457, but by the time it was completed
file2707578 hugely expensive restoration of this <i>former</i> palace in a perfect location. The public spaces
file2707578 the Duomo, began as a <i>single-storey</i> Gothic palace, but was given to Roderigo Borgia by Pius
file2707578 Duomo, began as a single-storey <i>Gothic</i> palace, but was given to Roderigo Borgia by Pius
file2707578 Palazzo Comunale, a <i>thirteenth-century Gothic</i> palace to which Michelozzo added a tower and rustication
file2707578 Palazzo Comunale, a <i>thirteenth-century Gothic</i> palace to which Michelozzo added a tower and rustication
file2707577 Piazza Pitti, forecourt of the <i>largest</i> palace in Florence, the Palazzo Pitti. Banker
file2707577 indeed ask Brunelleschi to design the <i>new</i> palace, but the result was so grandiose that Cosimo
file2707567 Pinturicchio and many more - to fresco their <i>new</i> palaces and churches. Tuscany and Umbria's art
file2707578 Vescovile; see below), virtually the <i>only</i> palace to see the light of day was the Palazzo
file2707577 survives of the interior of the <i>original</i> palace is Michelozzo's deep, colonnaded courtyard
file2707578 commission was to build a <i>cathedral</i> , <i>papal</i> palace and town hall, but Pius instructed the
file2707578 commission was to build a cathedral, <i>papal</i> palace and town hall, but Pius instructed the
file2707577 regime. The first of the city's <i>public</i> palaces, it soon became the seat of the Podesta
file2707570 each room is reminiscent of Spanish <i>royal</i> palaces, all heavily bedecked with drapes, silk
file2707570 each room is reminiscent of <i>Spanish</i> royal palaces, all heavily bedecked with drapes, silk
file2707577 Sangallo to rebuild it as a classical <i>rural</i> palace - the only architectural project instigated
file2707577 Sangallo to rebuild it as a <i>classical</i> rural palace - the only architectural project instigated
file2707577 often held in and around the <i>shed-like</i> palace in the centre of the fortress, as are occasional
file2707567 's Palazzo Pitti (p105) into a <i>suburban</i> palace for the Medici dukes and designed the Ponte
file2707578 and 1257, and said to be the <i>oldest</i> such palace in Italy, it may have served as the model
file2707578 and 1257, and said to be the <i>oldest</i> such palace in Italy, it may have served as the model

Figure 1
Premodification of *palace* in English guidebooks.

Query 18 > Sort Left 18 (56.28 per million)
file2707577 the top two floors of a <i>fifteenth-century</i> palazzo, this is a beguilingly antiques-stuffed
file2707577 ground floor of a <i>huge</i> fifteenth-century palazzo at Via Ferruccio 28, and Bottega del Vino
file2707577 ground floor of a huge <i>fifteenth-century</i> palazzo at Via Ferruccio 28, and Bottega del Vino
file2707578 windows - the effect is more <i>Florentine</i> palazzo than factory. Inside, the museum offers
file2707577 setting - in a pleasant <i>garden-fronted</i> palazzo - are delightful. There are plans to move
file2707577 and setting - in a <i>pleasant</i> garden-fronted palazzo - are delightful. There are plans to move
file2707578 researching Etruscan Places - the <i>medieval</i> palazzo was transformed into a hotel in 1860. Now
file2707578 places: located on the main square in an <i>old</i> palazzo, with period furniture and frescoes. Despite
file2707577 hotel located on the third floor of an <i>old</i> palazzo, very close to the station. Has fourteen
file2707570 headquarters in 1944, sits in a charming <i>old</i> palazzo in one of the most attractive and leafy
file2707570 headquarters in 1944, sits in a <i>charming</i> old palazzo in one of the most attractive and leafy
file2707578 precarious ruins of a <i>seventeenth-century</i> palazzo, whose Baroque exterior frescoes are fading
file2707577 whose son converted them into a <i>single</i> palazzo, leaving little trace of the earlier houses
file2707577 bathroom) occupying a <i>sixteenth-century</i> palazzo and furnished in a mixture of antique and
file2707570 over three levels, within a 15 <i>th-century</i> palazzo. It's worth the room rate simply for the
file2707570 (J) Aprile is a pleasant 15 <i>th-century</i> palazzo, just a stone's throw away from the piazza
file2707570 Tornabuoni 7; s/d 65/85) Within a 16 <i>th-century</i> palazzo on Florence's smartest shopping strip,
file2707570 Benci occupies a charming 16 <i>th-century</i> palazzo that was once the home of one of Florence

Figure 2
Premodification of *palazzo* in English guidebooks.

The types of activities proposed included: text analysis, reading comprehension exercises, compare and contrast activities and corpus queries. Text analysis was meant to help the students to identify the main textual features of guidebooks, to recognize the different text types found in this genre (i.e. descriptive, narrative, directive, informative text types) and their function in the text, and to become aware of the linguistic means used to produce them in English and Italian. This type of activity focused mostly on the points of divergence between the two languages. Reading comprehension exercises were created by using passages from the guidebooks included in the corpora and aimed at developing the students' specialized lexical knowledge, but also at focusing their attention on collocations and denotative/connotative word meaning, as well as on phraseological units and figurative language. The exercises included cloze tests, multiple-choice and true/false questions, and the search for synonyms and antonyms in the texts. Compare and contrast activities were guided tasks focusing on the level of formality, on sentence length, pre-

and postmodification strategies, and translators' choices in the source and target texts and in the comparable texts to identify preferences and tendencies in the two languages. Table 2 illustrates two of the examples used to point out differences in the linguistic and stylistic preferences in English and Italian.

EN	IT	Focus on...
Michelangelo's body was brought <u>here</u> (1) from Rome in 1574	costruita per Michelangelo nel 1574, in occasione del trasporto della salma da Roma a <u>Firenze</u> (1) [<i>built for Michelangelo in 1574, on the occasion of the transfer of the body from Rome to Florence (1)</i>]	1. Use of deictics (EN) vs. preference for explicit reference (IT). Mainly instrumental (EN) vs. mainly formative (IT) function of guidebooks.
Giardino di Boboli is Florence's <u>finest patch of tended greenery</u> (1) [...]	[...] il Giardino di Boboli è l'esempio fiorentino <u>più maestoso di giardino all'italiana</u> (1). [<i>Giardino di Boboli is the most majestic example of Italian garden (1) in Florence</i>]	1. Preference for non-specialized vocabulary (EN) vs. preference for specialized terminology (IT)

Table 2
Differences in usage and register connected to role of guidebooks.

The students were also asked to carry out some simplified translation tasks from English to Italian. Passages for translations were chosen from the guidebooks included in the parallel corpus so that an official Italian translation was available with which to compare work. The passages proposed for translation activities presented specific challenges (i.e. different levels of formality in the two languages, figurative language, culturemes, etc.).

After every lesson, students were asked to produce a short text, which was corrected jointly by an Italian and an English native speaker instructor. The texts were then sent back to the students: the parts which needed revision were highlighted in different colours indicating the type of "mistake" (e.g. red for grammar, yellow for vocabulary, etc.). Students were asked to revise their text and send it back to the instructors, who would evaluate it again and provide feedback for improvement. These texts were then used in class: the learners were asked to compare their work to authentic extracts from the corpora which served the same purpose. In this way, they could identify similarities and differences. Finally, the students were asked to rewrite their initial text twice (once halfway through the course and once at the end of the course), keeping in mind the things that they had learnt up to that moment. They were also asked to prepare a presentation discussing the changes that they had made to their previous versions of the text.

4.3.3. The post-testing phase

The post-testing phase included a computer-administered assessment test and a new writing task. The assessment test was modelled on the placement test, but it was enhanced with questions focusing on specialized vocabulary. This test aimed to verify whether the learner's proficiency level in EGP had changed and whether the students had acquired

specialized vocabulary, whether presented through explicit instruction or learnt incidentally by reading and working on the authentic materials included in the corpora.² The new writing task was the same as the first writing task assigned, and it had to be carried out in class. No Internet browsing was allowed. Students were allowed to use monolingual and bilingual dictionaries.

4.4. Data collected and analysis

The students' written production (SWP) is summarized in Table 3. A total of 490 short texts were collected and analyzed in 2013, and 471 texts were collected and analyzed in 2014. SWP included three versions of the same text (the first text produced without previous instruction (T1), and its first (T1-2) and final (T1-3) revisions), weekly assignments and their revisions (WA), and the text produced in post-testing (T2).

SWP	2013 – 63 students	2014 – 65 students
T1	63	65
T1-2	59	61
T1-3	55	61
WA	261	230
T2	52	59

Table 3
Texts collected from students' written production.

The discrepancies in numbers depend on the fact that not all the students completed all of the assignments, handed in their revised homework and/or took the final exam. In 2014, the overall participation in the project was steadier, with fewer students failing to complete their assignments or dropping out. The lower number of texts collected as weekly assignments is due to the fact that only 24 out of the total 48 hours of the course were allocated for the project.

The analysis carried out on T1 and its revisions and T2 was both quantitative (sentence length and readability grade level) and qualitative (e.g. register, specialization, appropriacy and accuracy, in which language the first text was drafted, etc.). The sentence length was calculated with WordSmith Tools (Scott 2008) and the readability grade level was calculated with the Readability Test Tool.³ These measures were compared to the equivalent measures for the authentic English texts included in the corpora (Table 4).⁴ The data from the weekly assignments were not used to monitor the progress and are not included in the discussion of the results of the study. They were occasionally used to try to

² The vocabulary section of the test included thirty multiple-choice questions. Of these, fifteen focused on specialized lexical items covered during explicit instruction (e.g., words and expressions included in the textbook vocabulary exercises). The other fifteen focused on the most common specialized items found in the authentic texts and belonging to the same thematic areas as the other words and expressions (e.g. art and architecture, food, types of accommodation, attractions, means of transport, etc.).

³ <https://readability-score.com/>.

⁴ In line with the literature on cultural orientations and preferences discussed in Section 2, the sentences in the comparable Italian corpus were longer, ranging between 18.6 and 28 words per sentence. The readability of the Italian texts was not calculated, since the study focused on the changes in the learners' written production in English L2.

identify, whenever possible, the critical point at which the linguistic system of the learner reorganized and the changes became stable.⁵

Guidebook	Sentence Length	Readability grade level
Lonely Planet (EN)	15-19	9-14
Frommer's (EN)	17-18	10-11
Frommer's for families (EN)	15-18	8.7-10.6

Table 4
Sentence length and readability grade level in travel guides in English.

5. Results and discussion

As could be expected, the analysis of the data showed some differences between the upper-intermediate learners (initial B1+ and B2) and the elementary learners (initial A2 and A2+). Greater variability was observed in the work of the intermediate learners (initial B1), whose production often fluctuated in terms of grammatical accuracy and style.

5.1. T1 and its revisions

The sentence length and the readability grade level of the English texts produced without any instruction (T1) was higher than the same measures for the texts included in the corpus of English guidebooks (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Sentence length						
	2013			2014		
	<i>T1</i>	<i>T1-2</i>	<i>T1-3</i>	<i>T1</i>	<i>T1-2</i>	<i>T1-3</i>
Lower-proficiency students	24.6 – 32	21.2 - 26.3	20 - 22	24.6 - 32	23.1 - 31	20 - 22
Higher-proficiency students					23.5 - 28	

Table 5
Ranges of words per sentence.

Readability Grade Level					
2013			2014		
<i>T1</i>	<i>T1-2</i>	<i>T1-3</i>	<i>T1</i>	<i>T1-2</i>	<i>T1-3</i>
11.4 – 14	11.4 - 12.8	10.8 – 12	11.4 - 14	11.5 - 13.7	10.7 - 11.8

Table 6
Readability Grade Level.

The qualitative analysis of T1 showed some macroscopic differences in terms of whether the students chose to write the first text in English or Italian, and of the effects of such

⁵ The study assumes a dynamic systems theory (DST) approach to second language acquisition, which sees languages as ever-changing complex adaptive systems and language development as a form of internal reorganization of the learner's linguistic system under the pressure of new input and iterative interactions with the environment. See Verspoor et al. (2011) for a thorough discussion.

choice on the second text drafted. These trends were also observed in the weekly assignments as well as in T1-2 and T1-3, but became progressively less prominent over the weeks.

As far as T1 was concerned, the lower-proficiency students (LPSs) tended to start with the Italian text, with few exceptions. The higher-proficiency students (HPSs) tended to start with the English text if the guidebook text they had to write was meant for the general public. If the guidebook was meant for families, they tended to start with Italian. No matter what the first language chosen was, the second text was generally a more or less literal translation of the first, rather than a comparable text in the second language.

As a consequence, if the first text was in English as in (1),⁶ the Italian text often resembled the English text in register and style: it usually included frequent forms of address to the reader, many space deictics (e.g. *here, there*) and was characterized by a low level of formality.

1. If you chose Spain for your family holiday this year, you must spend some of your time in Valencia. This beautiful city is just what you were looking for to make both your children and you happy.

Se per le vostre vacanze in famiglia quest'anno avete scelto la Spagna, non potete non passare per Valencia. Questa bellissima città è esattamente ciò che stavate cercando per rendere felici sia voi che i vostri bambini.

If the first text was drafted in Italian, more variability could be observed. The LPSs tended to produce a text in their own language characterized by a low level of formality and some of the features of the English guidebooks (e.g. forms of direct address to the reader) as in (2). Many of these texts included grammatical mistakes in Italian (e.g. *se le code però potrebbero stancarvi* [lit. *if the queues could bore you*] vs. *dovessero* [should]).

2. Se le code però potrebbero stancarvi potete tranquillamente visitare le numerose piazze ricche di testimonianze della precedente monarchia come piazza Castello, Piazza Vittorio Veneto e Piazza Madama. Se vi volete poi concedere una passeggiata all'aria [...].

If the queue could bore you, you would like to visit the numerous squares rich of testimony of the last monarchy such as Castello squares, Vittorio veneto squares and Madama squares. By the way, if you want grant some time walking in the open air [...].

Similar cases of Italian texts resembling the style of English guidebooks were also found in the texts produced by the HPSs. The second text was usually a more or less literal translation of the first. In these cases, as could be expected, the English text retained its most typical features (e.g. informality, direct address to the reader, etc.). Generic hybridity was quite common in the production of these students: some passages would seem more appropriate for a promotional brochure rather than for a guidebook, as in (3).

3. Una raccomandazione è d'obbligo: se visitare [*if you visit*] le attrazioni della città con i vostri [*your*] bambini fate attenzione [*be careful*], perché i luoghi sono molto affollati. Spero di incontrarvi presto a Firenze per una gita meravigliosa!

There's only one recommendation: if you visit the city attractions with your kids, be careful, because the places are very crowded! I hope to meet you soon, for a wonderful trip in Florence!

⁶ The examples provided are unedited and report the students' production exactly.

Some HPSs, on the other hand, produced a typical Italian guidebook text, characterized by a more formal register, absence of forms of direct address to the reader and a preference for impersonal expressions. The corresponding English text found in T1 tended to reproduce the form of the Italian text, with a few rare cases of “adjusted” English versions.

4. Di notte è possibile partecipare a eventi come festival e bizzarri spettacoli, dove i ragazzi sopra i diciotto anni possono bere cocktails prima delle 23.00. A partire dalla mezzanotte è piacevole concedersi una passeggiata sul molo, si può ascoltare la musica proveniente dai pubs.

During the night it's possible to join events such as festivals and bizarre shows where guys under 18 can drink cocktails before 11pm. From midnight could be pleasant to have a walk on the jetty; it's also possible to listen to the music coming from the pubs.

T1-2 was produced halfway through the project (24 hours of dedicated instruction in 2013 and 12 hours of dedicated instruction in 2014 respectively) and after many awareness-raising activities, including simple guided translation tasks. T1-3 was produced at the end of the hours allocated to the project. Both T1-2 and T1-3 were written as homework, but neither of them was graded: the students only received feedback and suggestions for improvement. In both cases, progress at the level of linguistic accuracy, lexical competence, rhetorical strategies and stylistic appropriacy was observed. The students' ability to identify distinctive features of authentic texts rapidly showed that they were more aware of the cross-cultural differences between English and Italian tourism communication and more independent in noticing them on their own when comparing and contrasting texts.

The extracts in (5), (6) and (7) exemplify the most commonly observed changes in the students' writing skills over the course of the project. They are taken from the material produced by three students who wrote their English text before the Italian one. Nevertheless, the text in (5) includes several expressions which are typical of Italian tourism communication and promotion (underlined in the example). In T1-2, the sentence length has been reduced, punctuation and grammar have been improved, and the student has learnt more natural collocations and expressions (e.g. *to dream of something*; *x doesn't mean y*) to encode the message he needs to convey. In T1-3, the student seems to have found a good way to render the Italian expression “*da x a y*” in English. This phrase is very commonly used in Italian tourism discourse to describe the range of attractions available at a destination, and it is one of the most frequently found calques in (poor) English translations of Italian promotional materials (Manca 2012). It is therefore no surprise that it also poses problems for learners.

5. if your dream is to do a family holiday [*literal translation of Italian expression*], certainly Castell'Umberto a little green village could be an option to the city's caos. Little is not synonymous of dull [*literal translation of Italian expression*]; there you can find every kind of attraction [*grammar*] for everybody from the mountain to the sea [*literal translation of Italian expression*]. If you're an adventure spirit [*literal translation of Italian expression*], the horse rides in the wonderful Verde Park will take you on the most high Sicilian mountains [*grammar*]. (T1)

if you dream of a perfect holiday with your family Castell'Umberto, a small green village near Meassina, is the solution. Small doesn't mean dull; there you can find any kind of attraction for everybody from the mountain to the sea. If you're the adventurous type, the horse rides in the wonderful Verde Park will take you on the highest Sicilian mountains. (T1-2)

[...] many different attractions, including mountains and the sea. (T13)

The parts underlined in (6) exemplify other common mistakes, such as the use of the

personal pronoun “we” followed by a modal verb (e.g. “we could find/we can find”) and the literal translation of the names of landmarks. This probably results from the attempt to avoid direct forms of address to the reader and to render the impersonal form “si può” (*it is possible to...*), which would be the most common and appropriate choice in Italian. Students also tend to avoid relative clauses in favour of semi-parenthetical elliptical units. T1-2 shows that by the end of the course the student was able to correct most of the mistakes and had become aware that the names of attractions are best left in the original language, unless a well-established and well-known alternative exists in the other language.

6. Pisa is a city of about 90000 inhabitants placed in the west part of Tuscany. Near Pisa we could find landscapes to suit every taste: from the Pisan Mounts to the beach resorts of Marina di Pisa and Tirrenia. You cannot say you’ve been in Pisa if you have not seen Miracles Square, which hosts the Leaning Tower, the Baptistery, the Cathedral and the Monumental Cemetery, all of them reason of pride for the city. (T1)

Pisa is a city of about 90000 inhabitants situated in western Tuscany. The surroundings of the city offer landscapes to suit every taste: from the Pisan Mountains to the beach resorts of Marina di Pisa and Tirrenia. You cannot say you have been to Pisa if you have not seen Piazza dei Miracoli, which hosts the Leaning Tower, the Baptistery, the Cathedral and the Monumental Cemetery, which represent a reason of pride for the city. (T1-2)

The most obvious improvement in the production of the LPSs was in grammar and vocabulary. A generalized tendency towards producing long, complex sentences was observable in most of their T1 texts. By the end of the project, although far from perfect, the paragraph structure, sentence length and grammar accuracy had improved, as exemplified by the extracts in (7).

7. If you had a family I suggest to you to see almost one of the big and beautiful park in the city because there are place where children can play safe also with animal and also spaces where the adults can stay and have relax.

If you are travelling with your family, I suggest you to see almost one of the big and beautiful parks in the city. Here children can have fun in a safe way and have fun also with animals. Adults can relax.

5.2. T2

T2 was produced in class at the end of the course. Only 52 out of 63 participants handed in T2 in 2013 and only 59 out of 65 in 2014. It was graded and the evaluation contributed to the final mark for the course. The students had two hours to complete the assignment; they could use monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, but they were not allowed to browse the Internet.

The sentence length of T2 was lower than the sentence length of their T1-3 both in 2013 and 2014 (15.1-20 words), especially in the work of the LPSs (15.1-18 words). The readability grade level was also lower, ranging between 8.5 and 11.

Overall, improvement was observed in all of the same domains as in T1-3, with some variability. Grammar mistakes were significantly reduced and students used appropriate phraseology and register. Some problems persisted in the production of all students in terms of calques from Italian and of generic hybridity. However, in terms of language skills, in some cases the improvement exceeded our expectations as evidenced by (8). The text was written by a student with an initial A2+ level.

8. London is the capital of England. It's a big city well-known that offer a lot of activities for to do. It's the most tourist city. It's a perfect destination for families and people who love the art and the history, has a great artistic and cultural patrimony: in fact there are lots of museums and monuments to visit as the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Tate Modern [...] (T1)

Paris, cradle of the Impressionism, is a city like no other. You should come here at least once in your life. This dream destination is considered one of the most romantic cities in the world. The city is located on the banks of the Senna river. This incredible town is perfect for people who love art and history. You should go for a walk along the Champs Élysées Boulevard and you should visit its staggering monuments. The heart of Paris has a rich artistic and cultural patrimony. The main attractions are the Louvre Museum, The Tour Eiffel, Notre-Dame de Paris, the Arc de Triomphe and the Montmartre district that is located on a hill, in the Nord of the city centre. (T2)

5.3. Post-test

The test confirmed that the vast majority of the students became more proficient in EGP and had acquired more specialized vocabulary. Table 7 summarizes the changes in the percentages of learners per CEFR levels. The most important changes were observable in the pre-intermediate (A2+) and intermediate (B1- B1+) students. The vast majority of them managed to reach a higher proficiency level by the end of the course.

	2013		2014	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
A2	3%	--	5%	--
A2+	58%	15.4%	65%	8%
B1	19%	42.3%	15%	59%
B1+	8%	26.9%	6%	19%
B2	11%	15.4%	9%	14%
Drop out	18%		9%	

Table 7
Changes in the students' proficiency level.

As Table 7 shows, some students deferred the exam or dropped out of the course altogether. There was no strict correspondence between the initial level of the students and their failing to complete the course: the students who dropped out were distributed among all the levels, with a slight predominance of elementary learners.

The second part of the post-test focused on the acquisition of specialized vocabulary. On average in 2013, the students answered 80% of the questions focusing on lexical items which had been object of explicit instruction correctly. They answered 60% of the questions focusing on lexical items which were learnt incidentally by reading and working on the texts in the corpora correctly. In 2014, the students performed equally well in both sections, answering 80% of the questions of both types correctly.

5.4. Discussion

To return to the research questions of this study, by the end of the project, the written production of the participants had improved in terms of linguistic accuracy and generic appropriacy (question 1). More specifically, the learners showed the most remarkable improvement at the lexical and syntactic level. Their lexical and phraseological repertoire was richer by the end of the course, and the negative collocational transfers from their L1 were greatly reduced in their final written production. The acquired awareness of the

differences in the Italian and the English phrase, clause, sentence and paragraph structure resulted in a simpler, more linear syntax, closer to the preferences of the English texts. This is shown by the reduced sentence length (e.g. 20-22 words) and by the lower readability grade levels of the learners' final texts (e.g. 10.7-12), where both these measures come closer to the numbers found for the authentic English texts (e.g. 15-19 words and 8.7-14), as shown in Tables 5 and 6 above.

With reference to the second question, the emerging data indicate that the same very positive results obtained by advanced learners through translation activities (cf. Cook 2010; Laviosa & Cleverton 2006; Machida 2011 among others) can be attained by elementary and intermediate students by working with translated and comparable texts through a mix of text analysis, awareness-raising activities, corpus-based activities and some very simple translation tasks.

As to the third research question, the post-test showed improvement not only in the learners' ESP proficiency or writing skills, but in their overall EGP proficiency as well. Moreover, the results of the test indicate that the activities included in the project had a positive impact on both receptive and productive skills, and helped develop the ability of the students to infer new and implied meanings in written texts. The spoken component of the final exam showed progress in oral skills as well, probably because of the expanded lexical knowledge of the learners. In spite of the very limited amount of hours allocated to the course in the degree program, most of the students managed to reach the next CEFR level. This includes some students with an initial B1 or B1+ level, who should presumably have gained less from instruction prevalently dedicated to elementary learners.

A major limitation of the study is the fact that there were no control groups due to the limited time and human resources available and, most of all, to the policy of the institution: diversified instruction for students in the same class was not allowed. Nevertheless, the results of the final tests administered at the end of the courses taught between 2006 and 2012 show a much lower percentage of success. We can therefore reasonably assume that the activities included in the project maximized the potential and effectiveness of the instruction. Moreover, the adaptability of the tasks and the authenticity of the materials presented seem to have allowed the more proficient students to progress in spite of the supposedly limited challenges posed by the activities designed.

With regard to the fourth research question, the positive results attained can be plausibly attributed to several factors. Firstly, compare and contrast corpus-based activities and the comparison between the students' texts and authentic materials proved beneficial in engaging and motivating the students. Secondly, they were effective in guiding the learners' attention towards crucial linguistic, stylistic and cultural features of tourist guidebooks. The role of attention and noticing in language learning has been known for a long time (Schmidt 1995), even if it might not be an essential prerequisite to language acquisition (cf. Ellis 1994 on implicit learning). Schmidt (1995)'s Noticing Hypothesis claims that noticing the gap between the learner's interlanguage and the target language is critical for the internalization of linguistic forms and functions. The choice to resort to passages taken from guidebooks for children – a genre which has no long-standing tradition in Italian – was meant to increase the students' awareness of a lingua-cultural gap to stimulate their interest and attention further. Interestingly, the results obtained at the end of the project in 2013 and 2014 were very similar, even if only half of the hours of the course were allocated to the project in 2014 and the level of the class was, on average, lower. Focusing on this lingua-cultural gap may have contributed to lower the percentage of students who dropped out of the course and to improve the results in the vocabulary test focusing in incidental lexical acquisition. This suggests that a cross-cultural approach to

ESP teaching has the potential of enhancing the learning experience and of maximizing language development in large multilevel classes.

6. Conclusions

The findings of the study show that the benefits of TELT discussed in the literature for advanced students can be attained by low proficiency learners as well through corpus-based and awareness-raising activities which revolve around comparable and translated texts. In the written production of the elementary and intermediate learners of English who participated in the study, cross-linguistic transfer and translating seemed to be pervasive even when no proper translation tasks were assigned. This tendency to relate the L1 and L2 lingua-cultural systems can be effectively exploited through compare and contrast activities that maintain the learners' interest level high and direct their attention towards the linguistic, stylistic and cultural features of the genre at issue. In so doing, such tasks favour noticing and contribute to converting input into intake (Schmidt 2001). This aspect is lacking in the commercial textbooks of English for Tourism meant for the global market. Nevertheless, it has proved crucial in producing a remarkable improvement in the learners' ESP and EGP proficiency. For this reason, special attention should be devoted to developing pedagogical materials which exploit the potential of noticing tasks by focusing, not only on grammar or vocabulary, but also on the lingua-cultural features of tourism texts.

The study could have benefited from more quantitative data on the students' production (e.g. frequent collocations and word frequencies). Moreover, the lack of control groups certainly represented a limit to the interpretation of the results. However, the data raise some interesting questions relative to the usefulness of allowing the learners' first language in the classroom. In future work, the study should be replicated with a control group. Interesting insights into specific learning strategies and the learners' awareness of such strategies could be obtained through feedback questionnaires. Finally, further research should be carried out on the correlation between difficulty of the tasks and the inconsistencies observed in the progress of some of the participants. A dynamic system theory approach to this issue might cast some light on the connection between task difficulty and complexity, the allocation of the learners' cognitive resources and the learning outcome.

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