

Giving Nature a New Voice: Translating BioRia from Portuguese to German

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Abstract

As part of the 3rd year of the Bachelor's Degree in Translation at the Department of Languages and Cultures of the University of Aveiro, a collaborative translation project was conducted during the second semester of the 2022/23 academic year with students from the Portuguese-German Translation course at the University of Mainz, Germany. This project aimed to deepen intercultural dialogue between Portuguese and German students while equipping undergraduate students from both universities with essential academic and professional skills. The project focused on BioRia, a nature conservation and biodiversity initiative in the Aveiro district. Since 2005, BioRia has transformed environmentally degraded areas into a network of walking and cycling trails, offering direct contact with nature. Given the ecological significance of the Ria de Aveiro and the lack of German-language information on the official website, the team proposed a collaboration with Estarreja's City Council to translate a tourism brochure into German. This effort aimed to enhance the visibility of the BioRia project for German-speaking audiences. This study describes and analyzes the translation project, highlighting the challenges of translating ecotourism materials and the project-based work methodology. The bilingual brochure's publication was financially supported by the Center for Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (CLLC) at the University of Aveiro and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Keywords: Translation Project; Ecotourism; BioRia; Portuguese-German

1. Introduction

In the context of the 3rd year of the Bachelor's degree in Translation at the Department of Languages and Cultures of the University of Aveiro, a translation project in the field of ecotourism was carried out in collaboration with students from the Portuguese-German Translation course at the University of Mainz, Germany, during the second semester of the

2022/23 academic year. The aim of this project was to deepen the intercultural dialogue between Portuguese and German students, as well as to best prepare the undergraduate students from both universities for the translation profession and other professions or activities that require intercultural skills.

The chosen theme for the translation project was the BioRia Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Project, located in Estarreja, within the Aveiro district. This project, initiated in 2005, focuses on rehabilitating environmentally degraded areas and has established a network of walking and cycling routes that offer direct contact with nature. Given the ecological and cultural significance of Ria de Aveiro, and the absence of German-language resources on the official BioRia website, the project team proposed collaborating with the Estarreja City Council to translate a tourist-information leaflet into German. This effort aimed to enhance the visibility and accessibility of the BioRia Project to German-speaking audiences.

The current study describes and analyzes the execution of this translation project, highlighting the specific challenges encountered within the ecotourism domain. This initiative builds upon a longstanding tradition of inter-university translation projects. Since 2007, the Department of Languages and Cultures at the University of Aveiro has engaged in bilateral collaborations with various institutions. The first such project, developed in partnership with the Department of German Studies at the University of Minho, focused on translating historical and cultural tourism materials for the Monastery of São Martinho de Tibães. Subsequently, several seminars were held in the areas of ecotourism at São Jacinto Natural Park in 2008, wine tourism in the Vinhos Verdes region of Melgaço in 2008, and monumental tourism in Vouzela in 2009. These projects included guided tours by an expert in the area and on-site translation work.

More recently, collaboration with the University of Mainz resulted in notable projects, including the translation of narrative texts in 2021 and 2022, the BioRia Project in 2023, and a 2024 initiative titled "Tell me how it was," which documented the experiences of Portuguese emigrants in Germany during the April 25th Revolution.

In this context, the present study aims to describe the translation project, highlighting translation challenges in the field of ecotourism and the project's work methodology. The project concluded with the publication of a bilingual brochure, which received financial support from the Center for Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (CLLC) at the University of Aveiro and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

2. Translation in the Field of Tourism

In the context of globalization, tourism now reaches even the most remote and lesser-known destinations worldwide. Translation plays a vital role in this process, facilitating communication between tourists and local communities, thereby contributing to intercultural understanding. As

global tourism continues to expand, there is an increasing demand for culturally sensitive translations across various types of texts. Salvatore (2009, p. 4) argues that “local cultures need to remove “their veil” and to work out how to make those patrimonies less inevitable and automatic, that is more evident and clear for the people outsider the circle”. Among common text types are informational brochures, websites, travel guides, restaurant menus, signage, and more, all essential in ensuring seamless cross-cultural interactions.

The language of tourism is "a specialized type of cross-cultural communication" (Agorni, 2012) and “belongs to a particular genre of specialised language characterised by peculiar stylistic, pragmatic and lexical features and within Translation Studies (Giampieri & Harper, 2021, p. 17). Malamatidou (2024, p. 57) observes that, despite widespread acknowledgment that “tourism texts need to be adapted through translation to address a new audience, research on how this might be achieved is generally limited and patchy”. Similarly, Agorni (2012) identifies translating tourism as an under-explored area, attributing this research gap to the challenges scholars face when defining the nature and degree of specialization of tourism language. The author notes that “it is precisely the heterogeneous nature of this community that produces the complex discursive practices characterizing this field, best exemplified by those hybrid genres such as the guidebook, brochure, and leaflet” (Agorni, 2012, p. 6). These hybrid forms combine various communicative functions, blending both informational and promotional elements, making their translation a unique challenge.

Furthermore, Agorni (2012, pp. 6-7) highlights that "the translation of tourist texts is an extremely interesting case of cross-cultural communication," Tourist texts also carry cultural markers that represent the specific historical, geographic, social, and cultural aspects of a destination, making their translation a complex task. In translating tourist texts, translators must intervene not only at the textual level but also at the cross-cultural level. For instance, in the case of a brochure translation, the assumption is that foreign tourists need more detailed information than local ones. Therefore, translators must choose from various techniques, such as glossing, adding clarifying explanations within the text, or providing additional information in footnotes. The selection and combination of these strategies should be guided by a thorough understanding of the foreign tourists’ profiles, as these will shape their expectations and informational needs (Agorni, 2012, p. 7). This nuanced approach is essential for ensuring that the translation is both culturally accurate and functionally effective in meeting the needs of its target audience.

3. Academic-Curricular Context and Training in Translation

In the context of translation education at the University of Aveiro (UA) for 3rd-year Bachelor's students, the curriculum comprises various fields, including Tourism, Literature, Technical Translation, and Public-Administrative Translation, as well as different types of texts, such as

informative, operative, and expressive texts. Practical training begins in the third year through Translation Practice courses, where students apply theoretical knowledge to hands-on translation projects, gaining essential skills for their future professional pursuits. Prior to this, during the first and second years, they are introduced to fundamental subjects such as Translation Methodologies, which provide essential concepts and theories related to translation practice. In these courses, students become familiar with not only the essential principles of translation but also concepts from Text Linguistics, such as text genres, discourse conventions, and textual structures. Additionally, subjects like Portuguese Linguistics complement their understanding of language and text functioning, preparing them for the practical challenges they will face during their Translation Practice. At the University of Mainz, Portuguese is offered as a secondary subject (Beifach) in combination with a major subject (Kernfach; such as other philologies, social sciences, history, etc.) as part of the Bachelor of Arts program. The Portuguese program covers four main areas: Linguistics, Literature, Culture, and Portuguese as a Foreign Language (with courses such as grammar, translation, oral communication, and creative writing, all aimed at enhancing writing and communication skills).

Additionally, starting in the winter semester of 2022/23, the university offers a unique qualification for education students (Lehramt/Education), providing a supplementary certification with a didactic component (Zusatzqualifikation: Zertifikat über die fachwissenschaftlichen Voraussetzungen zur Erlangung der Unterrichtserlaubnis in Portugiesisch) to train future Portuguese language teachers for the German educational system.

4. Methodology

Prior to initiating the translation project, a visit to the Natural Reserve was organized to familiarize the students with the area. Notably, only one out of 18 students had previously visited the reserve. A guided tour, led by a biologist from the Estarreja City Council, provided detailed insights into the region's unique flora and fauna. By exploring various areas within the reserve, each with its own unique characteristics, students were able to contextualize the translation project and gain a greater understanding of the site's significance. The Translation Practice classes were conducted in a computer lab to create an environment that supported research using online dictionaries, databases, websites, parallel texts, and other digital resources. At the onset of the project, students from both the University of Aveiro and the University of Mainz were invited to collaborate on a shared Google document, facilitating both real-time and asynchronous interactive collaboration.

The students were organized into mixed groups composed of members from both universities. This structure ensured that German students reviewed the translations produced by their Portuguese counterparts, offering detailed feedback and observations, often outside the context of regular class sessions. The exchange of feedback, which focused on error analysis and

suggestions for improvement, proved to be highly advantageous, as it emphasized student-centered learning.

The selection of Google Docs as the primary platform for the project facilitated a high degree of interaction and collaboration among participants. This platform allowed all group members to work concurrently on the same document, enabling immediate and efficient collaboration. Students could add comments and suggestions directly within the text, fostering continuous revision and constructive feedback. Additionally, Google Docs automatically tracked all changes made to the document, simplifying the process of monitoring progress and identifying areas requiring further attention. The platform also streamlined communication among group members, allowing for quick resolution of queries and alignment of work throughout the translation process.

The instructors, including the authors of this study, encouraged autonomy and responsibility among students throughout the collaborative learning process. While offering guidance and support as needed, the instructors allowed students to take the lead in decision-making, fostering a learning environment in which the students assumed responsibility for their own educational development. This approach effectively promoted engagement and facilitated the students' growth during the project.

5. Selection of Topic and Characteristics of the Source Text

Although the field of tourism is notably complex due to the wide range of discursive and stylistic practices across its various text types, students generally show a heightened interest in translating tourism-related texts. This interest stems from the fact that most students are already familiar with textual genres such as travel guides, brochures, and historical monument leaflets, among others. This prior knowledge contributes to their comfort and confidence when translating texts in this domain. As Agorni (2012, p. 7) notes,

students generally demonstrate a great familiarity with this type of text, as a large majority of them has been a consumer of similar works either in a foreign or in their native language. This familiarity facilitates the management of competencies related to discursive and textual conventions.

The BioRia Project text is a descriptive and informative document that highlights the natural heritage of Estarreja and the environmental conservation efforts promoted by the Estarreja City Council. The text is organized into several key sections, each focusing on distinct aspects of the BioRia project. The General Introduction outlines the history and objectives of the project, emphasizing the rehabilitation of degraded areas and the development of pedestrian and cycling trails. The Description of the Ria de Aveiro explores its geological formation and conservation

significance, while also detailing the historical interplay between humans and nature in the region. The Baixo Vouga Lagunar section provides a detailed insight at the area's ecosystems and biodiversity, showcasing the harmonious coexistence of human activities and natural habitats. Finally, the Walking Trails section offers detailed information about each trail, including distances, durations, environmental features, and GPS coordinates, enriching the reader's understanding of the opportunities for exploration within the reserve. The source text combines factual information with an emphasis on ecological awareness and conservation, makes it an ideal candidate for translation, especially within the context of promoting tourism and environmental conservation.

6. Culture-Specific Terms or Realia: Challenges for the Translator

Suleiman and Wilson (2019, pp. 51-52) highlight that Translation Studies research focusing on "the observable level of culture" addresses culture-specific terms (also *culture-specific items*, Aixelá, 1996; *cultural words*, Newmark, 1988; or *culturemes*, Nord, 1997, among other designations), which present significant challenges for translators. One of the primary challenges encountered was the translation of landscape-specific terms. A prime example is the term *Bocage*, which refers to a particular type of agricultural landscape found in regions, with moderate climates, particularly in parts of Europe, such as the Aveiro area. Originating from French, the *Bocage* landscape is characterized by a mix of small fields, hedgerows, trees, and shrubs. This contrasts with the more uniform open field system, where large areas of land are cultivated without permanent divisions between fields. In the translation process, students consulted dictionaries, databases, and parallel texts in both languages and decided to use the term *Landschaftsgefüge* in German. Although not a direct equivalent, this term offered a more appropriate description for German readers, emphasizing the landscape's structure and harmony between human activity and nature.

Another challenge was the translation of specific species names for both fauna and flora. The source text references a diverse array of species typical of saline environments. The translation of geographic names and references presented another challenge. For example, the *Ria de Aveiro* is a unique lagoon-like water system found near Aveiro, Portugal. This term, while specific to the local landscape, needed to be retained in the translation. However, additional context was provided to explain its significance to the German-speaking audience. In this case, the name was kept in the translation, supplemented by an explanation that described it as a "lagoon-like water landscape" in the Aveiro region.

Figure 1 displays a section of the final version of the brochure, highlighting how some of these challenges were addressed and the translation choices made.

BioRia

Apresentação

O Património Natural de Estarreja, fruto da privilegiada localização geográfica, nem sempre foi reconhecido pela sua riqueza e biodiversidade.

O desafio de reavivar a sua identidade perdida no tempo, valorizando este ecossistema natural, foi conseguido através do BioRia, projecto pioneiro de conservação da natureza e biodiversidade da Câmara Municipal de Estarreja, que neste milénio ousou "Virar o Conceito para a Ria".

Conhecer para aprender a valorizar e conservar foi a política que norteou este Projecto que, através da requalificação de zonas ambientalmente degradadas, permitiu a criação de uma Rede de Percursos Pedestres e Cicláveis em contacto directo com a Natureza. Fisicamente surgiu em 2005, com a implementação do Percorso de Salreu, dotado de painéis informativos e estruturas de apoio que permitem aos visitantes usufruir do local de uma forma cómoda, prática e divertida.

Os horizontes foram alargados com a criação em 2009 de três novos percursos que, de uma forma complementar, constituem um mosaico de habitats diversificados que lhe conferem uma elevada beleza paisagística, oferecendo diariamente aos visitantes um excelente retiro à vida stressante do quotidiano.

A expansão da Rede de Percursos Pedestres permitirá a ligação de Norte a Sul das 7 freguesias do Concelho, pelos caminhos da frente lagunar recortada, vencendo os Rios Antuã, Jardim e Gonde, através dos verdes campos de Bogaço.

O Centro de Interpretação Ambiental, estrategicamente localizado no início do Percorso de Salreu, é o ponto de entrada na Ria de Aveiro, ponto de recepção dos visitantes e um pólo de dinamização de inúmeras actividades de sensibilização ambiental.

Aventure-se e venha descobrir este tesouro natural que é de todos nós. Estamos certos que irá repetir!



Ria de Aveiro

Das Projekt BioRia

Vorstellung

Dem Naturschutzgebiet von Estarreja, das durch seine günstige geografische Lage entstanden ist, wurde trotz seiner Artenvielfalt und Biodiversität nicht immer die gebührende Beachtung geschenkt.

Durch das Projekt BioRia gelang es, den im Laufe der Zeit verloren gegangenen besonderen Charakter wiederherzustellen und dieses natürliche Ökosystem aufzuwerten. Es handelt sich dabei um ein Pilotprojekt für Naturschutz und Biodiversität der Stadt Estarreja, die zu Beginn dieses Jahrtausends die Herausforderung annahm, „die Gemeinde auf die Ria, die lagunenartige Wasserlandschaft in der Region um Aveiro, auszurichten“.

„Erkunden, schützen, erhalten“, lautete der Leitgedanke dieses Projekts. Durch die Wiederaufwertung der ökologisch geschädigten Gebiete wurde die Grundlage für ein Netz von Wander- und Radwegen inmitten der Natur geschaffen. Die konkrete Umsetzung erfolgte im Jahr 2005 mit der Eröffnung des Salreu-Rundwegs, der mit Infotafeln und begleitender Infrastruktur ausgestattet, Naturliebhaber*innen zu einem erholsamen und kurzweiligen Besuch einlud.

Das Angebot wurde 2009 mit der Schaffung von drei neuen Rundwegen erweitert, die ein Mosaik aus unterschiedlichen schützenswerten Lebensräumen von eindrucksvoller landschaftlicher Schönheit bilden. Sie bieten den Besucher*innen zugleich einen wunderbaren Rückzugsort vom stressigen Alltag.

Mit der Erweiterung der Wanderwege wird eine Verbindung zwischen Nord und Süd geschaffen, durch die sieben Gemeinden des Kreises und entlang der malerischen Lagunenlandschaft. Die Wege führen über die Flüsse Antuã, Jardim und Gonde und durchqueren die grünen Felder des Bogaço.

Das Informationszentrum für Umwelt und Naturschutz, strategisch günstig am Beginn des Salreu-Platzes gelegen, ist das Eingangstor zur Ria de Aveiro und Ausgangspunkt für zahlreiche Unternehmungen, die nicht zuletzt das Umweltbewusstsein der Besucher*innen fördern. Kommen und entdecken Sie die Schätze unserer Natur! Wir sind sicher, dass Sie wiederkommen werden.



Die Ria von Aveiro

Figure 1. Final version of translated ecotourism brochure.

7. Conclusions

The translation project of the BioRia nature reserve brochure provided a valuable learning opportunity for students, encouraging them to take an active and autonomous role in the translation process. The inter-university collaboration was a key factor in the success of the project, with the exchange of knowledge and perspectives between students from the University of Aveiro and the University of Mainz enriching the educational experience.

Peer feedback, rather than relying solely on the professor's guidance, was considered a motivating and essential factor for enhancing translation skills. This exchange of opinions and suggestions contributed not only to the technical improvement of the translations but also to the development of a greater cultural sensitivity, which is crucial in translation practice. The BioRia project also provided students with an authentic translation experience, allowing them to encounter the real-world challenges of working with specialized texts and culture-specific terms. Furthermore, the project raised students' awareness of environmental issues, emphasizing the importance of ecological preservation and sustainability. This component of environmental awareness strengthened the understanding of how education can play a fundamental role in promoting sustainability and building a more conscious and responsible future. In this way, the project also served as an opportunity to reflect on the role of translation in disseminating cultural and ecological values.

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