Life Beyond Dictionaries

Edited by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PROPOSAL FOR A MULTILINGUAL CULTURAL HERITAGE DICTIONARY: COMPLEXITIES AND PROBLEMS IN CORRESPONDING TERMS IN ITALIAN AND RUSSIAN¹

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The Importance of Multilingualism in Understanding Cultural Heritage

Within the framework of communicating and disseminating cultural heritage, the English language has assumed a dominant position. This is demonstrated primarily by the diffusion of terminology for professionals and researchers, starting from the lexicon of the materials used for restoration and conservation purposes through to defining the fundamental ideas about the urban and natural landscape expressed in this language. Secondly, English is the language of choice in a variety of contexts, ranging from museum portals and travel guides to the information panels displayed beside monuments. It is generally accepted, however, that the original language of the arts, and more specifically of cultural heritage, since the beginnings of humanism was Italian, which in the modern era

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¹ I would like to thank my graduates, A. Gennaioli, E. Guerra and C. Maccianti, who have dedicated their theses to the lexicon of cultural heritage and with whom I have discussed some of the examples offered in this work.

² See the proposals for standardizing English terminology related to "Cultural Heritage Conservation" promoted by the CEN (European Committee for Standardization). http://esearch.cen.eu/esearch/extendedsearch.aspx (see the entry "Cultural Heritage").

has become the language of reference for art and architecture in Europe.³ It may be noted, in fact, that most of the words in use in the English language in this field are of Latin or Italian origin, and through the mediation of English (preceded by French) they have established the world domination of traditional European terminology.

If, on the one hand, the imposition of a single code for heightening awareness and promoting cultural heritage may facilitate communication, in other respects it may present a serious risk to the very wealth of that cultural heritage, especially if we consider the extraordinary varieties of cultures and linguistic traditions in Europe and in other continents. Even within the European languages we are often hard put to find an equivalent lexical match for the word we wish to translate and are forced to fall back on an inadequate lexical term.

Communicating Italy's Cultural Heritage in Different Languages

Examples of Italy's determination to promote its cultural heritage are visible everywhere. It would be enough to visit the museums or exhibitions being staged in any of our country's major art cities to realize that Italy is making an extraordinary effort to communicate with foreign users in a host of different languages. Museum bookshops offer catalogues in several languages, or at least in Italian and English, while foreign language brochures and leaflets are available to illustrate a particular exhibition. The exceptional exhibition entitled "The Spring of the Renaissance" is a case in point. Held at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence from March 23 to August 18, 2013, it offered full brochures in languages as different as English, Russian and Chinese. 4 Obviously, city guidebooks or even specific publications on individual monuments or museums can be found in many languages, their presence or absence in the bookshops often reflecting changes in the influx of tourists from different countries. All this inevitably places a considerable burden on museum managers and exhibition curators who often lack both sufficient resources and time as well as experience difficulty in finding professional translators with expertise in the specific subjects and different languages. In this respect, our universities have been slow to offer targeted degree programmes

³ See the essay by M. Motolese (2012), which argues that Italian has become the language of reference for art and architecture in Europe.

⁴ Some versions, including the Russian (translated from English rather than Italian!) are available in print and online (Sebregondi 2013).

specializing in the study of language in relation to cultural heritage. With regard to education in the linguistic field, schools for tourist guides, often organized under the auspices of local government, play an important role. However, cultural heritage plus language is not systematically taught as one subject, and, at best, students partake in the knowledge accumulated through experience, especially by mother-tongue tourist guides who also work as teachers.

At the initiative of the same local governments, tourist information offices offer free materials, such as city maps, in different languages, while local monuments and places of cultural/artistic interest are generally flanked by the relevant information panels (in Italian and English).

The Paradigmatic Case of Florence

To appreciate the challenge of communicating cultural heritage in different languages today, let us examine the case of Florence, a city steeped in art and history and abounding in public and private museums visited all year round by tourists from the four corners of the world.

Its numerous kiosks, newsstands and bookstores offer guidebooks in different languages, translated from Italian and published locally. Major international publishers, however, are now moving into this market with their own publications, already available in their countries of origin, and usually translated from English into other languages (but mainly printed in China). A cursory look at the translations will reveal a series of errors and inaccuracies on the part of the translators (but sometimes even of the authors themselves), reflecting the hasty demands of superficial mass diffusion. Quality exhibition catalogues clearly come into a different category and are often accompanied by first-rate scientific articles, the translation of which however presents its own considerable challenges.

At times, the quality of the translations strays into the absurd, as in the case of the exhibition entitled "From the Icons to Malevich. Masterpieces from the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg," organized at Palazzo Pitti (2011) where the caption of a great icon of the Pantocrator read "Cristo onnireggente (Christ holding everything)," a "gem" due to the erroneous translation of the Russian *vsederžitel'* [вседержитель], a lexical calque of

⁶ We personally witnessed the complexity of the work involved when we participated in and coordinated the translation of the Italian-Russian bilingual catalogue for the exhibition realized in Florence for the Year of Russian culture in Italy and of Italian culture in Russia (Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana 2011).

 $^{^5}$ In Florence, the most widely used guide is one published by Bonechi (Florence), also available in Russian (Zotova, Katkova w/o yr.).

the Greek Pantocrator. This, of course, does not diminish the generous efforts of the management of museums or exhibitions, too often pressed by the constraints of time and resources and the limited availability of specialized translators.

In addition to the printed materials in different languages available at tourist information points, visitors can go online to the "Official Tourism Website of the Province and the Municipality of Florence," which is available in Italian, English and now Spanish (http://www.firenze turismo.it/it/), and download their own copies of the guidebooks and maps.

This rapidly evolving situation still seems at odds with the city's history. Starting from Vasari, Florence succeeded in creating a lexicon for cultural heritage, which through the Italian language greatly influenced the development of European cultures. We believe that the time is ripe to build on the experience of our forefathers and create a multilingual thesaurus of cultural heritage in Florence, and which could become a benchmark in this field.

The "Lexicon for Cultural Heritage" (LBC) Research Unit and the Multilingual Portal Project

In 2013, a research unit was set up in Florence for a "Multilingual Lexicon for Cultural Heritage" (LBC), bringing together researchers and lectors from the University of Florence, in partnership with other universities and foundations, with the aim of promoting, planning and conducting studies, research and other activities on the vocabulary of different languages relevant to our cultural heritage. The working group aims primarily to create a website for cultural heritage terminology dedicated to the city of Florence. Seven languages are to be taken into consideration, which are, in alphabetical order: Chinese, English, French, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, while the reference language for building the lexicon remains Italian.

After carefully considering the complex organizational and methodological issues related to this project, we have identified two initial steps designed to link the heritage of the past with its contemporary reinterpretation.

The first step involves studying ancient and modern translations of Vasari's *Lives* as a key work in describing this heritage, as well as the first and most comprehensive attempt to codify the artistic life of Florence and the Italian Renaissance. The research will examine translations into all

seven languages with the idea to create an initial database.⁷ The second step involves creating a database of the lexicon used in certain guidebooks of Florence available in different languages (and also as Ebooks) along with illustrative materials of exhibitions and the websites of museums in Florence. This material is effectively the most common form of presenting the city, but it does not always reflect the standards of the consolidated historical lexicon, and the inaccuracies and errors contained in it have never been analysed.⁸

We have already presented these initial steps in seminars and meetings to Italian and foreign colleagues, arousing considerable interest as well as offers of cooperation. Such positive reactions have encouraged us to expand our research unit and forge proactive relationships with other institutions in the field of lexicographical research.

The databases collected will be used to build a website containing comparative multilingual lexicographic descriptions regarding the cultural heritage of Florence. Although we initially indicated that the source languages would be Chinese, French, English, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, with Italian as the language of reference, we cannot rule out, including other languages in the future. In particular, the word list will consider:

- (1) Common names related to cultural heritage (Florentine or present in Florence).
- (2) Proper nouns referring to Florence and its history (historical realia, titles of works, place names, etc.).
- (3) Frequent collocations and syntagmas.

This project is intended as a dictionary of "language" and sets out to describe words and their meanings and facilitate their translation through internal links from one language to another. The architecture of the dictionary, however, has been designed to highlight the relationship that exists between the words selected and the referents and connotations that they have acquired in the history of the city of Florence.⁹

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⁷ For a more detailed presentation see Garzaniti & Farina (2013), where we offer a bibliography of translations of Vasari in the Romance languages.

⁸ See Garzaniti and Farina (2013), wherein we offer a bibliography of the various versions of the Bonechi guide.

⁹ For a detailed discussion see Garzaniti and Farina (2013).

Complexities and Problems in Corresponding Terms in Italian and Russian

Both linguists and those dealing with translations are aware of the difficulties that arise when translating cultural heritage texts from Italian to Russian and vice versa. First, it must be pointed out that, over centuries, the Russian language has developed its own terminology of ecclesiastical architecture; although in the same current of European culture, this reflects its traditional belonging to the Christian East. This involves significant differences that are sometimes disguised as "false friends."

A few examples will help to highlight these differences and point to the challenges posed by translating them. The term *sobor* [co6op], etymologically similar to our "collegiate church," is generally used to convey both "cathedral" and "basilica." In fact, Russian cities, such as Moscow and its Kremlin, may feature different church buildings with this same name, while in the Western tradition in a diocese there is only a "cathedral" in the capital town—namely, the place of worship that houses the bishop's official throne.

The term *altar'* [алтарь] corresponds to our "presbytery," while our "altar" corresponds to other Russian equivalents, such as *prestol* [престол] or *trapeza* [трапеза], which then took on other meanings, and in its function as an "oblation table" in the word *žertvennik* [жертвенник]. However, if we consult one of the popular bilingual Italian-Russian, Russian-Italian dictionaries (Kovalev 2007), under the entry *altar* we are likely to find the wrong Italian equivalent, "altare." To find a better translation and a more detailed explanation we must refer to more specialized bilingual dictionaries only available in French (Roty 1983; Castaing 1993), or otherwise use specialized dictionaries in Russian, published only recently (Plužnikov 1995; Skljarevskaja 2007).

There is a more subtle difference between the Italian "ambone" and the Russian *amvon* [амвон], both of which come from the same Greek root and refer to a building with the same function. In the Eastern Christian tradition, however, this building has a very different shape. Then again, we may find terms of different origins referring to the same realia, although of different shapes. A good example of this is the Italian "tabernacolo" which should be translated into Russian as *darochranitel'nica* [дарохранительница], as dictionaries have generally attested. Today, several translators prefer the calque from the Latin *tabernacula* [табернакула], but only with reference to the Western tradition.

Two different terms are used in Russian to designate "battistero": baptisterij [баптистерий] and kreščal'nja [крещальня], the first an

obvious loan from Greek, the second a derivation from the term *krest* [крест] "cross," hence the term *kreščenie* [крещение], which means "baptism." Both refer to the building, but if it is a building that does not belong to the Orthodox tradition: the loan *baptisterij* is preferable. Again, for the term "campanile" we can find two nouns in Russian: *zvonnitsa* [звонница] and *kolokol'nja* [колокольня], but this time they refer to two different types of architecture, of which only the second is an equivalent to "bell tower" and can be used, for example, to define Giotto's bell tower. We will not dwell on other terms of ecclesiastical architecture that should be placed in the broader context of Russian religious and philosophical vocabulary (Garzaniti 2011).

In the more specific context of art history, other difficulties may arise. An interesting example is the word "pittore," which in Italian refers both to an artist who paints pictures and to a painter who decorates houses. The Russian language offers a great variety of terms, from the generic *hudožnik* [художник] to the more technical term *živopisets* [живописец], which, in turn, has replaced the even older *ikonopisets* [иконописец], a painter of icons. To indicate house painters, Russian has borrowed from the German *Mahler* to produce *maljar* [маляр], but, in turn, this can also mean "bad painter" referring to the first meaning. This is just to illustrate how the Russian terms reflect the complex history of the language, with its Byzantine heritage and evolution in the context of modern and contemporary European culture, and how it can only be studied through extensive research on the basis of a series of historical and etymological dictionaries ¹⁰

If we consider the different translations of Vasari's *Lives* made in Russia since the mid-nineteenth century, and which we are currently working on, we can observe a great variety of styles and lexical choices. For example, already in the translation of the title of the *Life of Giotto* made in the 1930s and 1950s, we can identify a number of interesting lexical differences that require careful analysis (Vazari 1995; 1956–71).

Original text:

VITA DI GIOTTO, Pittore, Scultore et Architetto Fiorentino.

Translation by Ju. Verchovskij (1933):

Žizn' Džotto, živopisca, vajatelja i zodčego florentijskogo.

Translation by A. I. Venediktov:

Žizneopisanie Džotto, florentijskogo živopisca, skul'ptora i architektora.

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¹⁰ There is a long list of available dictionaries. We cite just a few of the main ones, for instance Vasmer (1953–58), and Sreznevskij (1893–1906).

Of course, traditional dictionaries do not offer much space for toponyms or anthroponyms, generally offering only the top names. If we look at toponyms and anthroponyms related to the city of Florence and its cultural heritage, we find certain differences in their transcription into the Cyrillic alphabet. The transliteration of the article "del" in the names of Italian artists is a case in point. Andrea del Sarto can be transliterated with Andrea del' Sarto [Андреа дель Capto], but also Andrea del'-Sarto [Андреа дель-Сарто] or, more rarely, with Andrea del Sarto [Андреа дел Captol. The artists' names may be transliterated in different ways: Masaccio as Mazaččo [Мазаччо] or Mazaččio [Мазаччио], or Baccio as Baččo [Баччо] or Baccio [Баччио]. The name Pisanello appears in the forms Pizanello [Пизанелло], closer to the correct pronunciation, and Pisanello [Писанелло]. In the toponyms we find the bridge Ponte alla Carraia as Ponte alla Karraia [Понте алла Карраиа] or Ponte-alla-*Karraia* [Понте-алла-Карраиа], with the use of so-called "defis" [(hyphen]. In other cases, a part of the place name is translated as *Dvorec Pitti* [Дворец Питти], but also *Palacco Pitti* [Палаццо Питти]. 11

The examples given here illustrate the need to reserve an important role in the lexical card of the multilingual portal to not only the grammatical description of the terms but also to their graphic forms and definitions, if possible with a reflection on the etymology that takes the origins and history of the word into account. Quotations from the original literature as well as from translations are equally important. The analysis of the vocabulary used in guidebooks, where we can check errors and inaccuracies, as well as the vocabulary used in electronic resources, illustrates how linguistic usage is constantly evolving, sometimes in contradiction with the standard literary language. Neither a bilingual nor a monoligual dictionary can adequately address these issues—they require a thorough job and specific research, and, if left untreated, can lead to mistakes and misunderstandings that will inevitably be reflected in the communication and understanding of cultural heritage.

Current Status of the Work and Expected Developments

The website will be an Open Access website, and will be dedicated especially to those working in the field of cultural heritage, from museum directors through to publishers of catalogues and guides. Its purpose is to raise the quality of the way Florence's cultural heritage is communicated and disseminated, creating a model that can be adapted and used for any

¹¹ For a discussion of the issue we mention only I. V. Nečaeva's study (2011).

other city. In a second step we will be able to offer specific advice to operators in the sector for translations of texts.

In the future, depending on the available human and financial resources, we plan to develop new initiatives, extending the database to new guides or catalogues, but also to travel literature in Italy and Florence. In this perspective, the project may interact with the important initiative proposed by O. Karpova and her school of lexicography, which aims to compile a dictionary entitled "Florence in the Works of World Famous People." This dictionary will contain entries devoted to celebrated travellers, highlighting the role that their stays in Florence played in their lives and work (Karpova 2013).

The initial investigation reveals that there are no such projects involving the lexicon of cultural heritage either in Italy or abroad, especially in the multilingual field. This project will only come to fruition if there is effective synergy between research and cultural institutions in the framework of language skills and could represent an important advance in the communication and dissemination of cultural heritage. It will promote respect for different cultural traditions, of which language is the first witness, and at the same time foster dialogue and collaboration for the transmission of a heritage that future generations will only assimilate if it is communicated in a familiar language, by bringing words and ideas often considered the sole prerogative of specialists into their everyday lives.

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