

Article

# Shaping Italy as a Tourist Destination: Language, Translation, and the DIETALY Project (1919–1959)

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## Abstract

This article presents the initial findings of the DIETALY project (Destination Italy in English Translation Over the Years), which explores the role of language and translation in shaping Italy's international image as a tourist destination from the 1920s to the 1950s. Focusing on the national tourism agency ENIT, it analyses brochures, booklets and related materials produced for English-speaking markets during a period marked by Fascism, economic depression and post-war reconstruction. The study reveals that translation, localisation and adaptation were pivotal to ENIT's communication strategy, facilitating cultural representation and adapting discourse in response to cultural, political and market changes. A case study of the *Italy* brochure series (1920–1937) illustrates the transition from literal translations to more adaptive, market-sensitive forms of linguistic mediation, reflecting growing awareness of audience expectations in Britain and the United States. Alongside this historical inquiry, the DIETALY project is developing a database that systematises the metadata of these dispersed materials. Although still in progress, this database is designed to support future qualitative and quantitative research, complementing the project's demonstration of how ENIT's multilingual discourse contributed to the construction of Italy's identity as an attractive tourist destination for international audiences.

**Keywords:** tourism promotion; tourism discourse; translation; localisation; transcreation; adaptation; cultural identity; Italy (1920s–1950s); digital humanities



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## 1. Introduction

Tourism has long been recognised as a phenomenon extending well beyond economic activity. It functions simultaneously as a socio-political instrument and a cultural practice, generating encounters and symbolic exchanges while shaping collective identities.

In Italy, one of the countries with the most developed tourist industries worldwide, tourism has long been interwoven with broader questions of cultural identity. Scholars such as Hom (2015) have argued that the tourist imagination, rooted in the tradition of the 17th- and 18th-century Grand Tour, played a pivotal role in Italy's development as a nation state. In this respect, the concept of Italy as a travel destination predates its political unification in 1861. How the country has presented itself to the rest of the world thus illuminates the interplay between cultural identity, socio-political change and economic motivations. It is at this intersection that the present article situates its analysis.

Building on this framework, the present article offers the initial results of the DIETALY research project (Destination Italy in English Translation Over the Years), funded by the Italian Ministry of Research and Universities as a national interest initiative. Focusing on the period from the 1920s to the 1950s, the study traces the development of Italy's

institutional tourism communication in English, paying particular attention to the work of ENIT, the national tourism agency, founded in 1919. By examining promotional language, translation strategies, and multimodal practices such as brochures, posters, photographs, and radio broadcasts, the project demonstrates how an international image of Italy was constructed so that it was resilient enough to withstand political upheaval, economic crises, and the trauma of war.

At the heart of the project lies the analysis of English-language materials produced for an international readership, primarily British and American at the time, which were translated and/or adapted using a variety of strategies. By examining how these texts were adapted for their intended audiences, it becomes possible to trace the gradual refinement of institutional approaches to tourism communication. Notably, this refinement involved recognising not only linguistic differences but also the cultural expectations of foreign visitors. This perspective enables us to observe how translation and other forms of linguistic mediation sustained tourist interest, even during periods of political and economic instability. The study also emphasises the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates tourism studies, linguistics, translation studies, and history.

Italy provides a particularly rich case for studying how language and translation have shaped international understandings of place. The creation of ENIT in 1919 was not only a response to economic needs but also a cultural and political project: to articulate, in multiple languages, an attractive and coherent image of the country for audiences worldwide. Yet despite the centrality of language in this mission, many analyses of Italian tourism history have focused on institutional structures, political contexts, or economic outcomes, paying relatively little attention to the linguistic labour underpinning the production of brochures, booklets, and posters, material that played a key role in constructing how Italy was perceived across different countries and cultural contexts.

Adopting a diachronic perspective, the DIETALY research project identifies continuities and ruptures across decades of radical transformation. The interwar years were shaped by the consolidation of Fascist rule and the impact of the 1929 economic depression, both of which had a profound effect on tourist flows. The Second World War brought international travel to an abrupt halt. However, the post-war decades saw tourism revived as a pillar of economic reconstruction and a means of rebranding Italy in accordance with democratic values. Examining this period diachronically reveals not only the evolution of institutional tourism communication but also broader processes of cultural negotiation through which Italy sought to maintain its international appeal while overcoming ideological constraints.

This article illustrates the innovative contribution of the DIETALY project, with particular reference to its investigation of tourist materials produced by ENIT in English between the 1920s and the 1950s. It begins with a theoretical discussion of tourism promotion as a means of shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations, focusing on Italy's representation for international audiences. A methodological section follows, highlighting the limited attention paid to linguistic aspects in tourism studies and introducing the project's interdisciplinary approach, which integrates perspectives from tourism studies and translation studies. The article concludes with a case study from the project: an analysis of the *Italy* brochure, published in multiple versions in English between 1920 and 1937, and a brief presentation of the DIETALY database, a digital resource currently in progress, which organises the metadata of a corpus of promotional materials and supports future comparative and interdisciplinary research.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Tourism Promotional Material as Mediator of the Tourist Gaze

Tourism promotion has long relied on material designed to shape the tourist gaze through brochures, leaflets, flyers, postcards, posters and other printed ephemera (Dilley, 1986; Dann, 1996). These artefacts serve not only as marketing tools but also as cultural mediators, interpreting one culture in terms that are understandable to another, and creating images of destinations that both inform and entice. Brochures, in particular, have traditionally been the main way of raising awareness, providing information, and creating a desire to visit a place (Getz & Sailor, 1993; Zhou, 1997). Their highly visual nature enables them to present not only factual details but also to conjure expectations and imaginings of the 'Other', the exotic and the authentic (Scarles, 2004; Hillman, 2007; Urry & Larsen, 2011). In this respect, tourist promotional material mediates the tourist gaze, enabling potential visitors to consume the destination symbolically before the actual journey (Long & Robinson, 2009; Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011).

The notion of mediation is central to understanding this process. Following Peel and Sørensen's (2017, p. 50) description of guidebooks as a 'mediation of understanding', tourism promotional media can also be viewed as technologies reflecting the efforts of tourist institutions such as ENIT in interwar Italy, and the materials they produce. Jennings and Weiler (2006, p. 7) emphasise the fluidity of mediation, describing it as an in-between state. The challenge lies in striking a balance between proximity and distance: while tourists require novelty to maintain the allure of travel, they also seek familiarity to ensure understanding, as Feldman and Skinner (2018, p. 11) point out. Effective mediation negotiates this tension, offering a sense of cultural accessibility without entirely dissolving the sense of difference.

The way in which mediation is conceptualised in tourism studies has been greatly influenced by Cohen's (1985) typology of the guide's role as pathfinder, animator, mediator and communicator. The latter two functions are particularly pertinent here. Weiler and Black (2015, pp. 32–43) later expanded upon this framework, emphasising mediation's capacity to guide tourist experiences more broadly. These perspectives remind us that the tourist gaze is never static; it evolves in response to socio-historical circumstances and the forms of mediation employed, whether by guides, institutions, or promotional materials. In the interwar period, brochures and other print media were the primary means through which tourist organisations such as ENIT sought to manage expectations and construct images of places.

Getz and Sailor (1993) identified three main functions within the typology of tourism brochures: informational, promotional, and 'lure'. Most publications combine elements of the latter two, presenting factual content while simultaneously shaping symbolic associations that are intended to influence the choice of destination (Anastasiadou & Migas, 2013, p. 124). Their strength lies in their ability to generate anticipation and desire before travel, an especially potent effect given the intangible nature of tourism experiences. However, brochures have also been criticised for being static and one-directional media, lacking the interactivity of digital platforms (Wang et al., 2012). Contemporary marketing trends emphasise customisation and personalisation, enabling tourism suppliers to tailor their messages to individual preferences and transform generic destination images into personalised experiences (Huffman & Kahn, 1998). While this shift reflects twenty-first-century technological advances, earlier institutions such as ENIT were already exploring rudimentary forms of customisation. Working mainly with fixed print media, ENIT had to experiment with ways of presenting Italy that were both accessible and appealing to different foreign audiences.

Seen in this light, the brochure emerges not as a neutral conveyor of information but as a mediating device through which cultural meaning is constructed and tourist expectations are negotiated. Its effectiveness rests on balancing familiarity with novelty, proximity with distance, accessibility with alterity. For ENIT in the 1920s and 1930s, this challenge was compounded by the absence of formalised marketing strategies: the agency had to experiment with ways of making its promotional texts accessible and persuasive for foreign audiences. Present-day practices of personalisation and customisation were pursued in the most basic form back then, through techniques such as localisation, adaptation and the earliest forms of 'transcreation' (Spinzi et al., 2018), as will be demonstrated in the concluding sections of this article. These techniques allowed the tourist discourse about Italy to be reinterpreted for potential visitors from abroad.

### 3. Historical Background: ENIT's Role in Constructing Destination Italy

#### 3.1. Projecting Italy Abroad: ENIT's Tourist Promotion and International Outreach

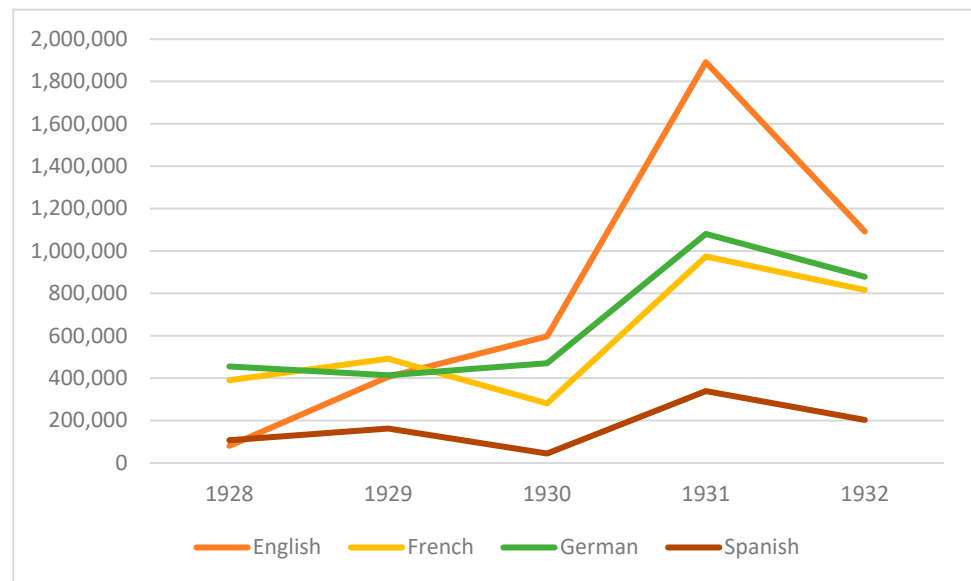
During the first half of the twentieth century, tourism in Italy was much more than just a commercial enterprise. It played a key role in shaping Italian cultural and social identity, particularly on the international stage. While Italy had long been associated with Rome's classical heritage and the Renaissance and romanticised landscapes of travel literature, in the early twentieth century, the country also sought to project a more modern image.

The establishment of ENIT in 1919 was a watershed moment for Italian tourism. Founded in the aftermath of the First World War, which had decimated tourism revenues, ENIT was charged with revitalising the sector and coordinating national promotional strategies. Following European precedents, notably the French *Office National du Tourisme*, its creation reflected the Italian state's recognition of tourism as an economic resource and a tool of cultural diplomacy. From the outset, ENIT engaged in foreign-language communication. Brochures were translated into multiple languages, including English, and distributed to embassies, consulates and railway offices abroad.

Podda (2025, pp. 16–21) has demonstrated that publications designed for foreign audiences constituted the majority of ENIT's output from the early 1920s onwards, a trend that became even more prevalent in the subsequent decade. In 1920, over half of the total print production (55% of around 1.7 million pages) was intended for international readers. By 1931, this figure had risen dramatically to 95%, equating to over 176 million pages (see also Syrjämaa, 1997, p. 396). Distribution patterns reveal a similar trend: in 1928, 78% of printed material was intended for circulation abroad, rising to 87% by 1932. Podda (2025) argues that the sharp increase in foreign-language editions in 1931 was part of a deliberate strategy to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn following the 1929 crisis, which had reduced international travel. As the 1931 ENIT annual report reveals, the increase in foreign-language print runs between 1929 and 1931 (see Figure 1) was explicitly linked to efforts to counter the sharp decline in international tourist numbers caused by the global economic depression. The surge in English-language materials reflected a particular focus on the American market, with a significant increase in the number of brochures produced for that audience. This focus was closely tied to ENIT's promotional activities surrounding the opening of its New York office in February 1931 (ENIT, 1931, pp. 30–31).

Notably, English-language publications far outstripped those in other languages, including French, which was still Europe's main lingua franca at the time. The primary factor behind this preference was not linguistic, despite the fact that English had gained greater international currency after the First World War, a development that was facilitated by the trade policies of Britain and the United States. Rather, ENIT's decision to prioritise English over French was driven by competitive considerations: France was Italy's closest rival in the tourist sector, offering comparable attractions and services, and was therefore

not expected to generate substantial tourist numbers. English was thus adopted primarily to reach two key markets: Britain, with its long-standing tradition of continental travel, and the United States, whose potential was becoming increasingly recognised. However, from the mid-1930s, the balance shifted. Fascist ideology began to erode Italy's appeal among British travellers, while political tensions appeared to affect American tourists less directly, making the United States a central focus of ENIT's promotional strategy (Podda, 2025, pp. 25–26). However, this reorientation towards the American market was short-lived, as the outbreak of the Second World War brought international tourism across Europe to an abrupt halt.



**Figure 1.** The data was extracted from the *Relazioni dell'Ente* and refers to the number of publications found from 1928 to 1932.

From the early 1920s to the mid-1930s, ENIT had started to supplement its linguistic and editorial strategies by investing in international advertising campaigns in popular foreign newspapers and magazines. These initiatives were supported by the gradual establishment of a network of overseas offices. By 1921, ENIT had a presence across Europe, and in 1931, it opened an office in New York to target the growing American market. This development coincided with the agency's broader shift towards English-language promotion, highlighting the strategic importance of the United States at a time when the number of European tourists was beginning to decline. The opening of the New York office in particular demonstrates ENIT's understanding that effective publicity can generate demand for tourism rather than merely respond to it.

### 3.2. Negotiating Italy's International Image: ENIT in the Fascist and Post-War Periods

The consolidation of Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s presented ENIT with new challenges. The regime viewed tourism as an economic necessity and a means of spreading national propaganda. While domestic promotion increasingly reflected Fascist ideology, an alternative approach was required for international communication: scholars such as Syrjämaa (1997) have demonstrated that ENIT's foreign-language publications contained relatively little explicit ideological content. This reflected the strategic awareness that overt political messaging could alienate foreign visitors, whose economic contributions were vital to Italy's balance of payments.

ENIT's English-language materials emphasised stability, modernity, and cultural richness. Italy was presented as both ancient and contemporary: a nation with a rich classical

heritage that was also embracing technological progress (De Bonis, 2025). References to new transport infrastructure, modern hotels and sports facilities were combined with iconic images of Rome, Florence and Venice to present Italy as both timeless and forward-looking. This approach enabled the regime to promote the country's appeal to international audiences while avoiding the more controversial aspects of Fascist rule.

Consequently, English-language materials often downplayed overt rhetoric, instead emphasising cultural heritage, natural beauty, hospitality and, notably, the ideal climate. This reflected the balancing act required of tourism promoters, who had to align with the regime's broader policies while ensuring Italy's international image remained attractive. While not entirely free from ideological influence, the resulting discourse prioritised economic pragmatism and cultural diplomacy over overt propaganda.

However, the political context remained present. The establishment of the *Commissariato Generale per il Turismo* in the early 1930s, chaired by Mussolini himself, illustrates the regime's determination to centralise control over tourism (Berrino, 2011). Radio was also enlisted: in 1927, ENIT collaborated with the national broadcaster to launch *Radiogiornale ENIT*, which provided tourist information in multiple languages (Fina, 2025). These initiatives demonstrate the regime's acknowledgement of the symbolic importance of tourism, despite the fact that ENIT's international message remained commercially focused.

The global economic crisis of 1929 further impacted tourism, reducing visitor numbers and prompting ENIT to intensify its promotional activities. American visitors, who tended to spend more during their stays, became more important, while the number of British visitors declined. Against this backdrop, as outlined in Section 3.1, ENIT expanded the print runs of its English-language promotional materials, with particular emphasis on targeting the American market. ENIT also adapted its approach accordingly, emphasising affordability, accessibility and modern comforts while continuing to promote Italy's cultural heritage (De Bonis, 2025).

The outbreak of the Second World War brought international tourism to a halt, as promotional campaigns were interrupted and the sector contracted dramatically. However, the war also marked a turning point, creating the conditions for Italy to reinvent its international image after the war. Promotional discourse distanced itself deliberately from Fascist rhetoric, focusing instead on cultural heritage, regional diversity, and hospitality. Representations extended beyond landscapes and monuments to include ordinary Italians, thereby conveying a more welcoming image of the nation.

The 1950s saw the emergence of the 'dolce vita', a narrative of relaxed elegance and a sensual lifestyle that quickly became an international symbol of Italian charm (Mattei, 2025). This imagery was promoted through films, magazines and tourism campaigns, reflecting the optimism of the post-war economic boom. ENIT itself was revitalised, renamed the *Ente Nazionale Italiano per il Turismo* (ENIT), and charged with coordinating all aspects of international promotion.

## 4. Materials and Methods

### 4.1. Tourism Studies and the Question of Language

Since the 1970s, the field of tourism studies has grown, drawing on the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, psychology, geography, management and economics, and each discipline has offered a unique perspective on how tourism reshapes communities and environments. However, a striking gap remains within this broad field: the systematic neglect of language and translation as integral dimensions of tourism (Agorni, 2025a). Although tourism is profoundly discursive, articulated through websites, promotional campaigns, brochures, guidebooks, museum texts, and the performances of guides and interpreters, research has often treated language as a transparent medium that is merely

instrumental to communication. However, language is not merely a channel of information but also a vehicle of representation and persuasion (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2017). Tourism promotion depends on carefully chosen words to stimulate desire, establish credibility, and reduce the perceived distance between travellers and destinations. When directed at international audiences, this process necessarily involves translation. Yet translation in tourism rarely involves straightforward transfer; rather, it requires adaptation, mediation and often creative rewriting to make landscapes, traditions and practices intelligible and attractive to foreign visitors (Katan, 2015).

Disregarding translation not only diminishes the role of language professionals and the institutions responsible for tourism communication but also obscures the processes by which local identities are negotiated for global audiences. As critical discourse analysis has demonstrated (see Jaworski & Thurlow, 2012; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), discourse actively constructs as well as describes. In tourism, this construction involves decisions about what to highlight or omit, how to frame cultural specifics and which narratives to project internationally. Without acknowledging the fundamental role of language, tourism studies risk perpetuating a monolingual culturally biased interpretation of the phenomenon being analysed.

While recent work in translation studies, cultural studies and applied linguistics has begun to address this issue (Katan, 2016, 2021; Malamatidou, 2024), its integration with tourism research remains limited (Agorni, 2018a). The challenge lies in both the empirical aspect of collecting multilingual materials and the theoretical aspect of recognising that translation is integral to tourism rather than a supplementary service. This marginalisation is partly due to the fact that, while case studies often analyse tourism practices in various contexts around the world, the theoretical basis of tourism research is largely based on Western, Anglo-American traditions, which tend to operate under universalist, one-size-fits-all assumptions (see Ateljevic et al., 2007, 2011; Pritchard et al., 2011). Such approaches often fail to account for the linguistic and cultural diversity in these contexts, where languages other than English are spoken and, crucially, cultural norms and traditions differ significantly. Recognising this imbalance allows us to explore how translation and linguistic mediation are not merely technical tools but critical practices that intersect with ideology, power, and identity within the global tourism sector.

In institutional contexts, the stakes are particularly high. The communication produced by ENIT and its partners was not only informative but also pivotal in shaping Italy's international image. The selection of aspects to be promoted, word choice, narrative framing, textual organisation, the function and quality of images, and the translation of cultural references all contributed to Italy's portrayal as a land of timeless beauty and modern vitality. If handled poorly, language could undermine tourist interest or perpetuate stereotypes. Conversely, if managed effectively, it could increase desirability and influence tourist flows.

The DIETALY project provides a means of systematically studying these processes. By collecting, organising and analysing dispersed sources, it enables the study of tourism discourse over time and highlights the role of language and translation in shaping Italy's international image (Mauro, 2025). DIETALY's key contribution is demonstrating that language and translation strategies are central to understanding how destinations acquire symbolic value in the tourist imagination, rather than being peripheral.

However, despite its importance, the linguistic aspect of tourism promotion has historically been overlooked, and this continues to be the case today, with translation and linguistic mediation remaining largely invisible. The names of translators working for ENIT were rarely recorded, and no evidence of the agency's instructions to them has survived, which makes it difficult to assess the extent of individual agency within

an institutional framework (on this topic, see [Kang, 2009](#)). Nevertheless, it is plausible that these translators followed internal directives, adhering to pre-established guidelines and frequently recycling materials produced by ENIT itself. Therefore, their contribution should be understood less as an expression of individual agency and more as a component of a broader collaborative process. This lack of visibility is consistent with a recurring theme in translation studies: the frequently overlooked role of translators and their work ([Venuti, 1995](#); [Emmerich, 2013](#); [Davier, 2014](#)). This pattern is particularly evident in the case of ENIT, where extensive attention has been given to its visual materials ([Barrese, 2020](#); [Ciafrei & Feudo, 2021](#)), but its foreign-language textual communication has yet to undergo systematic examination.

It has therefore been very difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether ENIT's texts were produced by professional translators, language experts or more informal language mediators, as most of the materials do not mention the names of the translators or the authors of the source texts. However, analysis of ENIT materials over the decades confirms that tourism promotion was considered anything but secondary or purely commercial. Rather, it was a central activity in which Italian identity was articulated and negotiated for an international audience. By tracing how language and translation were used in this process, DIETALY reveals how Italy balanced cultural representation, political ideology and social and economic needs.

#### *4.2. DIETALY's Interdisciplinary Perspective*

The DIETALY project demonstrates that analysing tourism promotion requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates linguistic, translational, historical and tourism perspectives ([Agorni, 2025b](#)). By examining brochures, posters, guidebooks, photographs and radio scripts, DIETALY reveals how Italy's tourist image was crafted for English-speaking audiences and how it evolved through turbulent decades. Tourism discourse emerges not as a series of discrete campaigns but as a continuum in which past strategies influence subsequent developments. For instance, analysis of ENIT tourism promotion over time reveals the persistence of certain narratives, such as the emphasis on Italy's classical heritage, hospitable climate and ever-changing landscapes, alongside notable shifts, from the nationalistic overtones of Fascism to the cosmopolitan optimism of the 1950s and 1960s ([Rossato, 2025](#)).

The project's methodological framework places language and mediation at its centre and is based on several principles. Firstly, it recognises discourse as constitutive rather than ancillary to tourism; tourists encounter a culture that is shaped through linguistic and semi-otic representation, rather than an unmediated one. Secondly, it foregrounds translation as a site of negotiation where cultural values, ideological positions and market imperatives intersect. Therefore, linguistic mediation should be considered a constitutive process in the creation of imaginaries through which destinations emerge as tourist sites, rather than a technical afterthought. Drawing on methodologies developed within translation studies and applied to tourism promotion ([Agorni, 2018a](#); [Katan, 2016, 2018](#); [Malamatidou, 2024](#)), this approach demonstrates that translation does far more than convey factual information: it frames cultural difference, mediates competing worldviews and shapes visitors' expectations. Applying this perspective to historical tourism material presents a number of unique challenges. Theoretical models and analytical tools designed for contemporary, multifaceted tourism discourse must be adapted for texts from the 1920s and 1930s, which demonstrate the early, relatively primitive stages of promotional communication. However, it is precisely through this lens that we can observe the gradual maturation of institutional practices in foreign-language tourism promotion, evolving from basic awareness of linguistic barriers to a more nuanced understanding of the cultural expectations of international

audiences. This historical trajectory illustrates ENIT's gradual evolution in learning to communicate more effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

This kind of integrated framework fosters productive dialogue between tourism and translation studies. The former gains in-depth knowledge of the negotiation of meaning across languages, while the latter benefits from examining a field in which translation is institutionalised, public, and deeply ideological. By foregrounding the role of translation, tourism studies can explore how identities are shaped not only by local practices but also by outsiders' perceptions. Even contemporary issues such as authenticity, heritage commodification and cultural sustainability cannot be fully understood without considering the mediating role of language and translation.

This type of interdisciplinary research clarifies how discursive strategies evolve historically, adapt to new media and shape perceptions of places in an increasingly mobile world. Incorporating language and translation into the conceptual core of tourism studies enables us to move beyond partial analyses that overlook the mediated nature of cultural encounters, and promotes a more comprehensive understanding of tourism as a global practice that is shaped by discourse as much as by economics, anthropology, or geography. Hence, by tracing how language and translation were mobilised in this process, DIETALY reveals how Italy balanced cultural representation, political ideology and social and economic needs. These dynamics are most clearly observable in the concrete promotional material, texts such as brochures, for example, that mediated Italy's image abroad. Examining these materials not only illuminates ENIT's strategies of cultural negotiation but also demonstrates how tourism promotion itself functioned as a practice of mediation, where translation, adaptation, and cultural interpretation were central to constructing a desirable destination image for international audiences.

## 5. Results and Discussion: Linguistic Mediation in Action

### 5.1. Promoting Tourism in a Foreign Language: Translation, Localisation and Transcreation

Promoting tourism in a foreign language never implies a straightforward transfer, as tourist discourse operates simultaneously as description, persuasion and cultural mediation, positioning destinations not only as geographical locations but also as imagined experiences. Examining ENIT's publicity materials over time provides a valuable opportunity to trace the evolution of these dynamics. Initially, when ENIT began systematically promoting Italy abroad, publicity materials were often based on Italian 'source texts' that were translated into other languages. However, as promotional campaigns evolved, the translated versions gradually diverged from the originals. This gradual movement along a continuum from translation to localisation and transcreation meant that the texts became increasingly independent in terms of style, tone and communicative perspective. This process situates tourism promotion at the intersection of translation and tourism studies, where language is recognised as a means of cultural adaptation and experiential construction.

Translation studies has long moved beyond an understanding of translation as linguistic equivalence. From functionalist perspectives to post-structuralist critiques, scholars have emphasised that translation is a culturally embedded act. Venuti's discussion of domestication and foreignisation (Venuti, 1995) demonstrates how translators negotiate cultural differences, either smoothing them away or emphasising them deliberately, depending on the communication objectives. This insight is particularly relevant to tourism, as destinations must be made legible to outsiders while retaining the sense of otherness that fuels desire. More recent developments have further expanded this understanding through the concepts of localisation and transcreation. Although these concepts originated in technological and marketing contexts, they are now proving useful for analysing tourist discourse.

Localisation, which originated in the translation of softwares (Esselink, 2000), involves adapting not only words but also extralinguistic elements, such as visuals, formats, and cultural references, for specific markets. Its function is pragmatic: to ensure usability and familiarity across cultural contexts. In tourism, localisation may involve practical adjustments, such as currency conversion and geographical clarification, as well as more subtle strategies, such as selecting images likely to attract foreign visitors. In this sense, localisation prepares the communicative ground by overcoming barriers to engagement and aligning promotional material with target audiences.

Transcreation represents a further step. As Katan (2018) and Agorni (2018b) emphasise, the objective in domains such as advertising or tourism is not to reproduce a message literally but rather to recreate its persuasive power. The focus is on evoking a similar response rather than maintaining semantic correspondence. Therefore, transcreation involves modulation, expansion, and narrative reinvention. In tourism, this means reimagining destinations to appeal to the cultural expectations and emotional responses of the target audience, even if this significantly departs from the original text.

As discussed in Section 2, tourists experience places through various forms of mediation, such as texts, images and narrative, that shape their perception of these places. Understanding these processes emphasises the significance of linguistic and cultural mediation as a conceptual framework for tourism promotion. The materials and messages that represent a place do not merely convey information; they actively shape how it is perceived. Within this framework, the tourism promotion analysed in this research can be understood as the deliberate shaping of these mediated perceptions, involving not only translation but also more complex forms of linguistic and cultural mediation, such as the provision of additional information based on presumed expectations of foreign tourists, the restructuring of brochures to offer coherent itineraries, and the progressive use of increasingly appealing images. Such interventions, whether linguistic, cultural, visual or structural/content-related, highlight how these choices play a pivotal role: translation provides access, localisation ensures usability, and transcreation enhances emotional appeal. Together, these processes establish language and other semiotic resources as a central component of the tourist experience, rather than merely an ancillary element.

The English-language versions of ENIT's *Italy* brochure illustrate this dynamic particularly clearly. First published in Italian in 1920, it soon became a model that was translated, reworked, and expanded across a series of editions, with images ranging from black-and-white drawings to art pictures and finally artistic black-and-white and then colour photographs. Examining these versions reveals how the balance between translation, localisation, and transcreation shifted over time as tourism promotion responded to evolving historical, political, and cultural priorities.

### 5.2. *Tourism Promotion and Linguistic Adaptation: ENIT's Italy Booklets, 1920–1937*

The small brochure, or booklet entitled *Italy*, which first appeared in a single Italian version in 1920, soon became the cornerstone of ENIT's international promotion, serving as a template for the multiple English-language editions republished in various revised forms across the following two decades. Examining these English-language editions of this series provides an instructive case study in how one source text was gradually reshaped to suit different audiences in different periods, as ENIT became increasingly aware of the need to adapt its message to the expectations of foreign readers.

Drawing on a more extensive overview published in Agorni (2025b), this discussion explores a selection of versions between 1920 and 1937, focusing on issues of audience definition, linguistic quality, adaptation strategies, the provision of information, and itinerary guidance. Particular attention is paid to the Italian original of 1920 (hereafter *Italia A*), the

first English translations distributed in London and New York (*Italy* B1 and B2), the more adaptive version of the mid-1920s (*Italy* C), the British-oriented deluxe booklet of 1928 (*Italy* D, with its cheaper reprint *Italy* E1), the American edition of 1930 (*Italy* E2, echoed in *Italy* F2), the British itinerary-based version of 1931 (*Italy* F1, later revised as *Italy* G), and the final pre-war edition of 1937 (*Italy* H).

### 5.2.1. *Italia* A as Template

The Italian-language *Italia* A was published in folder form, with short sections presenting the country as modern and accessible. Once arduous and hazardous, travel was now said to be facilitated by reliable railways, new roads and maritime routes. Accommodation was described as comfortable and international, and the country's main attractions were categorised by theme: climate, art, cities, mountains, coastal resorts, lakes and spas. By contrast, the south of the country received only a cursory mention, restricted to Naples and Sicily.

Linguistically, the Italian text was rather impersonal, avoiding the use of the first person and referring to recipients as 'travellers', 'foreigners', or 'visitors'. Such vocabulary confirmed the booklet's international orientation, as did promotional passages that compared the Italian Riviera favourably with the damp and foggy North of Europe. Yet despite its international scope, *Italia* A lacked adaptation strategies: place names were simply listed without contextualisation, leaving foreign readers with little guidance on what to expect.

The black-and-white illustrations, closely tied to the text, seem to reinforce the publication's descriptive yet impersonal character. Overall, *Italia* A acted as a prototype, providing a basic framework that was subsequently translated, reworked and expanded for foreign audiences.

### 5.2.2. Early Translations: *Italy* B1 and B2

The first English versions, produced in 1921 for distribution in London (B1) and New York (B2) respectively, reveal the mechanics of translation. Despite having different covers, the two editions contained identical texts and illustrations. In practice, they were direct translations of *Italia* A, with only minor adjustments. The introduction was handled quite fluently and appears to have been translated by a native English speaker. For example, the emphatic description of Italy as: 'the shining destination for anyone with an artistic soul' (*Italia* A, p. 2, my literal translation) has been rephrased as 'a great attraction for everyone' (*Italy* B2, p. 3), producing a more accessible, albeit simplified, version.

However, the rest of the booklet followed the Italian too closely, sometimes at the cost of clarity. This unevenness suggests that ENIT only polished the opening pages, that is, those most likely to be read, while allowing the rest of the text to remain awkward. As Syrjämaa (1997, p. 146) has noted, ENIT generally prioritised quantity over quality, distributing millions of pages annually to an undefined readership in the hope of reaching potential tourists<sup>1</sup>. The B1 and B2 editions exemplify this approach, with translation being perfunctory rather than audience-centred.

### 5.2.3. From Translation to Adaptation: *Italy* C

By the mid-1920s, signs of change had emerged. Around 1923 or 1924, an edition (*Italy* C) replaced drawings with photographs and adopted a freer, more idiomatic style of English. The language was more fluid, the collocations more natural and the translation less bound to the Italian source text. Rather than laboriously reproducing every phrase, the text captured the essence in concise English, thereby enhancing readability.

Another innovation was the addition of an appendix depicting Italy's economic and cultural vitality. Agriculture, industry, libraries, and concert halls were presented alongside landscapes and climate, providing a more comprehensive picture of the country. This

adaptation signalled a growing awareness of foreign expectations: tourists were seeking evidence of Italy's progress and modernity, as well as scenery.

#### 5.2.4. A British Focus: *Italy D* and *E1*

The 1928 deluxe edition (*Italy D*) marked a turning point. The thematic sections were abandoned in favour of a structure that presented a kind of geographical itinerary, albeit still rather vague.

Even more striking, however, was the fact that it was explicitly targeting a British readership. For example, Naples was defended against negative stereotypes by being compared to familiar English cities: 'Italy's Liverpool, not Blackpool' (*Italy D*, p. 12). This rhetorical strategy appealed directly to British cultural references, acknowledging foreign criticism while reframing it.

For the first time, the text also adopted a conversational style, posing rhetorical questions to prospective tourists such as "Where would you advise me to go if I wanted to spend the winter in Italy?" (*Italy D*, p. 14). This shift from impersonal description to simulated dialogue made the publication more persuasive.

The author was Major W. Stormont, ENIT's London director, which explains both the idiomatic English and the culturally tailored comparisons. The deluxe format with colour illustrations reinforced its prestige. A cheaper reprint in 1930 (*Italy E1*) reproduced the same text, confirming the effectiveness of this British-oriented adaptation.

#### 5.2.5. Across the Atlantic: *Italy E2* and *F2*

In the same year (1930), ENIT produced its first explicitly American edition, labelled 'American Edition' on the cover. Unlike previous versions, this brochure offered detailed practical information on transatlantic sea routes, new air transport and new Italian motorways. Visitors were also informed about visa requirements and free access to museums and archaeological sites. This focus on logistics met the needs of Americans planning long trips, reflecting the strong belief of Luigi Rava, ENIT's first chairman, who, as early as 1926, said that ENIT should adapt its publications to meet American expectations (Syrjaama, p. 89).

While Italy's climate remained the main attraction, new themes also emerged. Sports such as skiing, golf and polo were highlighted, reflecting broader international trends in leisure. At the same time, however, Fascist colonial ambitions began to intrude, particularly in this American edition, which described North African territories in triumphalist terms. The military rhetoric in these passages reveals the growing influence of the Fascist government, although explicit references to the regime's ideology remained rare:

the civil work of the new colonists has been able to follow the military conquest of the Italian troops. The development of abandoned land is going on with courage and vigour. The natives now take an interest in the development of their property. Every inch of the redeemed soil is made profitable. (*Italy E2*, p. 30)

This American edition was reprinted in 1931 (*Italia F2*) with minor changes, maintaining the emphasis on practical details and information relating to long-distance travel.

#### 5.2.6. British Itineraries: *Italy F1* and *G*

Alongside the American adaptations, ENIT produced an edition aimed at the British market in 1931 (*Italy F1*). This edition offered a coherent itinerary from north to south, starting in Piedmont and passing through Lombardy and Veneto, then continuing through central Italy to Naples, Sicily, and, for the first time, Sardinia. This geographical structure offered foreign readers a clear narrative of travelling through the peninsula.

The second half of the booklet contained extensive practical information, particularly regarding sports. Golf, skiing, polo and fox hunting were emphasised, indicating ENIT's

intention to promote Italian destinations as places where affluent British tourists could enjoy such activities. References to colonialism were absent, probably to avoid alienating readers who were less sympathetic to Fascist expansionism.

However, despite these advances in structure and adaptation, the language used was surprisingly formal. The style was sophisticated yet somewhat dated, which undermined its appeal to a broad British audience.

A revised version from around 1933–1934 (*Italy G*) addressed this issue. The itinerary was retained but presented in fluent English, evidently written by a native speaker. Additional details enriched the descriptions: for instance, Trieste was presented as Italy's primary port, and the historic burials in Ravenna and the carnival in Viareggio were mentioned. Southern regions such as Calabria and Apulia were included for the first time, thus broadening the geographical coverage.

The practical appendix was expanded, and the inclusion of sports again suggested a British audience. Overall, Italy was portrayed as both modern and traditional: efficient in terms of transport, yet still offering 'old-fashioned cordiality' (*Italy G*, p. 12).

#### 5.2.7. A Pre-War Perspective: *Italy H*

The final edition considered here, published in 1937 (*Italy H*), presented a polished itinerary moving from South to North. The language was fluent and featured clichés and collocations that have become familiar in tourism discourse, and are still in use today, such as "a paradise of blue and green" (*Italy F1*, p. 6); "noble history and age-long traditions" (*Italy F1*, p. 20). However, unlike earlier editions, it offered minimal practical information, providing only a stylised motorway map.

References to sport and climate were reduced, with the focus returning to cultural and scenic highlights. Fascist ideology appeared only in muted form, emphasising Italy's order and discipline rather than totalitarian doctrine. This restraint may have been deliberate, designed not to deter the small number of British and American tourists who were still willing to visit Italy on the eve of war.

### 5.3. Chronological Overview of ENIT's Mediation Strategies

The preceding analysis examined key editions of ENIT's Italy brochures, highlighting a gradual shift from literal translation to increasingly sophisticated mediation. Table 1 provides a chronological overview of the series, summarising the main editions, their intended audiences and the principal adaptation strategies to complement the detailed discussion. By organising the information in a single framework, the table makes it easier to appreciate patterns of continuity and change over the seventeen-year period, illustrating the progressive shift from literal translation towards more complex, audience-centred mediation. The table captures the interplay of language, itinerary structure, content inclusion and visual presentation, demonstrating how successive editions combined these elements to shape perceptions of Italy and treat tourism promotion as a gradually customised act of mediation from an early stage.

**Table 1.** Evolution of ENIT's *Italia* Brochures (1920–1937).

Edition & Date	Main Target/Distribution	Linguistic Strategies	Structural/Layout Changes	Added/Revised Content	Visual Choices
Italia A (1920)	Italian original—international orientation	Impersonal style; recipients referred to as “travellers”, “foreigners”; no adaptation for foreign readers	Thematic sections (climate, art, cities, mountains, etc.); the south is barely mentioned	Minimal contextual info; simple lists of places	Black-and-white illustrations tied closely to text
B1 & B2 (1921) London & New York	Direct translation of <i>Italia A</i>	Only opening pages are linguistically polished; uneven fluency	Retained <i>Italia A</i> 's thematic structure	No additional info for foreign readers	Same black-and-white illustrations as the Italian version
C (c. 1923–1924)	English-speaking audiences (general)	Freer, more idiomatic English; collocations more natural; translation less literal	Same basic sections but smoother text flow	New appendix on Italy's economic & cultural vitality (agriculture, industry, libraries, concert halls) to show progress & modernity	Replaced drawings with photographs for greater appeal
D (1928, deluxe British edition)	Explicitly aimed at British tourists	Conversational tone; rhetorical Q&A; culturally tailored comparisons (e.g., “Naples: Italy's Liverpool, not Blackpool”)	Shift from thematic to loose geographical itinerary	Content reframed to address British stereotypes; more persuasive copy	Colour illustrations, deluxe booklet; prestige format
E1 (1930, cheaper British reprint)	British tourists	Same idiomatic & tailored text as D	Same as D	Same content	Lower-cost reprint, same visuals
E2 (1930, “American Edition”)	US tourists	Idiomatic English; practical, informative style	Retained itinerary elements but with a stronger focus on logistics	Added detailed travel info: transatlantic routes, air & road transport, visa info, free museum access; promoted sports (skiing, golf, polo); introduced colonial rhetoric on North Africa	Similar to D but adapted captions; visuals emphasised modern transport
F1 (1931, British itinerary-based)	British tourists	More formal, somewhat dated English; still clear	Fully coherent north-to-south itinerary including Sardinia; second half devoted to practical info	Emphasis on British leisure sports: golf, skiing, polo, fox-hunting; omitted colonial references	High-quality photos; maintained a prestigious look
F2 (1931, American reprint)	US tourists	Similar to E2, minor changes	Same as E2	Retained emphasis on long-distance travel & practical details	Similar visuals to E2
G (c. 1933–1934, revised British)	British tourists	Fluent English by native speaker, less formal than F1	Retained itinerary but expanded regional coverage (e.g., Calabria, Apulia)	Richer descriptions: e.g., Trieste as main port; Ravenna burials, Viareggio carnival; appendix expanded; sports retained	High-quality photographs; attractive layout
H (1937, final pre-war)	British & American tourists (general)	Fluent, idiomatic English using tourism clichés (“paradise of blue and green”, “noble history and age-long traditions”)	Itinerary reversed: South → North; minimal practical info	Focus on cultural & scenic highlights, reduced sport and climate sections; Fascist ideology muted, stressing order & discipline	Stylised motorway map, polished visual style; fewer practical illustrations

## Commentary

Table 1 illustrates the development of ENIT's Italy brochures, showing a gradual shift from literal translation to more sophisticated, audience-focused mediation. The Italian original (*Italia A*, published in 1920) offered a thematic, impersonal template with limited guidance for foreign readers. The first English editions (B1/B2, 1921) closely followed this model with only minor linguistic adjustments and unchanged illustrations, prioritising rapid dissemination over reader engagement. By the mid-1920s (C), adaptation became more apparent. The English prose became freer and more idiomatic, drawings were replaced with photographs and the appendices emphasised Italy's cultural and economic vitality, reflecting a growing awareness of foreign expectations. The late-1920s British editions (D/E1) introduced more coherent itineraries, a conversational tone, culturally tailored references and colour illustrations, marking a shift towards a coherent narrative and a more persuasive visual presentation. From 1930, ENIT explicitly segmented audiences: American editions (E2/F2) emphasised practical travel information and leisure activities, whereas British versions (F1/G) expanded itineraries and descriptions while maintaining idiomatic fluency. The final pre-war edition (H, 1937) prioritised cultural and scenic experiences, provided streamlined practical guidance and employed polished, idiomatic English. Together, these changes show how ENIT progressively integrated linguistic, structural, visual and informational strategies, treating tourism promotion as a complex, increasingly complex and tailored act of mediation.

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis of ENIT's multilingual promotional activity reveals that Italy's international image was not fixed but rather the result of an ongoing mediation across linguistic, social and cultural boundaries. Translation, localisation, adaptation and transcreation functioned as strategies through which Italy positioned itself abroad, allowing ENIT to address the evolving expectations of English-speaking audiences. The relative absence of ideological content in English-language texts highlights how language was selectively used to adapt national narratives for foreign audiences. At the same time, the gradual shift towards more adaptive translation practices demonstrates an increasing awareness of the importance of market-specific persuasion in tourism discourse.

Within this framework, the DIETALY project views tourism communication as a laboratory in which translation and linguistic mediation are key to promoting Italy as a tourist destination to foreign audiences. The production of English-language materials demonstrates ENIT's collective agency and illustrates the progressive refinement of strategies for adapting promotional content to the linguistic and cultural expectations of international visitors. Rather than being secondary operations, translation and cultural adaptation strategies appear to be constitutive forces in the development of Italy's tourism promotion, which is traced here from its formative, experimental stages. Recognising tourism discourse as a site of negotiation between ideology, economy and culture opens up new avenues for interdisciplinary research, connecting translation studies, tourism studies and cultural history.

To preserve and extend this perspective, the project has developed the DIETALY database, a digital tool that systematises the metadata of the dispersed body of materials collected, which is now accessible at: <https://pric.unive.it/projects/dietaly/database>, accessed on 28 August 2025. By indexing over 600 brochures, magazines, and other promotional texts through more than thirty metadata fields, the database provides scholars and students with a resource for qualitative and quantitative research. It facilitates customised exploration of bibliographic descriptions and tourism-specific categories, such as tour type, promoted area, and presence of visual elements. Making the metadata searchable

and cross-referenced enables researchers to trace patterns over time, in different locations, languages and genres, and to reconstruct how Italy was presented to foreign audiences.

Looking ahead, the database's potential lies not only in its role as a record of Italy's tourism promotion but also in its comparative value. It paves the way for cross-national studies of tourism discourse and invites parallels with similar initiatives or collections relating to other countries, particularly in Europe, where comparable historical developments occurred. Such comparisons could shed light on how different countries used language, imagery and ideology to shape their international appeal.

Ultimately, the database is a valuable resource for studying the interplay of language, translation and ideology in tourism promotion and lays the groundwork for future projects incorporating computational methods. The DIETALY project thus demonstrates the potential benefits of combining historical research, translation studies and digital humanities to study tourism communication and of using modern tools to re-examine a multilingual past.

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup> According to the annual report, *Relazione dell'Ente* 1928, ENIT began to prioritise the quality of its publications over their quantity from 1927 onward. This was based on the recognition that a superior standard in text, illustrations, and design would substantially enhance their effectiveness.

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