TOURISM DISCOURSE - A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF TOURISM WEBSITES

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Abstract: *This paper aims to analyze tourism websites from a linguistic perspective and distinguish the main features of tourism discourse. As the main goal of any tourism website is to attract potential customers, specific linguistic patterns are being used to capture attention, maintain interest, generate desire, and ultimately get the desired action. Starting from the assumption that language choice is not a random one, we focus on the linguistic component across our sample in order to identify how tourism discourse serves promotional purposes, and what kind of communication strategies are used to achieve this aim.*

Keywords: *tourism, website, discourse, language*

Introduction

Tourism is presently one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. According to UNWTO, international tourists arrivals grew by 5% in 2013 to 1.087 billion, and a growth of between 4% and 4, 5% in 2014 is forecast.

As tourism has established as one of the most prolific businesses worldwide, tourism discourse finds itself as being one of the most widespread public discourses. Tourism discourse generally aims to meet the classical requirements of advertising discourse, to capture attention, maintain interest, create desire, and finally get action. In order to fulfill these functions, specific advertising techniques are being used to shape consumer behavior.

The use of promotional materials in tourism has an enormous power over the tourist. The content of the advertised product is meant to provide information on key sights, lodging, dining, travel connections, while detailed descriptions tell the reader what he should expect or experience. Therefore, the aim of tourism advertising is no different from that of the objectives of advertising summarized by Holloway: "informing, persuading and reminding" (Holloway, 2004: 265).

Advertisements are described as “a genre of communication that use words and images to convince people exposed to the advertisement to purchase the product or service being promoted” (Berger, 2004: 71). The explanation is also appropriate for the case of tourism advertising, as tourism advertisements try to charm the reader and determine him to purchase the service.

Tourist locations often promote and advertise their products by means of the internet, as it offers a cost effective means of communication, constantly updated. Moreover, a global audience can be reached via the internet and consequently almost all tourism websites are available in several foreign languages besides their native language. We noticed a broad linguistic choice as regards the foreign languages used in tourism websites, among which English is the prevalent pick.

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Besides visual and audio content, language choice and linguistic patterns used in tourism websites are important in rendering the desired output. Tourism advertising makes use of hyperbolic language and glamorous images to get the reader's interest and enhance its persuasive power. According to Sinclair, words do not occur at random in a given text but there are linguistic choices that can be seen as large-scale conditioning choices (Sinclair, 1991:10). Moreover, words use to co-occur frequently with other words, with certain grammatical categories, with one or more semantic fields, and they acquire their meaning from the linguistic co-text (Sinclair, 1996).

Methodology

Our approach is based on the assumption that words in tourism advertising do not occur accidentally, and that the persuasive function of tourism discourse is closely related to linguistic choice.

In order to sustain the above mentioned hypothesis, we gathered a corpus of texts selected from various tourism websites, and analyzed it from a lexical and syntactic perspective. We aimed to distinguish specific linguistic patterns that characterize advertising language. Thus, the choice of words, stylistic devices and grammatical structures in our sample are being examined. Our attempt was supported by the use of a text analysis software program, called Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC), which helped us undergo a content analysis of the data. By means of LIWC, we establish the recurrence of self-references, social words, positive emotions, negative emotions, overall cognitive words, articles and big words used across the texts we selected in our sample.

LIWC is a text analysis software program developed by James W. Pennebaker, Roger J. Booth, and Martha E. Francis. Its objective is to calculate the degree to which different categories of words are used, and determine the degree any text uses positive or negative emotions, self-references, causal words, and 70 other language dimensions. LIWC is text analysis software that divides words in psychologically meaningful categories. As experimental results have shown, the program has the ability to distinguish meaning in a myriad of different settings, to detect thinking styles, individual differences, emotion or social relationships (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010: 24).

For a more detailed analysis we have also used another software program, Diction 7, originally created by Roderick P. Hart and later developed by Craig Carroll who joined the Diction team in 2006 and led the creation of Diction 6.0. Diction is a computer-aided text analysis program for determining the tone of a written message. It searches the text for five semantic features - activity, optimism, certainty, realism and commonality - as well as thirty-five sub-features, and produces reports that include raw totals, standardized scores, word counts and percentages, thereby providing the user with a wide range of ways of understanding the processed text. By means of this program, we have looked for semantic features that indicate resoluteness, movement, change, optimism and positive entailments, realism, commonality, praise, satisfaction, inspiration, accomplishment, the degree of aggression, blame, familiarity, past or present concern, human interest, etc. in order to observe the linguistic variations that render the touristic message more appealing to the audience.

Linguistic patterns in tourism websites

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Our findings, gathered from the analysis of the texts in our sample, are in line with Dann's statement that "tourism promotion is based on glamour (bewitchment)" (Dann, 1996: 56), and that the language of tourism "tends to speak only in positive and glowing terms of the services and attractions it seeks to promote" (Dann, 1996, 65). In support of this view, our sample revealed a high level of positive adjectives (*magical moments*, *amazing country*, *famous beaches*, *exciting activities*, *perfect holiday*) and positive emotion words (Figure 1).

The superlative was the most frequent form: "world's biggest festival", "the most spectacular geology", "Britain's biggest gorge", "the most dramatic views", "Wales' oldest and largest national park", "Britain's most enchanting scenery", "the deepest of all", "the most visually sublime", "England's highest peaks", "the tallest building".

LIWC dimension	***Your data***	***Personal texts***	***Formal texts***
Self-references (I, me, my)	0.29	11.4	4.2
Social words	2.80	9.5	8.0
Positive emotions	4.04	2.7	2.6
Negative emotions	0.14	2.6	1.6
Overall cognitive words	2.04	7.8	5.4
Articles (a, an, the)	8.75	5.0	7.2
Big words (> 6 letters)	27.38	13.1	19.6

Figure 1

The abundance of positive words, adjectives or emotion terms, creates a fairy tale realm of charm, happiness, romanticism, fun, and fantasy. The description of the touristic product tends to enhance features such as uniqueness, diversity, calmness, warmness, relaxation, tranquility, while inducing a feeling of desire: "a warm, tropical place to explore in the depths of winter", " you can linger among the palms", "two huge lounges warmed by roaring fires, centuries of history and plenty of delicious food and drink", "packed with magical moments worth celebrating", "a bubbling, bustling melting-pot of races and religions", "rugged mountains reach dramatically for the sky", " warm, sandy beaches and rich, humid mangroves", "a melting pot of culture", "the peaceful city with small town feel".

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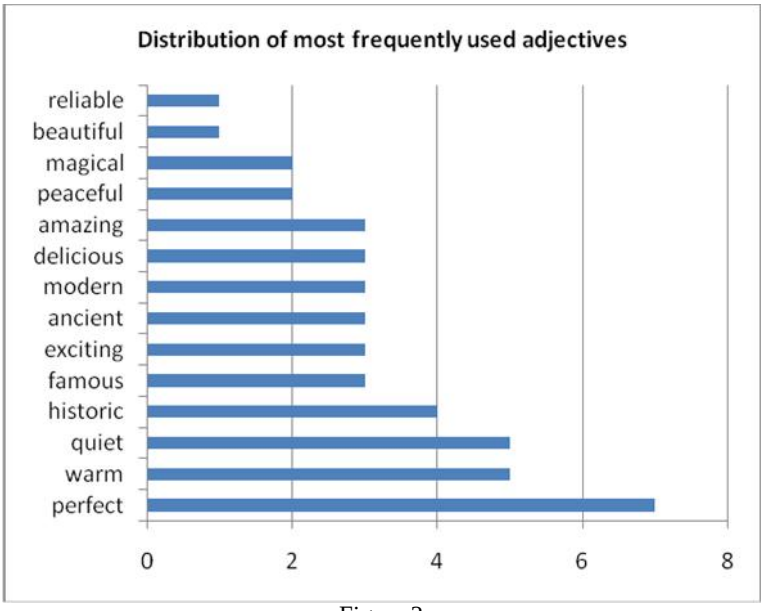


Figure 2

The dream like atmosphere is created by means of hyperboles and metaphors ("an archipelago of gold and light", "blessed by the gods", "a bubbling, bustling melting-pot of races and religions", "an endless carpet of forest", "dramatic landscape") which are abundant especially in scenery descriptions, and words of great emphasis: *genuine, truly, solely, authentic, sanctuary, icon, foundation*, etc.

The language of tourism recurrently uses the word 'magic' and its derivate 'magical', with both their connotative and denotative meanings. The two words stand for powerful linguistic means which fuel consumers' imagination and arouse their desire to experience the world described: "the magic of the east", "magic forest", "magical moments", "magical Kenya", "magical experiences", "a place of magic", "the magic of New Zealand", "magic climate", "magic garden", etc.

People are always *warm, friendly* and *relaxed*, and places, cities, or landscape are *peaceful, enchanting, spectacular, fascinating*, etc. Although many of these terms have become clichés in tourism language, and usually collocate with the nouns mentioned above or with their synonyms, they are meant to arouse readers' imagination. The descriptive words used in tourism discourse convey a strong sense of glamour and conviviality, which is highly appealing to consumers.

The use of certain linguistic patterns conjures up a specific representation in the reader's mind, called 'schemata', which are "mental representations of typical instances" used in order to "predict and make sense of the particular instance which the discourse describes" (Cook, 1994: 11). Thus, the description of the tourist product creates a positive image in the consumer's mind from the outset and smoothly induces a positive feedback from the potential tourist. As Cook contends, key linguistic features stimulate the mind of the reader and activate background knowledge, an existing schema, which influences the perception of the particular discourse.

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We noticed that more often than not the information appeared as helpful advice offered to consumers, by the recurrence of the modal verbs *should, have to* or of some other verbs: *recommend*, *suggest*, *guide*, *advise, propose* etc. Rhetorical questions were used as alternative ways of issuing commands. The use of imperatives was consistent throughout the whole corpus, with action verbs like *walk*, *eat, head*, *let*, *come*, *take*, *get*, *see*, *discover*, *look for*, etc.: "Walk along the cliff-top paths", " Head for Seaford Head", "Look out for the Watchdog", "Take the easterly coast road", "Make your experience...", "Get a fantastic view", "Take a boat trip", "Get out of the cold", "Grab a towel", "Live a life of elegance and wit", "Attend theatrical performances", "Admire the Royal Crescent", "Enjoy the fireworks".

As tourism is about travel through space, and often through time, many websites present the cultural heritage as a point of attraction for the respective country or region. When consulting tourism websites, we found out about ancient reefs, prehistoric rainforests, historical artworks, ancient lava flow, historic gardens, historic monuments, royal palaces or some of the world's top museums. That accounts for the past concern our content analysis revealed. However, present and future tenses were the most frequently used tenses across our sample data, which reveals a high concern for present or future activities.

By means of the Diction program, the analysis of our corpus revealed higher rates for the following dictionary variables: numerical terms, satisfaction, spatial terms, diversity and exclusion. Lower rates were recorded for blame, hardship, aggression and denial. The calculated variables showed higher scores for variety and complexity. The master variables which exceeded the normal values were activity and optimism. The value of these variables emphasizes language featuring positive images, movement, and change meant to maintain the reader's interest.

Conclusions

The language of tourism is meant to create a special world, appealing and marvelous. It provides the potential consumer with a preconceived impressive image of the respective place. Thus, the tourist sees and experiences what he was told to expect in the touristic description. Hence, the importance of tourism language: it builds up fairy tale realms, magical places, oasis of peace and tranquility, auras of mystery and fantasy.

Our findings suggest that the main feature of online tourism discourse is the preponderant use of positive emotion words, superlatives, and imperatives. Disguised imperatives stand for attempts to persuade, recommend, urge, and finally get action from the potential tourist. LICW analysis revealed a high rate of positive emotion words, articles, and big words. Diction showed a high score for satisfaction, spatial terms, diversity, variety, and complexity. These variables we analyzed characterize and are typical to tourism discourse as a whole, being however limited to the texts selected in our corpus. To increase the persuasive power, tourism discourse is loaded with metaphors and hyperbolic language. Words choice is designed to be influential, to direct expectations so that the described service or attraction becomes almost the real one.

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