

The Discourse of Tourism and National Heritage

The Discourse of Tourism and National Heritage:

*A Contrastive Study
from a Cultural Perspective*

By

Claudia Elena Stoian

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To my family

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FOREWORD

ARSENIO JESÚS MOYA GUIJARRO¹

The promotion of tourism in an international market is nowadays most often realized by means of the Internet, which has revolutionised the distribution of information. Tourism websites have the functions of informing, advising, promoting and selling. Their success depends on a combination of elements; among the most important are attractiveness and useful design. The discourse of tourism uses several semiotic resources to create meaning and communicate information, exploiting both the linguistic and the visual codes, which have a complex and complementary relation. Their simultaneous use aims to produce a better promotional message and to ensure that the informative and persuasive purposes of tourist discourse are reached. The monument or destination promoted is portrayed by means of language and image, both separately and together, in order to persuade readers to become visitors.

Claudia Elena Stoian's book, *The Discourse of Tourism and National Heritage: A Contrastive Study from a Cultural Perspective*, aims to contribute to the field of online tourism promotion. It presents the multimodal analyses of two sets of websites, institutional and commercial, from three different countries, Romania, Spain and Great Britain. The multimodal approach embraced uses powerful tools, those proposed by Halliday's Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics. The results of the analyses are compared in relation to (1) the organization and layout of the webpages, (2) their content and message, and (3) the visual and verbal strategies used to inform, persuade and direct potential visitors to the promoted destinations.

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The study also explores the way words and images are combined into multimodal acts in order to promote the tourist landmarks.

The book addresses students and professionals in the fields of tourism discourse, online promotion and intercultural communication as it makes explicit the complexity of a website's communication and its relation to cultural and contextual factors. It also identifies the verbal and visual tools that can be used to promote products, assets or landmarks. All in all, the book provides not only theoretical insights, but also practical implications. Last but not least, the study contributes to making us, potential users, aware of the different persuasive techniques that advertisers and promoters may use to fulfil a persuasive function and obtain their ultimate goal of selling. *The Discourse of Tourism and National Heritage: A Contrastive Study from a Cultural Perspective* is a very commendable study, which I strongly recommend to both students and professionals.

Cuenca, June 2015

PREFACE

The present study is a revised and updated version of my PhD thesis in the field of online tourism promotion. It focuses on the national online promotion of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, in two different types of websites—institutional and commercial—from three countries, Romania, Spain and Great Britain. The study analyses the way each country presents its national landmarks and combines various modes to create a virtual brochure with a promotional message from both institutional and commercial standpoints. For this, it studies the organization of the websites and their webpages, as well as the lexico-grammatical and visual features of the promotional messages. The results of the different analyses are interpreted from a cultural perspective.

The theoretical framework for the analysis is Systemic Functional Linguistics. The linguistic text is analysed following Halliday's theory of the metafunctions (1985; 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Thus, the analysis focuses on the ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings of the verbal message. The analysis of the visual text applies Kress and van Leeuwen's model (1996; 2006), studying the same types of meanings realized visually.

The results of the different analyses are compared from two perspectives: namely, in relation to a) the types of websites and b) the countries in which they were produced. The comparison between institutional and commercial websites reveals a pattern in which the similarities seem to be related to characteristics typical of web organization and layout, tourist promotion and specific topic, while differences seem to reflect the types of websites and their functions. However, when the websites are compared from the point of view of the different countries, a number of national characteristics of web promotion, common to the two types of websites are revealed. These are further interpreted from a cultural point of view, showing that the findings can be accounted for by the context dimension of cultural variability (Hall 1976; 2000; Hall and Hall 1990). The Spanish and British sets of websites are, in general, consistent with the literature on intercultural communication consulted (Hall 2000; Würtz 2005; Neuliep 2006; Șerbănescu 2007), whereas the Romanian sets do not follow the pattern for the country's usual classification as a high-context culture, but combine features of both low-contexts and high-contexts. The consistencies seem to indicate the stability of Spanish and British cultures.

At the same time, departures from the cultural contextual patterns exist in all the cases analysed. These inconsistencies can be explained by cultural changes and influences brought out by globalization and internal changes in terms of politics, economy and society. They also indicate that cultural patterns can be affected by the medium of communication (Internet) and the context of communication (type of promotion).

The findings from the study emphasize the need for an understanding of multimodality and interculturality in online tourism promotion, especially as applied to creating an image or brand for a country's successful international promotion. They show that Systemic Functional Linguistics offers a useful tool, from both theoretical and practical perspectives, which can be applied to areas like composition of promotional messages, online promotion, tourism discourse and its strategies, or intercultural communication.

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Last but not least, I am mostly in debt to my family, especially my husband, mother and brother, who supported me with their love and understanding and helped me overcome the hardest moments.

PART I:

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The use of the Internet for the promotion of tourism across the world is an ever-growing phenomenon (OMT 2001, 20; Montiel Torres 2002, 539; Plog 2005, 280; Mena 2008, 209; Mocini 2009, 291). Both institutional and commercial entities related with tourism have embraced and adapted this new medium to promote their countries and reach a wide national and international audience (OMT 1999, 34, 58). The possibilities and tools offered by the hypermedia environment are more than favourable for these purposes (Montiel Torres 2002, 539-542).

This chapter introduces the study by presenting its motivation. Then, the study is set into the framework of the field by a succinct description of the present situation of research. Its intended contribution to the field introduced is indicated in a number of research objectives. Finally, the chapter describes the organization of the book.

1.1. Motivation for the research

Different motives have contributed to undertaking the research on which this study is based. They are related to the topic, the corpus and the method of research. The choice of online tourism as a topic has been influenced by its frequent presence as an alternative medium to paper or other types of promotion (Antelmi and Santulli 2012, 14). The Internet has become “an indispensable tool” (Perandrea 2011, 1), not only for navigation on and buying from tourist websites, but also for promotion. Both institutional and commercial tourist entities have been influenced in their promotion strategies by the appearance and progressive diffusion of the Internet (OMT 1999; Rodríguez Abella 2011). Its relative novelty means that the body of research in the area, while not small, still leaves interesting questions open.

Online tourism promotion is based on websites (OMT 1999, 30; 2001, 84), which are not only text, but also “conglomerate[s] of images, multimedia, interactive features, animated graphics, and sounds” (Würtz 2005). This complexity indicates that the composition and production of appealing and efficient websites is not an easy task. The task is even more

complicated when the websites are created and used in different cultural contexts; their design, content, layout and multimodal communicative acts should be culture-sensitive. Differences in communication styles across cultures “are expected to pose challenges to the ways in which websites communicate their messages most optimally” (Würtz 2005). Considering the complicated task of promoting tourism online in a culturally diverse world, attempts have been made to provide instructions in the form of guides to improve efficiency. Market research companies carry out studies to find out more about people’s expectations and perceptions regarding different characteristics, like webpage configurations, designs or messages, with the purpose of improving websites (OMT 2001; Crystal 2004; Shchiglik and Barnes 2004; Steinmetz 2004). Nonetheless, recommendations are only beginning to be formulated and many of these are tentative (Crystal 2004, 15). This study, then, aims to contribute to the field of online tourism promotion with new insights, deriving from the analysis of institutional and commercial websites from the point of view of intercultural communication and offering suggestions as to practical implications.

The countries chosen as online tourism promoters are Romania, Spain and Great Britain. The sample was chosen for a number of reasons. The countries are different as far as tourism is concerned. Romania is a relatively new country in the tourism market. As such, it is trying to distance itself from the bad connotations left by the communist regime, create a distinctive brand and become known to the international world (Morgan and Pritchard 2000, 145; OMT 2005a, 32; Babu *et al.* 2008; Light *et al.* 2009, 234, 235; OECD 2009; Timothy and Nyaupane 2009, 6). Its numbers for 2013¹, compared to those for the other two countries, are very low: 1,715,000 international tourists and 1,438 million dollars income from tourism (OMT 2014, 8). However, it has to be considered that these numbers have grown in the last few years and are expected to keep growing (OMT 2013, 2). In Spain, in turn, tourism is a flourishing industry (Macleod 2004, 23). The country has repositioned itself successfully “as a cultural destination” different from its “bucket and spade cheap beach holiday image”, especially after Franco’s dictatorship ended (Moilanen and Rainisto 2009, 5; WTO and ETC 2009, 10). The Spanish tourist board has worked at the creation of a brand for almost a century (Macleod 2004, 23; Piñanes Leal 2004, 91). In the 1980s, it finally managed to make Spain the first “supra-brand” (Morgan and Pritchard 2000, 282, 289), mainly due to its consistent logo and associated core

¹ 2013 is the most recent year in the statistics published by the World Tourism Organization (OMT 2014).

values promoted (Morgan and Pritchard 2000, 289; Bartlett 2002, 45). Spain has higher numbers of tourists and is situated in 3rd position in the world for international tourists (60.7 million) and 2nd position in the world, after USA, and 1st in Europe for income (60.4 billion dollars) (OMT 2014, 6). Finally, Great Britain has always been on the market as a top destination (Macleod 2004; Babu *et al.* 2008). The destination's "supra-brand", established in the 1990s, can be promoted on its own or in conjunction with one of the other main brands, i.e. Scotland, Wales, England and London (Morgan and Pritchard 2000, 237). The latest documented data show that Great Britain has fallen several positions in the world's top list of international arrivals and income from tourism, even if the numbers are slightly higher than in the previous years (OMT 2013, 6). The number of tourists for 2013 is 31.2 million and the amount of income is 40.6 billion dollars (OMT 2014, 6).

These different destinations are expected to have different promotional messages. In this study, the differences have been restricted to the countries' multimodal communicative acts by choosing the same language of promotion and the same types of landmarks. English has been chosen, as it is the most widely used language on the Internet, the language of business and tourism (Danet and Herring 2008, 554; Ciutacu 2009, 316; Meyer 2009, 22). This lingua franca status assures international distribution to the promotional message. As for the types of landmarks promoted, those designated World Heritage Sites (WHS) by UNESCO have been selected because they are some of "the world's most visited and heavily marketed tourism attractions" (OMT 2009, 1, 5). Countries frequently use their WHS as a way of becoming visible to tourists (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009, 11) since the UNESCO award is "a highly valued promotional tool for developing tourism" (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009, 11). As the three countries have a large number of WHS², the types most visited by international tourists have been selected. These are religious, historic and urban landmarks (Timothy and Boyd 2002, 37, 39, 43; Sharpley 2006, 143; Richards 2007, 17; Timothy and Nyaupane 2009, 10; Steinecke 2010, 188, 189). The examination of webpages dedicated to famous World Heritage Sites from different countries, each with a different background in tourism, can indicate the ways each country promotes its most important destinations—its heritage sites—internationally.

² Romania has 7 World Heritage Sites (WHS)—6 cultural and 1 natural, very few compared to the other two countries. Spain has many WHS as it is the 3rd in the world, after China and Italy, and the 2nd in Europe. It has 44 WHS, of which 39 cultural, 3 natural and 2 mixed. Great Britain has 28 WHS (23 cultural, 4 natural and 1 mixed) (UNESCO 2014).

Analysing these sites can also reflect the identity of the countries, as projected in their webs, since the sites are related to their past and reflect their values. The purpose, thus, is to observe the ways top tourist destinations and emerging ones promote their famous landmarks and their identity to the world, paying special attention to verbal and visual modes.

Online tourism promotion can be analysed from different perspectives. The theoretical perspective chosen for this study comes from a school of functional linguistics. As already mentioned, websites are complex as they are built using a number of modes and resources. Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) (Halliday 1985; 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; 2006), with its perspective on meaning-making in context, has been considered a revealing model for the analysis of websites (Djonov 2005, 46). This model has been chosen to analyse the promotional messages of the corpus collected, from the point of view of how they combine to make meanings. The verbal and visual modes are both analysed in detail, as separate modes, and together, as multimodal acts. This deconstruction attempts to reveal the way each mode contributes to promotion, for a better understanding of the combined message (Hiippala 2013, 1). In this study, the analysis is taken to a further dimension, that of culture, attempting to show differences in the communicative acts, which may be rooted in the country's culture. The way language and image are used to depict people, places and circumstances; present social interactions; and compose a meaningful multimodal act can reflect cultural patterns (Würtz 2005; Stoian 2013a; 2013b; forthcoming). These can also be observed in the design of the websites (Würtz 2005). For the analysis, the cultural dimension chosen is that of context (Hall 1976; 2000; Hall and Hall 1990), since it seems the most relevant to the type of message studied and its function. This study, therefore, proposes SFT for the analysis of websites and attempts to provide more evidence to support those studies that consider it effective for the analysis of digital media. Furthermore, the characteristics revealed can reflect cultural communicative styles. The study, of course, does not intend to reinforce stereotypes, but to interpret the findings in each country's cultural communicative style. It also aims to insist once more that cultural competence is a must in today's business world.

To summarise, the present research study covers many areas (online communication, promotion, tourism, multimodal discourse and intercultural communication) and hopes to bring new insights to each. It conducts a Systemic Functional analysis of online national tourism promotion in order to show the ways World Heritage Sites are presented on the international market. For a more general contribution, different

types of websites (institutional and commercial), destinations (less and more popular), landmarks (religious, historic and urban), from different countries and cultures (Romania, Spain and Great Britain) have been chosen. Apart from this, the study includes the possibility to apply the results; it hopes to improve the understanding of the complexity of websites and provide useful information in the form of implications for more effective communication and successful promotion. It targets the creation, production, transmission and understanding of online messages. Many people contribute to these actions: websites designers, managers, copywriters, editors, tourist entities and/or governmental officials, to mention just a few. Understanding the implicit meanings of their choices in building their multimodal messages for intercultural communication would make it easier for them to achieve their different goals. The present work aims to draw specialists' attention and make them aware of the complexity and importance of good communication. The multimodal study of online tourism promotion from a Systemic Functional perspective, then, can help online and tourism writers, designers and/or marketers "develop appropriate communication strategies and design communication channels with a certain degree of cultural sensitivity" (Tsotra *et al.* 2004, 4219).

1.2. Previous studies

Tourism, as the world's largest industry (Smith 2001; WTTC 2003), has been studied from various perspectives. Topics like the tendencies of tourism markets (OMT 2003; 2005a; 2008; 2011), tourism products and the factors influencing them (McKean *et al.* 1995; McKercher 1998a; McKercher and du Cros 2002), the impact of tourism (Archer *et al.* 2005) or tourists and their behaviour (Plog 2005), have been thoroughly researched. Special attention has also been paid to different types of tourism, like global (Theobald 2005; Conrady and Buck 2010), national (OMT 2002), rural (Light 2006), nature-based (McKercher 1998b), religious (Richards 2003) or urban (Cazes and Potier 1996; Jansen-Verbeke and Lieveois 2002).

A type of tourism that has spread to "all corners of the globe", and its study together with it, is cultural tourism (Richards 2007, 9). Considered an arguably "good" form of tourism for the destination, avoiding many of the pitfalls of conventional tourism while offering additional benefits (Richards 2007, 2), cultural tourism has been investigated in relation to authenticity and globalization (Schouten 2007), its behaviour on the market of different countries (Hughes and Allen 2005) or the types of

cultural tourists (Richards 1996; Kemmerling-Clack 1999) and market segments (McKercher and du Cros 2002). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009) has looked at the relationship between tourism, culture and destinations' attractiveness and competitiveness. It has also examined the development of tourism production and distribution in relation to cultural resources, identifying the key factors and policy interventions that can maximise the attractiveness of destinations, as places to visit, live and invest in. Researchers have also focused on heritage tourism (Graham *et al.* 2000; McKercher and du Cros 2002; Timothy and Boyd 2002; Light *et al.* 2009) and its management by World Heritage Sites (OMT 2009). Heritage assets have been identified, described and classified (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000; Butler and Boyd 2000; Jansen-Verbeke 2010). Particular attention has also been given to the social implication of heritage tourism (Herbert 1995), its cult and mythicization (Rooijakkers 2002), its consumers (Timothy and Boyd 2002) and their reasons for visiting heritage places, like enhancing learning, satisfying curiosity, growing spiritually, relaxing or getting away from home (Prentice *et al.* 1997; Confer and Kerstetter 2000; Poria *et al.* 2004).

Another important area of research in the tourism field is branding. This has been applied to countries, places and destinations (Kotler and Gertner 2002; Olins 2003; Hemelryk Donald and Gammack 2007; Moilanen and Rainisto 2009; WTO and ETC 2009). It seems that place branding is becoming a theoretical and methodological field in its own right (Hemelryk Donald and Gammack 2007, 169). Several researchers have emphasised the fact that the success of tourism relies on successful image creation (Selwyn 1993; Morgan and Pritchard 1998). There are many reasons for adopting a brand, like competitive advantage (Aaker 1995), differentiation (Evans *et al.* 1995) and/or a special place in consumers' minds (Chacko 1997). Various studies have depicted successful destination brands, such as Scotland (Butler 1998; Moilanen and Rainisto 2009), Great Britain (Morgan and Pritchard 2000) and Spain (Piñanes Leal 2004; Mariottini 2012), pointing out the importance of cultural heritage assets in building destination branding (McKercher and du Cros 2002). Attention has been directed also to new tourism markets represented by countries like Romania, Poland and Bulgaria (Morgan and Pritchard 1998; Light 2006). These examples, together with other studies (Bartlett 2002; Buliç 2002; Anholt 2009), indicate different ways to build destination brands. To become successful, brands should be, most of all, "credible, deliverable, differentiating, conveying powerful ideas, enthusing for trade partners, resonating with the consumer" (Morgan and

Pritchard 2000, 296). Clearly, such complex objectives could be supported by research into ways of improving the message of a country as a tourist destination.

The tourism industry, like almost every field, has been influenced by the Internet era and the research focus has shifted towards “New Tourism” (Poon 1993). The application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their impact on tourism have been studied by a number of researchers (Poon 1993; Nijman 1999; Sawhney and Prandelli 2000; Fernández Cavia and Huertas 2009). Montiel Torres (2002) has focused on ICTs and provided the main advantages brought by the Internet to tourist promotion. She has also indicated some requirements for a successful website. She has tested her theory on two Spanish corporative websites, one belonging to the Rural Hotels Association in Andalusia and the other to the county department promoting Malaga. Similarly, Majó and Galí (2002) have analysed the importance of the Internet on tourist information, by briefly presenting various studies regarding webpages of different Spanish tourist boards and agents such as comarcal and city councils and hotels in Barcelona and Cataluña. The Internet has also changed the habits of 21st century tourists (Talón *et al.* 2007; Rodríguez Antón and Alonso Almeida 2009); they increasingly use it to look for information on destinations and/or cultural events (Richards 2003; PEW/Internet 2004 in Janoschka 2004) and to book and buy holidays and/or services (Dwyer 2005; Pyka and Freitag 2010). Tourists’ expectations and perceptions are frequently investigated by means of questionnaires or other methods and/or tools in order to help improve websites (OMT 2001; Shchiglik and Barnes 2004; Steinmetz 2004). The identification of consumers’ needs makes personalization easier, information being continuously controlled and updated (Buhalis 1998; Steinmetz 2004).

The success of promotion and, obviously, of tourism depends, among various factors, on the website created for the purpose. Various features and/or components have been claimed to make a website successful. These include contents and design (Huizingh 2000; OMT 2001; Montiel Torres 2002); access speed, navigation, interactivity and responsiveness (OMT 2001; Palmer 2002); ease of use (OMT 1999); motivation to purchase (Jeong 2002) or marketing concepts (OMT 2005b). Frequently used in marketing, the AIDA model³, for example, has been used to study more than 160 Internet presentations of European Regional Destination Management Organisations (IZT and DWIF 2003). The results have showed that the application of the model to tourism websites’ design and

³ The acronyms stand for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action.

structure of information can make them attractive and successful (OMT 2005b, 8). AIDA has also been applied to analyse different tourism campaigns, like Turespaña's⁴ 2010 (Mariottini 2012). Other researchers (Mich *et al.* 2003) have studied websites from the perspective of rhetoric with the aim of finding a conceptual basis and a reference outline for the evaluation of website quality.

The discourse of tourism, understood as the particular ways of using language and image to communicate information related to tourism (Thurlow and Jaworski 2010), also plays an important role in promotion and branding. As such, it has received the attention of various researchers, who have focused on the evaluative techniques (Kaltenbacher 2007) used to portray destinations positively (Hiippala 2007), sometimes linking them to tourists' nostalgia (Dann 2005); on its features of specialised discourse (Gotti 1991), its translation (Londero 2006, Mocini 2009) or its diachronic evolution (Antelmi 2011), among many other topics. Frequently, tourism discourse has been seen as promotional discourse and compared to advertising (Henríquez Jiménez 1997; Morgan and Pritchard 2000; Bosh Abarca 2001; Londero 2006; Crişan 2013), its online variant making no exception (OMT 1999). Different tourist materials have been analysed, like travel guides (Mapelli and Santos López 2010), tourist brochures and leaflets (Hiippala 2007; 2013), paying attention to their discursive characteristics (Leech 1996; Juan González 2000; Ruiz and Saorín 2000; Saorín 2001; Moya Guijarro 2006), intertextuality (Antelmi 2011), sensorial techniques (Pérez Vázquez 2011), rhetorical structure (Mongkholjuck 2008) or their moves and generic structure (Ramm 2000; Vimomnan 2003; Toledo Pereira 2006; Calvi 2011).

Interest has been raised also by online materials, mainly represented by various types of websites, such as institutional, produced by tourist boards (Calvi and Mapelli 2010; Rodríguez Abella 2011) or by UNESCO (Navarro and Miotti 2011), and/or commercial (Calvi 2006; Calvi *et al.* 2008). In these cases, the attention has been directed to their discursive and linguistic features (Pierini 2008), their translations into English for an international audience (Pierini 2007; Garzone 2008), their comparison to other websites (Garzone 2009) or their structure as digital genres (Stein 2006; Bateman 2008; 2014; Calvi 2010; Mariottini 2011; Suau Jiménez 2011). *Linguaturismo*⁵ (Calvi 2006; 2010; Calvi *et al.* 2008; Calvi *et al.* 2009; Calvi and Mapelli 2011), for example, is an interuniversity research project that focuses on the language of Spanish and Italian tourism

⁴ Turespaña stands for *Instituto de Turismo de España*, i.e. the Institute of Tourism in Spain or the Spanish Tourist Board.

⁵ The project is carried out by a research team from Milan University.