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Virtual Touring: The Web-Language Of Tourism

L'Organizzazione Mondiale del Turismo definisce il turismo come il settore industriale a più alta crescita economica nel mondo occidentale, con un giro d'affari che supera quello derivante dai settori economici più tradizionali quali le esportazioni di petrolio, generi alimentari e automobili. Il turismo ha così guadagnato un'importanza sempre maggiore e acquisito una posizione prominente nei mercati economici internazionali. Questo aspetto ha promosso ampie ricerche sul turismo in ambiti strettamente legati all'economia, geografia, sociologia, psicologia e antropologia. Tuttavia, poca attenzione viene posta sul turismo da un punto di vista linguistico a causa della difficoltà di percepire il suo linguaggio come diverso dal linguaggio non-specialistico. Infatti, è questa l'impressione che si ha del linguaggio turistico quando il target del pubblico è più ampio di quello degli specialisti del settore turistico. Comunque, studi linguistici più approfonditi forniscono uno scenario diverso. Questo studio si propone di analizzare le strategie linguistiche usate dall'industria turistica per strutturare testi in generi specifici, grazie ad un'attenta combinazione delle caratteristiche che derivano sia dal codice iconico sia da quello verbale. Lo studio, basato su un corpus di testi inglesi presi dalle home-page di uffici turistici siti in UK analizza il modo in cui tali testi riescano a raggiungere una struttura altamente coerente in cui le intenzioni dell'autore, le esigenze contestuali e gli aspetti sintattici sono perfettamente organizzati nel registro del discorso turistico.

1. Introduction

As stated by the World Tourism Organization (<http://www.unwto.org/index.php>), tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, since its business volume has surpassed that of oil export, food products and automobiles. Indeed, tourism has gained ever-increasing importance and acquired a prominent position in international business markets. From the tourism industry viewpoint, "tourism is a deliberate purchase, in which limited financial resources are invested in buying time to visit a chosen resort" (Laws 2001: 64). In Europe mass

tourism developed as an industry in the 1950s and 1960s, when the increasing demand for holidays in Northern European countries first led to the development of local seaside resorts and then extended to other locations along the Mediterranean coasts (Casarin 2001: 137). The rapid growth of the travel demand in the last few decades has required an even more rapid transformation of the tourism industry, the attention of which has consequently focussed on the tourist's decision-making process (Hudson / Snaith / Miller / Hudson 2001: 174). Tourists are no longer seen as passive customers but "more experienced, more educated, more destination-oriented, more independent, more flexible and more 'green'" (Cho / Fesenmaier 2001: 353). Tourists always select their holidays carefully: in order to minimize the gap existing between their expectations and their experience, they seek as much information as possible (O'Connor / Buhalis / Frew 2001: 333). Since holidays cannot be inspected for purchase beforehand and since expectations are constructed on product representation and description which cannot be seen before the actual tourist experience (O'Connor / Buhalis / Frew 2001: 333), the Internet has begun to be regarded as a dynamic source of information by means of which tourists can 'experience' the holiday instead of simply having a description of the destination. Indeed, the Internet enables tourists to explore a chosen interactive multimedia site in order to obtain the required information about a destination (Cho / Fesenmaier 2001).

Since the tourism industry is designed to attract as many customers as possible in order to make a profit, there is, on the part of tourist organizations, the need to sell the same product on different markets and to different customers, which means that different types of information have to be provided (Osti / Pechlaner 2001: 234). This aspect has promoted extensive research on tourism in various fields, such as marketing, sociology, psychology and anthropology, where attention has been focussed on either business and profits – and consequently on integrated promotion, advertising and marketing communications – or on the meaning tourism acquires as a form of social and psychological behaviour¹. More recently, and mainly in

¹ Giving an exhaustive bibliography on tourism is clearly beyond the scope of this article. Here I refer to just a few of the authors that appear to be more significantly representative of the field: Giordana (2004) focusses on tourism as a marketing phenomenon; Cogno / Dall'Ara (1994)

recognition of the fact that in order to promote the same product successfully to different targets it has to be presented in adequate and convincing linguistic ways, investigations have concentrated on the linguistic tools employed in the tourism industry². Indeed, the language of tourism has features which identify it as different from general discourse. Such a language is highly persuasive because its ultimate purpose is to sell a product by describing a reality which has to be perceived by the potential buyer – the tourist – as authentically and genuinely *off the beaten track* and which can therefore give the targeted people the illusion of *feeling* the holiday experience, before actually living it, in line with their most optimistic expectations. Furthermore, the idea of something *off the beaten track* makes the product sound exclusive, thus providing added value. In the creation of such persuasive language, the tourism industry has always exploited texts characterized by a network of interrelations in which verbal and iconic elements are interwoven so as to meet the requirements of today's tourist. The potentialities of these multimodal relationships are further augmented when tourism texts are uploaded on the Net and become hypertexts. The main feature of hypertexts is that their information is chosen and designed to attract attention by paradoxically disturbing any process of predictable reading on the screen in a conventional way (Crystal 2006: 205). The hierarchical structure of traditional texts where co-textual references allow the processing of meaning seems to be lacking and is substituted by the presence of (external and internal) links, responsible for abundant information provision. Web-links are strategic inasmuch as they reflect a communicative choice of the web-designer. Nevertheless, they enhance the web-user's illusion of having

investigate the psychological interrelation between interpersonal communication, advertising and Italian tourism; Leed (1992) investigates the sociological and anthropological implications deriving from tourism.

² The most recent and meaningful work on the language of tourism from an English perspective is undoubtedly Gotti (2007). The same subject has been investigated but concerning a more restricted topic by Francesconi (2005). A major contribution to the analysis of Spanish tourism language has been given by Calvi (2000, 2001 and 2006). The works by Nigro (2005), Vestito (2005) and Chiavetta (2007) deal with the English language of tourism describing Italian resorts and the way in which Italy is culturally perceived. Multimodal analysis following Kress (2004) is offered by Denti (2007). Catenaccio's (forthcoming) analysis of medical tourism web-sites focusses on the way in which corporate and institutional identities are constructed in the tourism industry.

total control over what link may be followed, thus the reader appears to be playing an active role while scanning the texts in the web-pages.

This paper discusses the strategies exploited by the tourism industry to structure texts into specific genres, carefully combining features that derive from both the iconic and the verbal codes. The study, based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a corpus of English texts taken from the web-pages of tourist offices located mainly in the UK, aims to investigate in what ways web tourism texts achieve strong generic coherence by successfully fulfilling the encoder's intentions, contextual exigencies and structural linguistic rules, thus outlining how the registers of tourism discourse are organised.

2. Corpus and methodological approach

Given the great quantity of web pages dealing with tourism, the texts to be analysed have been selected carefully, on the premise that reliability and international accreditation on the web should be the main criterion for inclusion. The starting point for web page selection was the World Tourism Organization (WTO), whose homepage reported a 5% increase in tourist flows in 2006 over the previous year. In Europe, the top ten destinations included France, Spain, Italy and the UK. In particular, UK tourist arrivals testified a 12.3% increase compared to -2.6% in France, -2.8% in Spain and -0.5% in Italy (data available at <http://www.unwto.org/index.php>). The fact that the UK has acquired such a prominent position in the traditional tourist market provides clear evidence of a well-constructed and successful campaign promoting various types of destination for different types of customers. This explains why my website selection was focussed on the UK as a tourist destination. In particular, I concentrated on the website of the British National Tourism Agency website (www.visitbritain.com), on the official sites of the top four destinations in the UK, i.e., London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast (www.visitlondon.com, www.edinburgh.org, www.visitcardiff.com, www.gotobelfast.com) and on the homepage of the Official Tourism Website for the Liverpool City Region (www.visitliverpool.com), because of its role as the European Capital of Culture in 2008.

In the first phase of my study, I reviewed the sites from a semiotic perspective in order to assess how multimodal discourse had been elaborated. The second stage of my investigation was focussed on the linguistic contents of the web-sites. All the texts accessible from the homepages with a single click were collected (on Jan 28th, 2008) from the digital source and extracted in Word format. A corpus of 82,257 words was created and analysed both quantitatively (Wordsmith Tools 4.0 – Scott 2007) and qualitatively. The way in which the textual and iconic languages interrelate in order to construct a cohesive generic website will be investigated in the following sections.

3. *Results and discussion*

3.1. *Semiotic background*

The layout of the web pages follows a very precise composition plan which can easily be detected thanks to multimodal analysis. Indeed, the positions of the pictures, texts, video-clips, the frames in which they are set, their interrelation and interaction form what Kress / van Leeuwen (2004: 181) define as *composition*, conveyed to the reader thanks to various interrelated systems of information existing within any text, regardless of whether the text is visual, textual or both. The way in which *composition* is realized depends on the fact that when we read we follow a Z-reading pattern (Kress / van Leeuwen 2004: 218): in Western cultures, text is written from left to right, from top to bottom, line by line. The most immediate and *natural* division created by the Z-reading pattern of the page is into left and right, top and bottom, and centre and margins which helps us to define the *zones* where the different visual elements are placed. Their corresponding informational values are *Given* and *New*, *Ideal* and *Real*, *Centre* and *Margins* (Kress / van Leeuwen 1998; Kress / van Leeuwen 2004: 181-229). Elements placed to the left of the vertical axis of the page are presented as *Given* pieces of information, or items that the reader already knows; *New* elements on the right are not yet known or agreed upon. A sense of contrast is presented through layouts based on the horizontal axis. Elements in the upper part of the page appeal to the reader's emotions, expressing *what might be*. The bottom elements

have an informative appeal, showing *what is*. These contrasting appeals can be awarded the values of *Ideal* and *Real*, where *Ideal* elements are more salient and simply contain the general points of information; *Real* elements give more practical and specific information. The elements placed in the *Centre* are the essential nucleus of information, with those set at the *Margins* as subsidiary parts of the image core.

Elements are positioned so as to attract the reader's attention and direct it to different levels of importance. These various levels are created through relative choices of colour, size, image sharpness and position. Often *vectors*, i.e. virtual lines created by the shape and position of elements, help to lead the eye from one element to another, in order of decreasing impact. This determines the *salience* of each element (Kress / van Leeuwen 2004: 212-214). Sometimes there are elements suggesting division or framing lines, which helps the reader to connect or differentiate the layout. These sections, or frames, give a sense of unity and progression. The *framing* of an element suggests its differentiation and individuality, while the lack of *framing* suggests unity and presents the picture as a whole (Kress / van Leeuwen 2004: 214-218). The application of these theoretical principles in the sites forming the corpus under investigation will be discussed below.

3.1.1. *www.visitlondon.com*

On the *www.visitlondon.com* webpage (Figure 1), visual and verbal elements appear to be well balanced: its homepage consists of a picture at the top. Moving clockwise, the search engine, 'Book now', 'Visit the London experience', 'People like you', 'London Areas' and the 'From Russia' exhibition review sections follow. All of them seem to frame the verbal rather than the visual central elements.

The photo, depicting the static skyline of London, is placed on the *ideal* section of the text; the shot creates a harmonious view as far as perspective is concerned: Blackfriars and Southwark Bridges ideally focus on both the City and on a part of London which has traditionally been associated with inns³, entertainment and the criminal underworld

³ Most famously, Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens mentioned the Borough Inns in their works. Chaucer mentions the Tabard Inn in the *Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare and Dickens mention the White Tabard in *Henry VI* and in *The Pickwick Papers*, respectively.



Figure 1. Visit London. London's official website [28/01/2008]

of prisons. Since the area may not be immediately recognized by (foreign) tourists, as indeed here no typical London symbols such as either Westminster or Big Ben are shown, web-links have been inserted on the photo, just by clicking on St. Paul's Cathedral on the left and Cannon Street on the right. From the two links, the virtual tourist is brought to a London map of the area in which its most famous tourist attractions are shown. A manipulation of the shot shifts St. Paul's Cathedral to the left rather than the centre of the picture – the Cathedral should be the focus to which the ideal vectors formed by the two bridges lead. Such manipulation, however, contributes to heightening the sense of visual equilibrium.

The presence of links regarding accommodation, places to go, events, maps, guides, etc. transforms the top part of the web-page into a semiotic unit which can be divided between *Ideal* (the photo, i.e., what London seems) and *Real* (the links, i.e., what London actually is.). The frames found below London's skyline can, in turn, be analysed as semiotic units, which, apart from the section on the left-hand page promoting an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, are mainly

divided into *Given/New* pieces of information – the *Given* being represented by a picture, the *New* by the texts which thus function as the caption of the visual.

Use of colour appears to be well-balanced too: blue, green and orange are wisely disseminated over the web page so as to avoid any striking or disturbing contrast. Even scrolling down the page, the constant factor seems to be the division of the homepage into three columns, mainly divided according to the *Given/New* pattern and with the presence of the same colours. The sensation conveyed to the virtual tourist is that of a metropolis in which arts, traditions and events are interestingly mingled: it is up to ‘People like you’ to discover them. The website provides the tourist with a treasure map; the tourist is invited to explore the “treasure island”. Indeed, interactivity is apparently offered, as ‘People like you’ can enter a competition, register (and become virtual Londoners) with no language problems since at the top, on the right-hand page, you can choose the language in which surfing will take place.

3.1.2. *www.visitliverpool.com*



Figure 2. visitLiverpool.com [28/01/2008]

Although the British National Tourism Agency manages both the www.visitliverpool.com and the www.visitlondon.com websites, the www.visitliverpool.com home page is a bit different from the London one (Figure 2).

The virtual tourist is offered a text in which the division between *Ideal/Real* is mediated by a row of central pictures depicting Liverpool as the city, its countryside, coast, sport and music. It gives the impression of a dynamic town and such dynamism is confirmed by the predominance of colour (red) found in the (a) background of the www.visitliverpool.com label, (b) choice of language, (c) factual information a tourist needs about Liverpool and (d) each web-link shown on the webpage.

In the lower part of the webpage, the *Real* section of the text, information is displayed in such a way as to create a *Given* part offered by the traditional links to 'Welcome to Liverpool', 'Accommodation' and 'What to do', and a *New* part offered by the search engine for accommodation. The two frames are virtually linked by the central text celebrating Liverpool as the 2008 European Capital of Culture, which, written on a white background, is pointed out as the most relevant piece of information.

The tourist is thus visually and verbally welcomed by a personified Liverpool, introduced as the 2008 Capital of Culture. Indeed, Liverpool's night skyline with fireworks seems to celebrate not only its nomination but also the tourist himself/herself. Images on www.visitliverpool.com are static, yet each firework contains a link to another photo taken during the People's Opening of Liverpool's European Capital of Culture Year on Jan 15th, 2008, when Liverpool-born ex-Beatle Ringo Starr and other musicians held a concert on the roof of St. George's Hall. Overall, the idea is that of a lively, young capital which can be, at the same time, as artistic as its city, as relaxing as its coasts and as peaceful as its countryside. In short, a capital for everybody.

3.1.3. www.edinburgh.org

In the *Edinburgh. Inspiring Capital* (Figure 3), the web page opens with a cartoon-like logo on the left. From a tiny spot which will eventually be revealed as the 'E' of Edinburgh, three curving lines move, forming a sort of cap under which the words *Edinburgh* and the subtitle *Inspiring Capital* appear.



Figure 3. Edinburgh. Inspiring Capital [28/01/2008]

The homepage of the Edinburgh Tourist Board is divided into four frames. On the left-hand of the page, the *Given*, the virtual tourist can surf between links taking him/her to the accommodation section (which includes special offers), the event page, the web tourist guides and to other historical and practical pieces of information. At the centre, the column forming the link between practical (*Given*) information and the (*New*) chance to save money can be taken as a semiotic unit split into *Ideal/Real*. In the *Ideal* part of the home page we can find four alternating pictures of Edinburgh (a photo of Calton Hill at dusk, a photo of the Forth Rail and Road Bridges at night, a detail of the National Gallery of Arts and a view of the town with the Scott Monument in the foreground). The *Real* part of the frame is characterized on the one hand by an uncharacteristically long text. Such a text is both a ‘welcome page’ and an introduction. On the other hand, in two red and green frames information about accommodation rates and downloadable videos can be found. Yet their layout, and above all their bright colours, appear to have been designed in such a way as to be perceived as belonging to the fourth column on the right-hand part of

which is at the same time pinpointed because of the drawn background (concentric waves whose focus lies outside the webpage). The drawing physically limits the *new* piece of information of the text where six alternating pictures convey the idea of a place where you can *experience* real Cardiff: a shot of the MAS (Masquerade Cardiff Carnival taking place in July/August 2008) is superimposed by a photo of Cardiff Castle which then gives way to a picture of (young) people eating *al fresco*, followed by typical Cardiff views. The virtual tourist is immediately drawn into a dynamic atmosphere where he/she can choose what to enjoy, taste, see and visit.

The dynamic visual and *Ideal* part of the *Experience Cardiff* homepage is an ‘umbrella’ under which we find the whole *Real* part organized in three columns: on the far left-hand part of the page the usual links to practical information are found; they are then followed by pictures illustrating what tourists can experience in Cardiff, an experience described in words, but reinforced by more photos. The frames in which the layout is organized give, however, the impression that we are actually in front of four columns since the space between them is equidistant despite the presence of vectors delimiting just three columns. The overall result is that of harmonious variation between texts and pictures which metonymically suggests the “harmony” tourists can find in Cardiff. Indeed, such perfection seems to be represented by the central blue headline, resolving any physical (and linguistic) division into a visual equilibrium: ‘Welcome to Cardiff, capital of Wales!’ or ‘Croeso I Gaerdydd, Pfriddinas Cymru’, written immediately below the Welsh, British, French, Spanish and German flags.

3.1.5. www.gotobelfast.com

The webpage of the Belfast Tourist Board (Figure 5) is striking for its emphasis on text visually reinforced by the choice of the photo symbolizing Belfast: the use of lights in and on Custom House reveals a sort of architectural geometry which reproduces the lines of the texts uploaded on the net.

The classical division between *Ideal* and *Real* is sustained by vectors that divide the text into five sectors on the horizontal axis and into three columns on the vertical axis. Here the logo is reproduced with an



Figure 5. gotobelfast.com. The official tourist website for Belfast [28/01/2008]

extremely close-up shot of the Big Fish sculpture by J. Kindness on the left (the *Given* part of the section) and the label *www.gotobelfast.com*. The official Tourist website for Belfast (the *New* part of the first horizontal sector). It forms the *Ideal* world of Belfast which is visually described as *Real* by the photo of Custom House. The mediation between *Ideal* and *Real* seems to be achieved by the different national flags and the link to the traditional pack of information tourists need to organize a holiday. Because of its prominence given by the blue lights which recall the blue column in the centre of the webpage, Custom House can in turn be analysed as an *Ideal* piece of information whose *Real* texts are placed at the bottom of the page. Also here the gap between *Ideal* and *Real* is bridged by the caption to the photo, an unusually long text supporting a visually intense image. The photo, with its contrast of shade and light, seems to duplicate the textual layout: the projection of the two wings depicted in the dark stresses the main entrance which ‘contains’ the central blue column of the *Real* part. The chess-like alternation of blue and white seems to reproduce the architecture of the monument in the texts: a central part with two

propelling wings. The *Real* part of the webpage is developed by patterning information from left to right: on the left-hand and central part of the homepage, the virtual tourist can find items of information in the form of advertisements; it is only in the right-hand column that tourist news can be found.

3.2. *Linguistic analysis*

The multimodal analysis of the webpages suggests that the layout is constructed in such a way as to depict a sort of spiral composed of a central text surrounded by frames containing both visual and verbal texts. Such frames can alternatively be regarded as the semiotic *New* or *Given* piece of information featuring *Ideal* and *Real* representations of the world they are both portraying and describing. The linguistic analysis of such texts is necessary in order to assess whether lexical differences can be evidence of underlying linguistic strategies. Indeed, any distinction based on lexis can reflect “at the same time the epistemological, semantic and functional features of a given variety of specialised discourse” (Gotti 2006: 20). It is true that the language of tourist websites is more similar to general discourse since such multimodal texts are examples of communicative interactions between specialists and non-specialists. Yet the nature of the (web-)language of tourism appears to be extremely persuasive and therefore evaluative because of its promotional function. Indeed, the language of tourism has specific world-views to present in which evaluation can be expressed with modification, nominal selection and verbal strategies (Knowles 1989: 59-61).

The corpus selected can be synthetically described below in Table 1:

| <i>Website</i> | | <i>Words</i> | <i>Standardized TTR</i> |
|----------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| London | www.visitlondon.com | 36,235 | 440 |
| Liverpool | www.visitliverpool.com | 2,649 | 32.20 |
| Edinburgh | www.edinburgh.org | 1,909 | 23.20 |
| Cardiff | www.visitcardiff.com | 9,430 | 114.64 |
| Belfast | www.gotobelfast.com/ | 32,034 | 389.43 |
| TOTAL | | 82,257 | 1,000 |

Table 1. Breakdown of corpus in websites.

As MacCannel (1989: 14) states, in tourism discourse what is important is to recreate a relationship of authenticity between the tourist and what he/she will see. Such prominence given to authenticity is conveyed by means of key modifiers such as *actual*, *authentic*, *real*, *typical* and *very*. At the same time, tourist appeal is possible because of the sensation created concerning different values assigned to the tourist destination: things, sights and cultures are indeed appreciated because they are different from what is familiar (Cohen 1972: 165). The positive value of diversity is usually represented by key words which at the same time imply different values characterizing tourist destinations, such as preservation (*untouched*, *unspoilt*, *primitive*, *simple*, *natural*), continuity (*tradition*, *timeless*, *unchanging*, *traditional*, *unsophisticated*), novelty (*different*, *exotic*, *adventurous*), distance (*remote*), exclusiveness (*exclusive*, *for the discerning customer*, *away-from-it-all*, *unique*) and attractiveness (*colourful*, *picturesque*, *fascinating*, *spectacular*).

In order to see whether the concepts of authenticity and difference were recreated through the language of my corpus, a frequency wordlist with Wordsmith Tools was created. The most frequent adjectives occurring at least fifty times in the corpus are indicated below (see Table 2):

| Word | Frequency | Standardized TTR |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| new | 202 | 0.228727 |
| great | 129 | 0.146068 |
| special | 117 | 0.13248 |
| free | 97 | 0.109834 |
| royal | 96 | 0.108702 |
| national | 68 | 0.076997 |
| famous | 66 | 0.074732 |
| unique | 61 | 0.069071 |
| major | 54 | 0.061145 |
| central | 53 | 0.060012 |
| international | 53 | 0.060012 |
| local | 53 | 0.060012 |

Table 2. Adjectival items occurring at least 50 times in the corpus

Apart from *special* and *free*, clearly linked to offers proposed to tourists, all the other positive terms seem to transmit both a sense of euphoria for the services the website is promoting and a sense of distinctiveness and authenticity. This is confirmed not only by the presence of such adjectives as *unique* and *local* but also by the high frequency of the intensifiers *top* (148 occurrences – TTR 0.16), used as a modifier, and *great* (129 occurrences – TTR 0.14), and supported by the adverbial comparative *more* (406 occurrences – TTR 0.16) and superlatives *best* (130 occurrences – TTR 0.14) and *most* (115 occurrences – TTR 0.13). These items, while conveying the exclusive quality of the described destinations, underline the evaluative and therefore clearly promotional character of the corpus.

The most frequent collocate of the adjective *top* is *tips*, resulting in an alliterative binomial that introduces recommendations as to the *top theatres* or *top buildings* to visit. It is thanks to these hints that people can have a *great time*, while re-discovering the *great value* the destination has. Clearly, the described tourist location is always the *most famous*, *most beautiful* and *most popular* one. The language is very emphatic and strongly evaluative, extolling positive characteristics of the places described (Gotti 2007: 27). Furthermore, the absence of the second term of comparison within the sentence in which *most* occurs implicitly stresses both the uniqueness and the authenticity of the place. Such a resort is evidently the *best (most popular) place* to go: not only is such a destination unique but it is also authentic – favoured by local people, it is really *off the beaten track* and therefore *the best*. Authenticity, popularity and distinctiveness are indirectly featured by the verbs employed in the texts. The frequency list I extracted (Table 3) suggests that the type of verbs exploited invites the web-tourist to look for the pleasure a holiday in that destination can offer.

The verb *find* is usually set within the collocational pattern *find out more* (106 occurrences) which, along with *click* and *go*, is meant to encourage the web-tourist to read further. In all the other cases, the verb *find* is simply a synonym for *discover*, opening a scenario of exploration to which the tourist is lured. The fascination such a web exploration can offer is indeed supported by the extremely high frequency of such verbs as *visit*, *see*, *get*.

It is worth noting that verbs are mainly expressed in the imperative

| Word | Frequency | Standardized TTR |
|-------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Find | 186 | 0.21061 |
| Visit | 183 | 0.207213 |
| See | 126 | 0.142671 |
| Get | 121 | 0.13701 |
| Click | 114 | 0.129083 |
| Go | 100 | 0.113231 |
| Stay | 98 | 0.110966 |
| Enjoy | 77 | 0.087188 |
| Discover | 75 | 0.084923 |
| Dance | 74 | 0.083791 |
| Explore | 73 | 0.082659 |
| Live | 63 | 0.071336 |
| Make | 53 | 0.060012 |
| Use | 53 | 0.060012 |
| Experience | 50 | 0.056616 |

Table 3. Verbal items occurring at least 50 times in the corpus

form. The use of imperatives seems to be preferred by the tourist industry to guide its potential clients; yet by using experiential verbs the overall impression is that of granting web-tourists unrestricted freedom to choose whether to accept the invitation and visit the location or not. In other cases, verbs are introduced by the dynamic modal *can* and by the auxiliary *will* (130 occurrences – TTR 0.14), which respectively convey the idea of possibility and certainty. In these cases, the reference to the target consumer *you* is explicit. There is, however, a difference in the use of *you* according to the auxiliary employed in the text. As we can see from the concordance list below (Concordance 1), whenever the impression of certainty is conveyed by means of *will*, there is a balance between the active and passive role of the potential tourist: indeed, *you* has the subject function if the collocate is an experiential verb; if this is not the case, it occupies the object position.

| | | |
|-----------|-------------|--|
| you | will | meet... |
| You | will | experience a city rich in culture & heritage... |
| You | will | be collected from the hotel at 9am on the Saturday ... |
| you | will | be returned to the hotel. Price £115 per person ... |
| people | will | ensure you have fun. Day... |
| Paintball | will | provide you with an action packed... |
| Shag | will | keep you on your feet all night... |
| That | will | get you moving... |
| You | will | will find the dance floor filled with a... |

Concordance 1: selected concordance lines for *will*

As we can see from the instances in Concordance 2, in the case of the auxiliary *can* (141 occurrences – TTR 0.15) the subject is always *you*, the tourist, and *can* transmits the idea of possibility. Yet by conveying the impression that the tourist has the opportunity to choose what to do, *can* seems to express an off-record invitation, thus becoming deontic.

| | | |
|---------|------------|---|
| you | can | relax and enjoy the festivities, and let... |
| you | can | all take a dip in our 15m Swimming Pool. Price: Special Delegate Rates Tour ... |
| you | can | can browse our operators listing by 1 of 3 methods:... |
| we | can | show you the FULL Tour Operators A-Z 3. Browse tour operators by a-z: a... |
| planner | can | help you plan your journey up to 28 days in advance From: To: Optional ... |
| you | can | even book your place on-line! Nightlife Midnight. A queue of late teens a... |
| you | can | be watching seals dive from rocks in meandering loughs, walking golden beach... |
| you | can | book your place on-line! Featured Events Out to Lunch Arts Festival.. |
| we | can | provide endless adventure! Choose from canoeing, abseiling, kayaking... |

Concordance 2: selected concordance lines for *can*

On the other hand, in those rare cases in which the main idea expresses some (implicit) necessary conditions, *you* is the complement, as, for example, in *They can help you plan your visit with ideas on where to go, what to do, how to get there* in which an introductory clause like *should you need assistance* is ellipted (www.visitcardiff.com).

The two concordance lists reveal that there is an asymmetrical interaction between the participants of the web-communicative event: while the potential consumer is always referred to with the pronoun *you* (534 occurrences; TTR 6.49), the people who have control over communication are very seldom indicated; indeed, the term *we* has just 65 occurrences (TTR 0.79).

Interestingly, the occurrence of *must* is not so frequent as the other modals (8 occurrences – TTR 0.001). A manual extraction revealed that the modal is nominalized (15 occurrences – TTR 0.02) in such expressions as *a must-see*, *a must-do* and *a must* (see Concordance 3):

| | | |
|------------|-------------------|--|
| Love | Must See! | dates: 17 January 2008 |
| Awards | Must See! | dates: 22 February 2008 Times |
| Afrika! | Must See! | dates: 18 January 2008 to 27 March 2008 Time |
| Empire | Must See! | dates: 17 February 2008 Times: 17 |
| Amjad | Must See! | dates: 30 January 2008 to 2 February |
| Roundhouse | Must See! | dates: 28 February 2008 to 29 |
| the | Must See! | shows of 2008. |
| 1870-1925 | Must See! | dates: 26 January 2008 to 18 April 2008 |
| a | Must See! | for all Star Trek fans. |
| the | must do | city experiences |
| the | must-see | attraction over the Christmas period |
| the | 'must see' | attraction over the Christmas period |
| Top | Must-See | Attractions List |
| A | must | for all shoppers is |
| a | must | for all budding B-Boys |

Concordance 3. selected concordance lines for nominalized *must*

In this case, nominalization is a strategic tool used to avoid mentioning the actors involved in communication; a necessity is

indicated but who considers it a necessity or why it is so is not mentioned. When *must* is used as a nominalization, while acquiring a colloquial status indicates a necessity the tourist cannot miss in order to have an authentic experience and creates the illusion of a friendship-like relationship with the web-master, thus lowering any defensive (financial) walls the potential consumer may have built. Agreement, obtained through empathy – the first step towards co-operation – is thus created. At the same time, the nominalized form *must* is extremely concise. Conciseness is a verbal strategy by means of which concepts are expressed in the shortest possible form (Gotti 2007: 24) which reduces textual surface and increases lexical density. In this way, the most effective and powerful words are deliberately chosen to create persuasiveness. The virtual tourist is invited to ‘taste’ authenticity by means of an on-record direction (Brown / Levinson 1987): *must* introduces a condition without which the tourist cannot fully appreciate the authentic experience the destination has to offer.

As for the nouns in the websites that form the corpus under investigation, they normally (and predictably) refer to the world of tourism – see Table 4.

| Word | Frequency | Standardized TTR |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| hotel | 195 | 0.220801 |
| hotels | 155 | 0.175508 |
| information | 181 | 0.204948 |
| guide | 163 | 0.184567 |
| attractions | 157 | 0.177773 |
| tour | 157 | 0.177773 |
| tours | 100 | 0.113231 |
| accommodation | 147 | 0.16645 |
| music | 143 | 0.16192 |
| offer | 51 | 0.05774 |
| offers | 143 | 0.16192 |
| world | 139 | 0.157391 |
| events | 131 | 0.148333 |
| house | 123 | 0.139274 |
| map | 123 | 0.139274 |

| | | |
|---------------|-----|----------|
| street | 112 | 0.126819 |
| church | 110 | 0.124554 |
| people | 105 | 0.118893 |
| area | 101 | 0.114363 |
| night | 99 | 0.112099 |
| park | 99 | 0.112099 |
| weekend | 99 | 0.112099 |
| place | 98 | 0.110966 |
| features | 97 | 0.109834 |
| detail | 96 | 0.108702 |
| family | 90 | 0.101908 |
| restaurant | 67 | 0.075865 |
| restaurants | 90 | 0.101908 |
| museum | 89 | 0.100776 |
| bars | 86 | 0.097379 |
| theatre | 86 | 0.097379 |
| visitor | 84 | 0.095114 |
| art | 83 | 0.093982 |
| arts | 67 | 0.075865 |
| club | 83 | 0.093982 |
| clubs | 86 | 0.076997 |
| time | 80 | 0.090585 |
| history | 73 | 0.082659 |
| league | 68 | 0.076997 |
| fun | 66 | 0.074732 |
| pubs | 64 | 0.072468 |
| culture | 59 | 0.066806 |
| budget | 58 | 0.065674 |
| welcome | 56 | 0.063409 |
| break | 51 | 0.057748 |
| capital | 51 | 0.057748 |
| entertainment | 51 | 0.057748 |
| style | 51 | 0.057748 |

Table 4. Nominal items occurring at least 50 times in the corpus

Indeed, such terms convey objective and practical information about the destination. Although the web-text transforms places into commodities through an advertising process (Santulli 2007: 45), the text itself needs to be informative in order to offer a description of the places. Words thus present the location as a concrete destination to the would-be tourist. Moreover, the description of the location's physical and cultural characteristics is embedded in a text which is extremely evaluative and persuasive, as the adjectives and the verbal strategies present in my corpus confirm. In this way a complex discourse is constructed, enhancing the attracting power of the destination and producing in the receiver the desire to go there and have a unique experience. The destination promotion process is therefore achieved: the image of the individual site is transformed into a desirable and fashionable tourist destination (Giordana 2004: 75-79).

4. Conclusions

The analysis of five web-sites carried out above shows some interesting features. All texts offer hyper-modality in terms of visual-verbal interplay. The semiotic multimodal analysis reveals a pattern in which a central frame is surrounded by others where visual and verbal elements alternate creating a harmonious effect. Such alternation is not immediately perceived, since the framing usually foregrounds one of the many textual elements. The reading process usually offers a schematic pattern by means of which sections are identified as *Ideal/Real* and *Given/New*. In all these frames, the visual element presents the place or the event as literally visible and concrete, placing particular emphasis on factual aspects. Yet visuals display emotional and deeper values which go beyond their iconic function; in addition, the accompanying texts generate more profound meanings in the would-be tourist's mind.

The verbal element of these web-pages apparently describes the tourist resort in a referential way. However, since the main goal of the texts is not to inform but to sell, all these texts clearly have an illocutionary function. The first clue to this is provided by the widespread use of the pronoun *you* and by the rare presence of the pronoun *we*. At all times, the focus is on the web-reader rather than the

web-author: the text is meant to be eye-catching for the would-be tourist, its ultimate aim being that of persuading the potential consumer to buy the services offered on-line. By using *you*, the web-author establishes a direct relationship with the web-audience. Indeed, one of the most efficient methods used to generate a successfully persuasive text is the creation of a personal relationship between the actors of the communicative event (Cogno / Dall'Ara 1994: 228). In this way, agreement is more easily obtained: the recipient is drawn into the text and empathy is established, generating identification and loyalty. By exploiting highly evaluative premodifiers, the texts become suggestive and evocative to such an extent that they trigger emotions in the web-reader, who thus associates the place with values regarded as essential in modern tourism where adventure, freedom, uniqueness and romance are the main features (Santulli 2007: 45-46).

However, factual information is also fundamental, as the range of specific referential items found in my corpus reveals, in order to establish contact with the real world. It is by means of these informative elements that the potential tourist acquires a sense of belonging to an exclusive group who can take advantage of the type of experience offered. Indeed, as we have seen, most verbs convey an invitation to taste the 'real luxury' of the destination available to a privileged few. In this way, the extremely effective interaction between the iconic and verbal codes generates complex and stimulating communicative events which successfully contribute to the achievement of their persuasive function.

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