

## **EDITORIAL**

# **THE LANGUAGE OF TOURISM: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPICAL ISSUE<sup>1</sup>**

Tourism is a complex phenomenon with psychological, sociological and cultural dimensions (Urry, 2002). Regarding the latter, tourism involves direct contact between cultures with a particular emphasis on the importance of exchange and sharing among local and foreign cultures. The reproduction of cultural and environmental discourse through tourism is a key characteristic of our modern era. Culture as an educational subject has gone from one aspect of the curriculum to its very centre as more expertise in intercultural communication has become required in interactions of all kinds: travel, business, medical tourism, and migrations, among others (Cocca, Rodríguez Bulnes, & Alvarado, 2016). From a linguistic perspective, the increasing influence of tourism and its recognition as a social practice, the marketization of public discourse and the growing impact of the media, have resulted in a firmer grounding of tourism as discourse (Przeclawski, 1993). Moreover, as claimed by Dann (1996, p. 2), tourism is an “act of promotion” with “a discourse of its own”; indeed, “the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in doing so, convert them from potential into actual clients”. In this context, keywords in promotional texts play a significant role. As pointed out by Cappelli (2008, p. 6) “the importance of keywords is one of the most interesting phenomena for linguists and translators,” because they are essential for tourism promoters who need to be aware of the issues involved in promoting a location in different languages, in an attempt to sell a local product to a national and international clientele (Pym, 2001).

The rapid development of the tourism and hospitality industry can directly influence the English language, which is the most widely used in international tourism. Employees who work in the tourism and hospitality industry are aware of its importance and need to have a good command of English in their workplace. For this reason, English for tourism and hospitality has been categorized under English for specific purposes (ESP), and is an important and dynamic area of specialization within the field of English language teaching and learning.

Language proficiency is essential in all professional fields, perhaps all the more so in the tourism and hospitality industry due to its specific nature and concepts. Thus, it is required that educators understand the practical applications of the ESP approach (Zulqarnain, Abu Bakar, & Saffari, 2017). Teaching ESP in the field of tourism and hospitality means focussing on specific linguistic skills, and this would benefit from a different approach to that normally adopted for pedagogical purposes, which is still heavily based on acquiring vocabulary skills. It requires a shift to a range of specific language skills mostly based on understanding diverse types of

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<sup>1</sup> This Introduction has been written by S. M. Maci, M. Sala and Š. Godnič Vičič and their authorship should be considered as follows: Stefania Maci wrote the Introduction incipit – pp. 1-2 (20%); Michele Sala wrote the Introduction body text as well as the resumes of the articles published in this issue – pp. 2-4 (60%); and Šarolta Godnič Vičič wrote the conclusion section of the Introduction – pp. 4-5 (20%).

discourse in varied language situations and contexts. As Staiton (2018) states, unfortunately to date there has been little or no recognition of the link existing between ESP and tourism within the tourism industry or academia. Re-forming educational paradigms of the current subjects to include these sectors should produce favourable results. An attempt in this regard is offered by this issue of *Scripta Manent* in which pedagogical applications and theoretical frameworks are presented. The goal is to raise awareness in both ESP specialists and students of those socio-cultural elements which may disrupt communication in the tourism workplace.

The articles in this topical issue assess in various ways the resources that are typically used (and that can, therefore, also be outlined and systematized for pedagogical purposes) in multimedia tourism discourse, and are here divided into two sections - the first dealing with the representation of 'otherness' and the second with specific communicative strategies for tourism promotion in digital contexts. Tourism discourse is grounded in the concept of 'otherness' (stemming from the interplay or tension between binary concepts such as *here/now* vs. *somewhere else*, private vs. exotic, routine vs. leisure, real vs. ideal, tourists vs. locals, guides vs. prospective users, experience vs. discovery, information vs. persuasion, effectiveness vs. politeness, etc.), and, more specifically, is engaged in both representing otherness, and, at the same time, finding viable ways of bridging the gaps between different concepts.

In this light, the first article, by Mariana Lya Zummo, examines the mechanisms of users' discursive self-construction in Web-mediated tourism communication by investigating webzines authored by and targeting expats. Expats constitute a particular community of users who occupy the grey area between tourists (people visiting destinations over relatively limited periods of time) and immigrants (people moving to different countries mainly for economic or political reasons). Expats are people temporarily (in most cases) living abroad, usually for professional or personal reasons, having an interest in and understanding of the host culture which they aim to experience as locals do. This article focusses precisely on the ways these users construct their own identity as members of this extended community of discourse and how they project this identity onto prospective readers primarily by creating rhetorical dynamics between the first person personal pronouns (to refer to expats, both writer and readers) and the third person pronoun (to point to locals). This analysis considers a corpus of articles published on the *Transition Abroad* webzine over 2015 and, in order to provide a fully-fledged overview of how personal pronouns and other discourse markers are used (in what contexts and with what purposes), it offers a comparative perspective on the subject, comparing entries published on the Europe 2015 issues to those published on the Asia 2015 issues.

Elena Pasquini investigates the potential tension existing in some performative contexts in tourism communication arising from the need to express potentially sensitive meanings (i.e., the representation of people with disabilities, and what they are expected to do or not to do in given situations), and, at the same time, the need to avoid using a language that is (perceived as) stigmatizing for specific groups or face-threatening for the general user. This type of tension, which is common to many communicative scenarios (performative, institutional, professional, etc.), is particularly relevant in tourism settings in that such potentially sensitive information is meant to be useful primarily and specifically to tourists with special needs, who might nonetheless be threatened by the way the information is presented. This article discusses how such a tension may be mitigated through Political Correctness (PC) resources, by

examining how special assistance web-pages of international airports textualize descriptions, instructions, directions or advice for users requiring special assistance, and, more specifically, focusses on the interplay between PC concerns (aimed at softening some lexical and semantic aspects of the propositional content) and the need to maintain informative precision, detail and specificity. The article also provides a comparative overview of how informative effectiveness and PC appropriateness are achieved in different contexts and cultures by comparing special assistance web-pages of two different international airports (Gatwick Airport, UK, and Milan-Orio al Serio, Italy).

A very popular genre in tourism discourse, that of audio guides, is the object of the analysis offered by Maria Elisa Fina. This article detects and fills a gap which is found in most multimodal approaches to tourism research that are mainly concerned with the interaction between text and visuals, explicating the significance of the aural dimension, an element of primary importance in such a genre meant to guide users by orally providing directions and making available contextually relevant information intended to be listened to and easily understood while visiting a destination. Based on a corpus of city audio guides – containing English texts describing both British and American destinations and Italian guides for Italian cities – this study specifically focusses on the dialogical dimension of this genre; that is to say, on how different voices are used to fictively reproduce interactive scenarios. The analysis investigates how, through the manipulation of different voices, listeners are addressed by narrators, how they are given information as if directly by (fictionalized) locals – either experts or ordinary people – solicited by narrators, and also how they may be given the impression of being addressed directly by characters from the past (whose voice are introduced to dramatize historical events).

The second section of this topical issue sheds light on typical discursive and semiotic aspects of tourism communication, and, more precisely, those resources which are used by experts to enhance immediacy, impact and communicative effectiveness when promoting products or destinations. Based on the fact that the Web has become the privileged channel for tourism promotion, in her article, Stefania Consonni assesses the ways in which tourism experts exploit multimodality – a set of resources which are distinctive to and readily available in digital communication – to get messages across, capture the prospective users' attention, convey attitudes – both towards products and addressees – and elicit affective responses on their part. This study offers a thorough systemic analysis of textual-visual strategies aimed at creating audience engagement by considering the way these resources are use in the LEGOLAND theme park web-site. The author draws on the Hallidayan metafunctions as designed within Systemic Functional Grammar (and originally meant for verbal communication) and effectively applies them to the mixed-media texts of the web-site under consideration, illustrating how engagement can be maximized and handled both at the ideational level (through narrative and relational/conceptual representations of the interacting audience), the interpersonal level (by the construction of an ideal and responding audience in terms of closeness, emotional engagement, etc.), and, finally, at the textual level (by considering how various informative pieces are positioned on the screen).

The last article, by Anna Franca Plastina, provides an in-depth analysis of World Heritage Sites discourse, pointing out that the textualization of meaning in such contexts is indeed an articulated process of inter-semiotic and multimodal representation stemming from the

interplay of different systems of signification (words and visuals), and at the same time the referent, or, more precisely, the most appropriate, effective and possibly expected way of representing the site. The immediacy and impact characterizing these texts is achieved by resorting to symbolic, conventional and recognizable images which provide interpretive parameters intended to guide (and indeed influence) the prospective users' perception of a given sight or destination. This analysis focusses on off-sight markers (that is, those resources meant to anticipate the sight of a destination rather than fully represent it) as they are used to convey evidential information and epistemological familiarity. By examining websites describing the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in Australia, this article discusses the meaning-making and effectiveness-enhancing practices produced by combining presentation and interpretation markers as they are realized by both textual and multimodal resources, and determines how interest in the destination can be elicited by lexicalizing the users' experience of the site (be it sensory or conceptual) or picturing it, that is by showing users enjoying their experience or sharing memories, impressions and their appreciation with the prospective visitor.

The papers published in this issue of *Scripta Manent* make yet another important contribution: they aim to enhance the teaching practices of English for tourism – an uncommon feature of research publications in the field of tourism discourse. By addressing the pedagogical implications of their research findings, the authors continue *Scripta Manent's* quest to bridge theory and practice in languages for specific purposes.

The articles by Zuma, Pasquini and Fina in the first section thus also argue that 'otherization' in tourism discourse should be addressed by the syllabi of English for tourism and/or translation courses. Zuma's findings show that by paying careful attention to the use of personal pronouns and the associations they evoke teachers could not only explore the linguistic resources expats use to construct their own identities and those of other tourists and local people in webzines but they could also develop students' critical thinking skills. By claiming knowledge about the three groups, expats create relationships of power and polarize relationships between the in-groups and the otherized out-groups. Understanding the ways in which linguistic resources are used to create power relations in discourse can also assist with the development of students' writing skills. English for tourism syllabi could also be expanded using political correctness strategies. Since political correctness strategies used in communication with travellers with special needs may vary from culture to culture, Pasquini suggests raising students' awareness about the linguistic resources that can empower disabled travellers and create a welcoming ambience as well as those that can help mitigate face-threatening communication acts.

Cross-cultural comparison is also relevant in another context: that of audio guides for tourists. Fina finds this digital genre especially useful for developing students' creative writing skills for oral delivery and the teaching of speaking skills to students interested in tour guiding. Students of translation, too, could benefit from learning to translate audio guides as the act would require them to engage in adaptation, re-writing, and transcreation.

The second group of papers deals with specific communicative strategies that promote tourism in digital contexts; both Consonni and Plastina suggest that their research findings show that multimodal approaches to website analysis should be incorporated into English for tourism syllabi. Consonni's reasoning lies in the fact that understanding audience engagement on tourism websites requires multiliteracy skills. She showed that the use of Systemic Functional

Grammar metafunctions can explain the meaning-making processes that engage visitors through words and visuals and create effective persuasive communication strategies on websites. Therefore, they could help to raise students' awareness and understanding of these processes and strategies.

Plastina's reasons for arguing for the adoption of multimodal approaches rest in her findings that the use of particular linguistic and visual aspects in representation discourse can be discipline specific. They can also help students discover and understand competing heritage representations and help develop their critical thinking skills.

The emergence of new digital genres in the field of tourism is thus delivering new challenges to our understanding of tourism discourse. However, these genres also bring about new opportunities for both research agendas and teaching practice. We trust the papers in this issue of *Scripta Manent* will open up new research questions and at the same time help enrich the syllabi of languages for tourism and translation courses by helping to raise students' awareness and critical understanding of these new genres and empower them in their translation or use.

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