

Foreword

Language and images are inextricably tied in tourism discourse, both synchronically and diachronically. Guidebooks offer a perfect observation point to investigate the dynamics of multimodal cultural meaning construction. The contributions collected in this volume advance our knowledge of the way in which cultural values and tourism discourse have been shaping each other.

The papers offer a multilingual perspective on the complex relationship between the iconic apparatus and the vocabulary of tangible and intangible heritage. They show that the need to describe the travel experience both through linguistic and visual means is a need of all human beings, independently of their cultural background. At the same time, the culturally predicated needs of each traveller shape the image of destinations and change it over time.

Images have always contributed to both realistic and stereotyped representations of distant realities and cultural practices. Over the centuries, travel writing and the visual arts have gone hand in hand, contributing to the generic hybridization of tourism discourse (Francesconi 2012). This is a constantly growing trend, to the point that “human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before” (Mirzoeff 1999: 1) and the tourist gaze is increasingly guided through visual resources (Urry and Larsen 2011). Similarly, the sacralisation of sights and destinations (MacCannell 1989) tends to rely on the sharing of iconic representations of popular sites through both specialized publications and user-generated content platforms. Guidebooks are becoming sophisticated multimodal artefacts and their mediating role as “culture broker” (Cohen 1985, Crang 2004, Cappelli forthcoming) largely relies on the complementary relationship between semiotic codes.

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The use of images in tourism discourse is far from unexplored. However, in spite of the fact that “tourist consumption is primarily visual” (Jenkins 2003: 309), linguists have started to thoroughly investigate it in its connections with cultural meaning construal only recently (Francesconi 2014), thanks to the development of the field of multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Images come with a narrative structure of their own which contributes to encoding conceptual representations. The size of frame (e.g. close, medium or long shot), the perspective (e.g. low angle vs. eye level), the modes (e.g. colour saturation, depth, brightness, etc.), the reality principles (e.g. naturalistic vs. abstract) and the polarization (e.g. left-right, top-bottom, circular, etc.) are all elements that can convey meaning.

When such elements combine with language in a guidebook, the result is powerful mediated discourse which shapes and freezes the image of destinations and sights through the filter offered by the eyes of the author. In this sense, we can talk of “discours image” (Raus : VII) (depicted discourse), a type of discourse in which images offer not only a denotative representation of reality but a connotative and highly symbolic one too which can also result in promotional effects, depending on the author’s reputation (e.g. Rick Steve’s guides or Pauline Frommer’s guides in the English speaking world).

Tourism discourse is necessarily “subjective” to a certain extent, and guidebooks are no exception. They play a crucial role in the diffusion and popularization of culture-specific concepts. The intricate interplay of linguistic and visual resources ensures optimal accessibility of specialized information, which might otherwise be too complex to process for the reader. The iconic apparatus offers an immediate representation of more or less specialized vocabulary and helps the “lay reader” manage the wealth of (possibly) new information necessary to understand the destination and its culture. In other words, through the complementary relationship between words and images, guidebooks create connections between the “known” and the “new”. They provide interpretive tools for tourists by helping them integrate their culturally-predicated expectations and needs with the destination’s culture. They take advantage of available mental representations to help tourists make sense of what is new and unfamiliar to them and of the importance of the items selected as culturally relevant (Cappelli forthcoming). The choice of words and images, though, are ultimately an author’s (culturally-predicated) subjective choice.

The articles included in this volume focus on three main macro-topics: the representation of journeys and destinations, art in guidebooks and imaginary and propaganda in guidebooks. The articles by Paola Novara, Monica Maffioli, Marie-France Merger and Lorenzo Devilla explore the complex relationship of visual and linguistic resources in guidebooks and their role in creating both the image of the destination and tourists’ ex-

pectations. The studies by Philipp Meuser, Ulrike Müller, Hannah Wirta Kinney and Dorit Kluge focus on the relationship between guidebooks and art and on the way in which tourism discourse can contribute to the changing fortunes of specific monuments or forms of art and vice versa. Adolfo Mignemi and Galia Yanoshevsky offer an interesting take on guidebooks and focus on the ways in which they can contribute to the fabrication of collective imaginary and even military propaganda.

The variety of topics, perspectives and languages represented in this volume is proof that, in spite of being one of the most investigated genres in tourism discourse, guidebooks still have much to offer to interdisciplinary and cross-linguistic research. Their interest lies not only in the semiotic resources used to describe destinations and sights, but in their value as a hybrid cultural artifact whose complex role is that of mediating and leading at the same time. This cannot but result in an interesting mix of subjective communicative choices which are culturally and temporally bound. For this reason, the language of guidebooks offers an ideal vantage point to observe the ever changing “gaze” that people cast on other people and their territories and cultures.

Gloria Cappelli
University of Pisa