

## The Discursive Features of the Written Tourism Discourse Specific to the Travel Guide

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### Abstract

*Along with the other tourism writings, travel guides are the result of a socio-discursive practice, since they are created in professional situations. As a social activity, the travel guide introduces, within the framework of human exchanges, a specific type of discourse which shares certain characteristics with other genres, while maintaining a specificity that distinguishes it from the others. The question that arises is: "What are the characteristics that contribute to the conceptualization of the notion of discourse, especially tourism discourse?". This paper relates to the theoretical-methodological journey carried out during my PhD thesis, as part of the analysis of the travel guide's tourism discourse. Our paper, situated within the written discourse analysis, aims to answer the question: "Which are the features shared with other types of discourse and which are the characteristics specific to tourism discourse?". The aim is to provide an overview of this type of discourse.*

**Key words:** *travel, euphoria, tautology, monologue, magic.*

**J.E.L. classification:** Z30, Z39

### 1. Introduction

In our society, tourism discourse has become ubiquitous and familiar as it is part of the promotional language used by mass-media, but it is also found in various other interactions. It is characterized by a number of particularities which allow its individualization in relation to other types of discourse.

Our paper is part of a larger investigation regarding the analysis of the written tourism discourse, in Romanian and French. For this research, we have focused on the travel guides printed in both languages. Although it has been and still is an extensively studied and researched field from an economic, sociological and political point of view, tourism has not generated great interest from a linguistic viewpoint, and the travel guide has not been the central object of a linguistic analysis in the specialized literature of our country. This paper is part of an original bilingual study within which we have implemented a comparative study, through which we have compared the written tourism discourse of the Romanian writer with that of the French writer, discourses that present both similarities and differences.

### 2. Theoretical background

In order to be properly understood, tourism discourse must respect several stages of communication, and its objectives must be clearly set out. According to Boyer and Viallon (1994, p. 92), the first objective of this type of discourse is to present the destination with the help of advertising, in order to build a reputation, the increase in notoriety being an important objective of tourism communication. Along with already existing institutions, the newly established ones have the interest of making themselves known, by attracting a large audience. Thus, informing the public is a major objective due to social evolution, namely information has become a positive cultural value. Regarding the second objective, tourism specialists aim to present a positive image of the destination so as to capture the readers' attention, to impress them so that in the end their offer can become

attractive and desired (*Faire-aimer*) (Frochot & Legohérel, 2007/2014, p. 205). These objectives can only be achieved by creating connections between the destination and the reader with the help of evocative images and a specially chosen lexicon. As for the third goal, it aims to persuade the readers to react, by provoking an emotional reaction and encouraging them to go on the journey. Therefore, through this discourse, the writer of the guide seeks to sell an imaginary space, which triggers a dream which impresses the reader, the former being the bearer of an emotional message, referring to an oneiric, timeless world, in which the destination becomes a product desired above all else (Peja, 2015, p. 60). Having said that, the objective of the travel guide – and of the tourism communication in general – is to convince the reader to move from the phase of ignorance to that of action, as Frochot & Legohérel stated (2007/2014, p. 205).

### 3. Research methodology

According to specialists, the discourse is a text within a context, a unit which belongs, in general, to a field of activity. This activity is based on the discursive contract established between the partners and made following certain strategic choices. Dominique Maingueneau (1998, pp. 38-41), referring to the way in which the discourse is perceived, completes the definition of the discourse by listing some aspects present in each discursive activity, namely: the discourse is an *oriented, active, interactive, contextualized, assumed by the subject, normative, interdiscursive* unit and it has a *transphrastic* structure. Thus, he describes the essential features of the discourse, which we also find in tourism discourse and which will be briefly presented in this paper.

### 4. Findings

The discourse is a transphrastic organization (beyond the phrase); it has a different structure from that of the phrase. The discourse is subject to the rules of organization existing within a certain social group, relating to the plan of the text, the length of the enunciation, etc. The discourse is oriented; it develops over time according to the purpose chosen by the addresser. From the very beginning, it is built to have a purpose, and the addresser gives his discourse a certain direction that can be interrupted or deflected by a possible addressee. In this case, the linear evolution of the discourse changes depending on the type of enunciation: monologue or dialogue. In the case of the tourism discourse, the writer of the guide directs his discourse in terms of well-defined goals, relying on several twists, such as anticipation, repetition, etc. (especially in the narrative sequence).

Discourse is a form of action: any enunciation is a language act aimed at changing a situation. The language acts are part of a certain type of discourse and are aimed at producing a modification involving the addressees. As Peja states (2015, p. 59), through the various language acts, such as *inviting, advising, suggesting*, etc., the discourse of a guide's writer tries to modify or act upon the reader's behavior, transforming him from a passive reader into a real traveler, since the captivating presentation of the tourist destinations acts upon him, convincing him to visit the place described.

Moreover, the discourse is interactive: any discourse involves a verbal exchange between two partners, in the form of an oral interaction, for example, the case of a conversation based on interactive discourses; however, one should remember that a discourse is not always based on a conversation. In general, a discourse is interactive if there is an exchange of oral or written lines, but, in particular, any enunciation produced in the absence of a recipient constitutes interactivity, being considered an exchange of lines, explicitly or implicitly, with other addressors, virtual or real. In the case of travel guides, the guide's writer constructs his message, imagining himself to be face to face with the readers, depending on the representations he has of the latter.

The discourse is contextualized: we cannot assign any meaning to the discourse outside the context. The same enunciation in two different places can represent two distinct discourses. In addition, the discourse helps define the context, which it can modify during the discourse. In tourism discourse, what the guide's writer/author states is interpreted according to a context. That is why, in French, in the example "*Les plages y sont bien paradisiaques*" (GRC, 2017, p. 13), the adverb of place «y» cannot receive any other reference than «Corsica».

The discourse is assumed: the enunciating subject "I" assumes the responsibility of his discourse and chooses an enunciative attitude. Thus, the discourse entails a "deictic center" and a source of the person, time and space references, involving certain relationships between those who are in interaction. In the tourism discourse, the guide's writer is rendered by the first-person plural pronoun and by the verb endings, and in French also with the help of the indefinite pronoun "on".

The discourse is governed by norms, thus, it is based on general social norms and specific discourse norms, given that each act of enunciation is part of a type of discourse involving a set of norms which must be observed by the participants in the discourse. The tourism discourse will follow a system of rules which relate to a specific discursive practice, characterized by a certain organization of the discourse and a specific linguistic code.

In addition to these features, Dann (1996, pp. 55-64), referring to the tourism discourse, claims that it has characteristics in common with other types of discourse, but also its own features, which distinguish it from them, such as: *the absence of the addressee, the monologue, the euphoria, and the tautology*. Regarding the unique characteristics of the tourism discourse, unlike other forms of communication in which the author is well defined, in tourism discourse the author is not known. The absence of the author is also highlighted by Peja (2015, p. 70), who makes the following clarification: in the travel guides, the presence of the authors is not canceled, but their absence is presented, and the modalities of presenting "*de la mise en absence*" represent one of the editorial peculiarities of this discursive genre.

Another specificity of tourism discourse is the use of *tautologies*. Dann (1996, p. 65) explains that tourists primarily participate in the events presented in tourism writings, called by the author "*pseudo-events*", because tourists do not travel in order to check if the image corresponds to reality, but rather to check if the reality discovered corresponds to the image described in the travel guide. That is the reason why travel becomes a tautology.

The commendation of the tourist destination is carried out especially by using a very rich adjectival system. Considered essential elements in persuading, attracting and seducing readers, adjectives are the triggering elements for readers who have to choose where they will go, what they will visit or what they will buy, etc., the persuasive function being highlighted by the *euphoric* language of the guide's writer. Thus, the discourse of the travel guide is a discourse of celebration with a strong epideictic character, whose main purpose is to praise a product, which will have as finality the challenge to "buy" tourism (Kerbrat Orecchioni, 2004, p. 147). It is an exhortative discourse that borrows the features of evaluative and more precisely laudatory discourse, which generally works according to the inferential mechanism typical to any advertising enunciation - the strategy of persuasion or "seduction" - a mechanism involving not only idyllic photographs, but also the intervention at the linguistic level: for example, the presence in large numbers of metaphors and evaluative adjectives, superlatives or hyperboles. We can conclude that tourism discourse distinguishes itself by the euphoric aspect rendered not only at the stylistic level, but also by means of images, which contribute to the creation of a blissful, holiday atmosphere.

If Boyer and Viallon (1990, p. 40) denounce the excessive use of euphoric elements present in the travel guide, firmly supporting the simplicity of the texts, Agorni (2012) and Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004) mention that these elements are characteristics of the "*travel guide*" genre, and the relationship between seduction and information strategies varies according to each text (Kelly, 1997, p. 37).

Taking into account that the type of text which interests us is entirely a written medium, the reader of the travel guide will only understand or follow the sequence of ideas of the text produced according to what has been written. Regarding the *monologue* nature of the written communication, underlined by Dann (1996, p. 64), the reasons why tourism discourse is considered a monologue discourse are the following: firstly, within the guide, there is no verbal interaction because the addressee is not present, the message is directed to the addressee, and behind the addresser can stand a group of people who make up the editorial staff. While in the case of an oral communication, the roles of the two change, each becoming in turn addresser and addressee, in the written discourse this does not happen, and the *absence of the addressee* at the time of the enunciation will result in a gap between the moment of delivering the message and that of receiving the message.

Along with magic, another characteristic of tourism discourse is represented by the element of time. In Dann's opinion (1996, pp. 60-64), the journey does not necessarily mean moving from one place to another, but also the journey in time more often in the past and less in the future, because

tourism writings focus more on the authenticity, antiquity and history of the destinations. Nevertheless, at the same time, the journey is presented as an event which must take place in the near future, the ultimate goal being the escape of the readers from the rhythm of the daily life and possibly going on a trip.

The discourse of a guide's writer, like any written text, has other specific syntactic-semantic characteristics which distinguish it from the oral text, but the presence of orality in the travel guide is signaled by the use of certain grammatical procedures and enunciative strategies. According to Hagège (1985 apud Bidaud and Magherbi, 2005, p. 2), the human being seems biologically predisposed to become "*un homme de parole*" which will probably, but not surely, become "*un homme de l'écrit*".

Firstly, being "*un discours différé*" or at a distance, the written tourism discourse has certain differences in relation to oral discourse, some of which are mentioned in this paper. The first criterion for the differentiation is distance. If a conversation most often unfolds face to face, the written discourse of the travel guides is characterized "*par une interaction différée dans le temps et l'espace*" (Adam et Bonhomme, 2012, p. 36). Thus, unlike oral communication, where all the material signs that support it and that can take over both the meaning and the context itself, such as gestures, mimic, intonation, attitude, in written communication, as a remote interaction, the participants do not share the same context. The absence of the common context will involve, in most cases, an explicit completion by the addresser, thus resorting to describing the situational context or using punctuation marks, but which will not be able to capture everything that is transmitted through oral communication. Peytard and Genouvrier (1970, p. 17) argue that (regarding the use of descriptions) in the case of a novel (which is a written text) there are more descriptions than in a play, which is acted and spoken in a setting which takes the place of the situational context, resulting in the fact that written messages need much more detail than oral messages. Moreover, oral discourse exploits several sensory channels, especially auditory and visual, while the written text only the visual one (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005, p. 30). What we can remember from the above is that both oral and written discourse are only two forms of language, two different ways of communicating, which have similarities and differences, but which are not mutually exclusive given that oral discourse can be constructed by resorting to writing, and vice versa.

The discourse of the guide's writer is part of the specialized discourses because it is a discourse delivered by experts to the general public, in a field which includes many sectors of activity, each having a specific lexicon. Although less studied, due probably to the "*insaisissable*" linguistic physiognomy, tourism discourse, the object of our analysis, can be considered a special discourse, because, although characterized by a thematic component resulting from the combination of various technical and disciplinary fields, it is attributed to a well-defined professional environment present in different sectors of the tourism field (Calvi, 2011, pp. 153-158), and also because it has information, ignored by the readers (or unknown to them), who are looking for it in the travel guide. We can say that the discourse of the travel guides, as a professional discourse, contains pragmatic and enunciative elements, but also specific linguistic elements that differentiate it from the discourses resulting from everyday life interactions.

Like any communication situation, this discourse constitutes an act of enunciation. In creating his message, the guide's writer resorts to information, for example, from the history of art, from different disciplines, but also from the history of civilization (civil, military and religious architecture) which are joined by painting, sculpture, urbanism, regional and national histories along with cultural and social traditions. All this knowledge is fundamental to him, because it is an inexhaustible source for the message he will convey. In conclusion, the readers-travelers are informed or acquire knowledge about the place of destination due to the discourses of guides' writers. According to Dufriet (2012, p. 18), a guide's writer is a "*parleur*", because his discourse shows, narrates, describes, explains and comments based on the extra-linguistic world, that is, on the chosen referent. And vice versa, the reader is a "viewer" and a "*listener*" and as a result, we expect the discourse of a guide's writer to be that of a professional.

## 5. Conclusions

Part of a larger research on tourism discourse analysis, this paper shows the interest of tourism for discourse analysts and explores discursive mechanisms for researchers in all fields of tourism.

For discourse analysts, it is a "dreamy" object because discursive phenomena collide therein that link the discourse to the social: the image of the tourist, of tour operators, routine and authoritative discursive genres, generic hybridity, the enunciation scene, the singular and collective ethos ... For researchers who focus on tourism, discursive analyses expose and list phenomena that remain unnoticed in studies that neglect micro-analysis and do not feed on its contributions.

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