The Language of Tourism

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Abstract
The language of tourism is part of tourism discourse. This claim is supported in the paper by the reference to the concept of discourse community and by the reference to four major sociolinguistic theoretical perspectives on tourism as provided by G. Dann. A sociolinguistic view illuminates identification and verbalrepresentation of the functions that the language of tourism fulfills.

1.Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most important businesses throughout the world and tourism discourse has become one of the most common public discourses, with millions of people taking part in its formation when entering a myriad of communicative situations. People, culture, landscape, history, traditions, and other social and natural entities have been offered and chosen, experienced and used, and at the same time talked and written about. The language used in tourism is a specific kind of language, fulfilling multiple functions that correspond to the specific position of tourism in the current society.

2.Tourism Discourse Community

The nature of ongoing communication in any field of human activity can be understood by identifying and exploring a complex set of contextual factors. Among the key communicative factors rank the participants of a communicative event. To highlight their role in communication, their relationship to communicative events and to the language used, we will use Swale's concept of discourse community.

While belonging of an individual to a speech community is subject to their place of birth and/or long-term residence, e.g. the New York speech community, the Šariš region speech community, a discourse community is formed through the engagement of a certain groups of individuals in a professional or leisure activity. A discourse community includes both producers and receivers of texts, with their contributions both being influenced by the established order of discourse and influencing the future development of the given discourse. For example, writers of sales promotional letters follow the existing rules, conventions and current expectations of the audience, but their letters might influence other writers or linguists who analyse the given genre and provide its characteristics. According to Swales (1990: 24 - 27) a discourse community is constituted if it meets several requirements:

- it follows the recognized public goals;
- it has a communication mechanism among its members that includes not only the provision of information but also the provision of feedback;
- its communication mechanism is secured via one or more genres;
- it has developed specific vocabulary;
- it has a perspective of acquiring new membership.

Considering the given criteria, tourism discourse community can be recognized as an ample community representing the reality via a communicative loop described above (being influenced and influencing the order of discourse). The producer's verbal representation of the offered destinations and services respects the expectations of the receiver, and the

expectations are often created by the offer itself. Thus, tourism discourse is conditioned to reflection and self-reflection of its participants, whose verbal behavior mirrors and influences their social behavior.

3. Sociological perspectives of tourism discourse

The marketization of public discourse and the growing impact of the media, the Internet in particular, result in the firmer grounding of tourism as discourse. This tendency is explained by Dann (1996: 2):

> ….tourism, in the act of promotion, as well as in the accounts of its practitioners and clients, has a discourse of its own. Seen in this light, the language of tourism is thus a great deal more than a metaphor. Via static and moving pictures, written texts and audio-visual offerings, 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.

The conversion of any person to a tourist and a current strong wish, even the need, to become a tourist is reflected in four major sociological perspectives on tourism, i.e. in the perspectives of authenticity, strangerhood, play and conflict. Their detailed description as well as an overview of other scholars' approaches is provided by Dann (1996: 6-32). I will mention a few opinions and findings that seem to be relevant for identifying the functions of the language used in tourism.

3.1 The authenticity perspective

The authenticity perspective is connected with the work of MacCannel (1989), who claims that the main tourists' motivation is the search of authenticity (qtd. in Dann 7 – 11) although, for the sake of tourism, the real life of the Others has been largely manipulated and commercialized. In the end, the destination is reduced to a few attractions that can be assigned almost a semiotic nature. For example, before visiting San Francisco, the tourist is exposed to numerous verbal or visual representations of the best-known sights, which have become the markers of the town. The Golden Gate Bridge is profusely represented by textual descriptions in tourism brochures, in TV documentaries, on the internet, etc; therefore, when looking at the real Golden Gate Bridge, the individual's authenticity perspective is shattered and is subject to their previous off-sight experience. MacCannel (qtd. in Dann 1996: 14) further states that the language of tourism enhances the impression of authenticity through abundant explicit expressions:

> this is a **typical** native house; this is the **very** place the leader fell; this is the **actual** pen used to sign the law; this is the **original** manuscript; this is the **authentic** Tlingit fish club; this is a **real** piece of the **true** Crown of Thorns.

3.2 The strangehood perspective

The strangehood perspective emphasizes that a driving motivation for travelling is the search for strangeness and new experiences (Dann, 1996: 12-17). Despite their call for strangehood, many people cannot cope with a foreign culture and prefer organized package holidays, which protect them from the unknown. In this respect Cohen and Cooper (1986, qtd. in Dann 16-17) elicit several distinguished varieties from tourism discourse – foreigner talk, tourist talk, host talk, host language, and tourist language. They observe an interesting phenomenon in the language use:

> … the asymmetrical use of these forms of communication – how tourists talk down to natives and natives talk up to foreigners – not simply on account of perceived status differentials, but also due to the fact that tourism is a temporary pleasure-oriented service industry predicated on commercialized hospitality.

A constant call for something new and exotic is reflected in the language of tourism, mainly in descriptions of places and people. When analyzing tourism promoting materials related to Thailand, Cohen (1983) identifies the qualifying adjectives: *'untouched by civilization'*, *'remote* and *unspoilt'*, *'colourful'*, *'picturesque'*, *'quaint'*, *'fascinating'*, *'almost unknown'*, *'newly discovered'* ... These lexical means contribute to the image of novelty and strangeness of the offered destination (qtd. in Dann 1996: 16).

Another relevant finding resulting from the strangerhood perspective is the importance of tourists' verbal accounts of their holiday experience and their contribution to the formation of tourism discourse and, as a result, to tourism marketing. This sphere of tourism discourse seems to be getting more important for both providers of tourism services and receivers. Tourists' accounts placed on the internet are not just a feedback to the services provided but also a reflection on the discourse available before the actual experience.

3.3 The play perspective

The play perspective (Dann, 1996: 17 - 23) treats tourism as a game and provides tourists with special experiences, which do not often match cultural and natural conditions of the visited destinations. At present one of the key terms is spectacle (Urry 1990, qtd. in Dann 1996: 18) and as a result, holiday resorts compete in providing a variety of visual experiences. People are prepared for their *gaze* by the media and by tourism communicative channels, which, to a large extent, create the space for and the content of their holiday experience. Thus, Urry's post-modern tourism is also about playing with reality, i.e., about its alluring interpretations. The Californian Disneyland can be given as an example of a displayed transformed reality, taking visitors not only to an imaginary world of fairy tales but also to different historical periods (the American West in the 1800s) and to different world's lands (jungle, deserted island, the South Pacific).

The play perspective often avoids any contacts of the visitor with the native culture, which is used just as a desirable spectacle. Dann and Potter (1994) provide an example of series of tourism communicative events in Barbados (advertisements, brochures, shows) that do not respect the native people, culture and history and treat them as one big spectacle. This is illustrated by the show for tourists "The Plantation Tropical Spectacular":

> … the plantation, once the scene of iniquitous black slavery, has now been transformed into a carnival centre of entertainment, where male slaves are depicted as engaging solely in limbo and fire-eating surrounded by jolly pirates. The female slaves in their turn are represented by seductive dancers in two-piece sequined costumes and exotic feather-fashioned head-dresses (qtd. in Dann, 1996: 23).

3.4. The conflict perspective

Among other scholars Dann refers also to Hollinshead, a British academic, who claims that discourse is shaped by ideology and is subject to power relations, and social and institutional practices. He claims that tourism attempts to provide people with a chance to break away from every-day life and have exciting experiences. This effort to create tourist attractiveness often contradicts the real past and present of the visited areas and their inhabitants (1993a:

qtd. in Dann 1996: 25-26). Thus, the conflict concerns differences between the provided thrilling experience and the truth and can be traced in the language of promotional materials too.

4.Conclusion

A brief overview of four sociological perspectives enables better understanding of tourism discourse community by pointing out the main tourism perspectives that are reflected in tourism promotional materials. Sociological studies suggest that the tourism search for authenticity, strangehood and play might come into conflict with what is really authentic and valuable. Sociological studies also suggest that tourism discourse is closely related to a wide range of cultural and political issues. As a result, the language of tourism can provide a revealing insight into the state and into the changes of current society.

References:
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