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Click Here, Book Now! Discursive Strategies of Tourism on the Web

Stefania M. Maci

Abstract

The World Tourism Organization has recently confirmed the tourism industry as one of the fastest growing sectors in international business markets. This rapid growth has resulted in an equally rapid transformation of the communication strategies employed by the tourism industry. The Internet has begun to be regarded as a dynamic source of information for both tourists and operators.

This paper aims to discuss the strategies exploited by the tourist industry to structure web-texts where their main feature seems to be the careful selection and presentation of information designed to attract attention by paradoxically disturbing any process of predictable reading on the screen in a conventional way. The resulting multi- and hyper-modal peculiarities of tourism texts are clearly the consequence of a changing society where the dynamic interrelations between profit, new forms of (web)communication and the presence of emerging professional figures, as well as audiences, has profoundly influenced tourism discourse.

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of travel demand in the last few decades has required an equally rapid transformation of the tourism industry, which has shifted its focus to the tourist's decision-making process (Snaith, Miller, Hudson 2001: 174). Since holidays cannot be inspected for purchase beforehand, tourists try to minimise the gap existing between their expectations – based on product representation and description – and their experience by seeking as much information as possible (O'Connor, Buhails, Frew 2001: 333). In this quest for information, the Internet has begun to be regarded as a convenient and dynamic source of information by means of which tourists can *virtually* experience the holiday, thanks to the interactive multimedia sites existing on the Web (Cho and Fesenmaier 2001).

Investigations of the linguistic strategies employed in the tourism industry have recently been carried out mainly in recognition of their key role in promoting, in adequate and convincing linguistic ways, the same product successfully to different targets¹. In other words, this highly persuasive language sells a product by describing a reality – the destination – in such a way as to be perceived by the targeted potential buyer – the tourist – as authentically and genuinely *off the beaten track*. Hence the illusion of *feeling* the holiday experience, before actually living it. Such persuasive language is constructed in texts where verbal and iconic elements are interwoven. When these texts are uploaded on the Web, their potentialities are amplified: not only are these (hyper)texts designed in such a way as to attract attention by breaking conventional reading patterns (Crystal 2006: 205), but also the processing of meaning, traditionally deployed in a hierarchical structure, seems to result from the interconnections of inter- and intra-textual Web-links, which, while reflecting a communicative choice of the Web-designer, enhances the Web-user's illusion of having total control over what link may be followed when scanning the texts on the Web-pages.

It is the aim of this paper to describe the strategies exploited by the tourism industry to structure hypertexts, carefully combining features belonging to the iconic and verbal codes. The study, based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a corpus of English Web-texts of tourist offices located in the UK, aims to investigate in what ways Web tourism texts achieve strong coherence, thus outlining how the iconic and verbal registers of tourism discourse are organised.

2. Tourism and the Web

Because of information technology, prospective travellers now have easier access to information, which facilitates direct bookings. By bypassing intermediaries, they assume a more independent-traveller behaviour, but, at the same time, require more personalised and specialised forms of travel (Pierini 2007: 85; Osti, Turner, King 2008:

¹ See, for instance, Tognini Bonelli, Manca (2002); Francesconi (2005); Nigro (2005); Vestito (2005); Cappelli (2006); Gotti (2006); Chiavetta (2007); Denti (2007); Pierini (2009) and Maci (2010).

63-64). Such a shift away from package tourism to independent travel organisation has influenced the structure of the travel industry (distribution channels, booking systems and destination suppliers) and contributed to the development of new forms of information, mainly digitised, which help tourists to be aware of product options and to allow appropriate product decision-making.

In order to grant potential tourists effective information about destinations, the tourism industry offers short, clear and up-to-date texts. This is particularly true when the channel of communication is the Web, whose main linguistic requirement is search engine optimisation. In other words, Web-pages must contain particular linguistic elements, such as keywords and key-phrases. This gives the Website a certain ranking in the results of search engines and consequently highlights the visibility of the information presented (Cappelli 2008).

The main purpose of keywords is that of firing the imagination while reflecting the consumer's tastes. The use of keywords and keying are common techniques of the language of tourism (Dann 1996). On the Web, keywords "must actually be the very same ones tourists would use to describe what is being sought after" (Cappelli 2008: 106). In Web-pages, keywords are generally concentrated at the beginning of the page, because the first paragraph of a Web-page content is awarded greater importance than the rest of the text. Indeed, it has to attract the reader's attention immediately by informing him or her of the text's main points. In addition, as Website users tend to scan rather than read, any decision about reading the homepage depends on the impression conveyed after examining the beginning of a page. Finally, their relevance lies in the fact that keywords are fundamental in link activation. Keywords, therefore, must be informative and short. It goes without saying that the relevance of keywords on the Web makes them one of the most interesting phenomena for linguists. The lexical analysis of online texts can therefore provide some observations on their nature and quality (cf. Cappelli 2008).

3. Corpus and methodological approach

Given the great quantity of Web-pages dealing with tourism, the analysed texts 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).

The WTO homepage (<http://www.unwto.org/index.php>) reports a 6.7% increase in the flow of tourists in 2010 over the previous year, which is felt to be a success, considering the economic crisis. Yet the recession has hit harder in Europe's tourism sector than anywhere else in the world², as confirmed by Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>). Nevertheless, amongst the top 20 EU areas (Italy, Spain, France, Austria and Germany being the first five), the United Kingdom has maintained a prominent position in the traditional tourist market³, which seems to provide clear evidence of a well-constructed and successful campaign promoting various types of destinations for different types of customers. This explains why my Website selection was focussed on the UK as a tourist destination.

The 2009 report on international travel surveys by the Office for National Statistics indicates the twenty top destinations in the UK selected by overseas tourists⁴. The four top destinations, i.e., London, Edinburgh, Manchester, and Birmingham were then selected, and their Official Tourism Board links (www.visitlondon.com, www.edinburgh.org, www.visitmanchester.com, www.visitbirmingham.com) were found via the British National Tourism Agency Website (www.visitbritain.com).

All the visuals and texts accessible on their homepages with a single click were collected (in the period between March 11 and May 2, 2011) from their digital sources. 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 focussed on the linguistic

² The air traffic disruption caused by the Eyjafjallajökull volcano eruption and the economic uncertainty affecting the euro zone seem responsible for having put off European recovery. See http://85.62.13.114/media/news/en/press_det.php?id=7331&idioma=E (last accessed May 4, 2011).

³ Data available at http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php?title=File:Most_popular_tourist_region_per_country,_number_of_nights_spent_by_residents_in_hotels_and_campsites,_by_NUTS_2_regions,_2008%28%29.png&filetimestamp=20101025134848 (last accessed May 4, 2011).

⁴ See <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=1391> (last accessed March 3, 2011).

contents of the Websites. The collected verbal texts were then extracted in Word format. All texts were read in order to better contextualise them. A small corpus of 22,974 words was thus created (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Corpus breakdown and Web-page word count

Website	Words
London www.visitlondon.com	6,562
Edinburgh www.edinburgh.org	3,958
Birmingham www.visitbirmingham.com	5,002
Manchester www.visitmanchester.com	7,452
Total	22,974

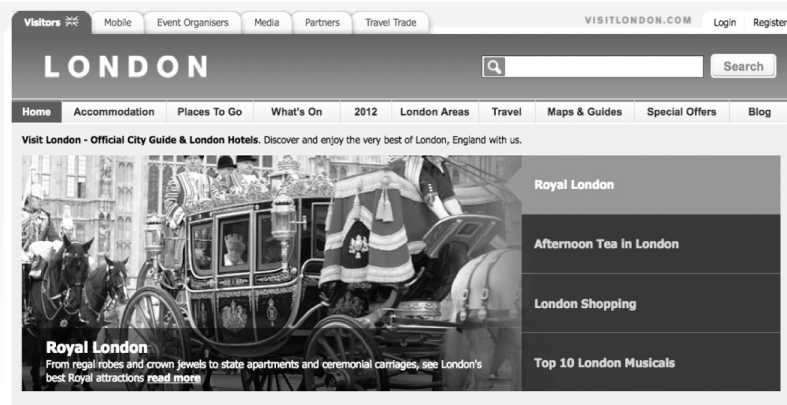
The corpus was then analysed both quantitatively with Wordsmith Tools 4.0 (Scott 2007), and qualitatively. In the quantitative analysis, the figures were normalised in Type/Token Ratio (TTR). In the following sections the way in which textual and iconic languages interrelate in order to construct a cohesive generic Website will be investigated.

4. Visual analysis

4.1. The official tourist Website for London

The *www.visitlondon.com* Web-page (Figure 1) offers an unbalanced representation of visual and verbal elements: only two very short texts are found at the top and the bottom of the picture on the right-hand part of the homepage, listed in such a way as to form a column; on the right, some nominal word groups are found, i.e., *Royal London*, *Afternoon Tea in London*, *London Shopping*, *Top 10 London Musicals*, which are the links to the Web-pages bearing the same titles and which, incidentally, are in line with the stereotyped ideas (international) tourists have of London, i.e., the Queen, afternoon tea, popular fashion trends and entertainment, which here can be experienced virtually.

FIGURE 1
www.visitlondon.com (11/03/2011)



Nevertheless, the Web-page creates a harmonious view as far as perspective is concerned: the opulence of the picture with its gold, red and blue hues of the Royal Coach, the uniformed guards, and even the Queen herself in her crown are counterbalanced by a certain textual sobriety, introduced through a manipulation of the shot – an image of the horses, whose colour fades out to become an indistinct shade providing the background on which the text appears. The same technique is applied to all four pictures alternately while clicking on the text on the right and introducing the sections named on the right. Despite the contrast between textual sombreness and visual sumptuousness, the sense of a visual equilibrium remains. Even the use of colour seems to be well-balanced and any striking or disturbing contrast is avoided thanks to an astute distribution over the Web-page of blue and orange. Overall, the message conveyed seems that London is a metropolis in which traditions, the arts, and cultural events are interestingly mingled: it is up to the tourist to discover them.

4.2. The official tourist Website for Edinburgh

The *Edinburgh. Inspiring Capital* (Figure 2) Web-page opens with a cartoon-like logo on the left. From a tiny dot which will eventually be

revealed as the ‘E’ of Edinburgh, three curved lines move, forming a sort of cap under which the words *Edinburgh* and the subtitle *Inspiring Capital* appear.

This homepage is divided into three frames. On the left-hand side of the page, the virtual tourist can surf between links taking him/her to the accommodation section, the events page, the Web tourist guides and to other historical and practical pieces of information. At the centre, the text is distributed in a column-frame style, which seems to be the explanation of what type of holiday the tourist can enjoy in Edinburgh, visually represented at the top of the homepage, where we can find four alternating pictures of Edinburgh.

The verbal frame is an uncharacteristically long text; entitled “Surprise Yourself in Edinburgh & The Lothians”, it is both a welcome page and an introduction to the locality. On the right-hand part of the Web-page, information about the Mary Queen of Scots tour and the Edinburgh Pass is offered. The brightly-coloured layout seems, however, designed to be perceived as framing the rather sober text which is thus highlighted. The “Surprise yourself in Edinburgh & The Lothians” text is metaphorically represented as the pivot around which all events take place.

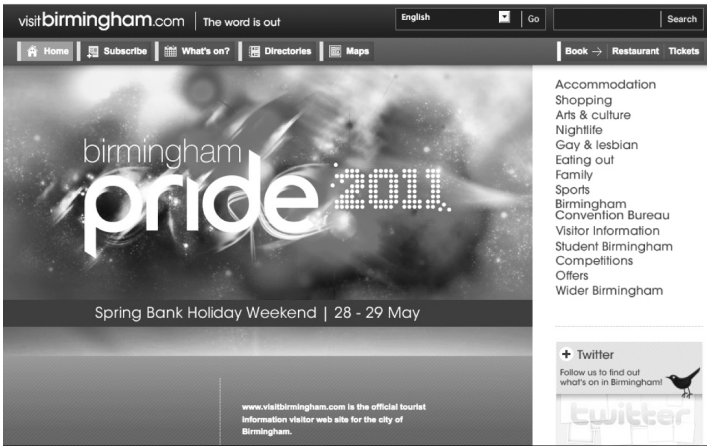
FIGURE 2
www.edinburgh.org (28/04/2011)



4.3. The official tourist Website for Birmingham

The *visitbirmingham.com* homepage (Figure 3) is the most surprising of all because it does not contain any photos but simply colour. The profusion of bright blue, pink, red, orange and green with tiny white dots here and there reflects the image of a planetary nebula, but while photos of real nebulae have a much darker photographic resolution, the one represented by the Birmingham tourist office is more cheerful. It is hard to say whether the psychological association between the feeling the colour arouses in people and the announcement of the *2011 Birmingham [Gay] Pride* has been deliberate or not, but the result seems to be successful, considering the extremely delicate topic being promoted. This also explains the absence of both pictures and text, apart from the nominal groups on the right-hand part of the Web-page, which are the links to the sections whose headings are given.

FIGURE 3
www.visitbirmingham.com/ (19/04/2011)



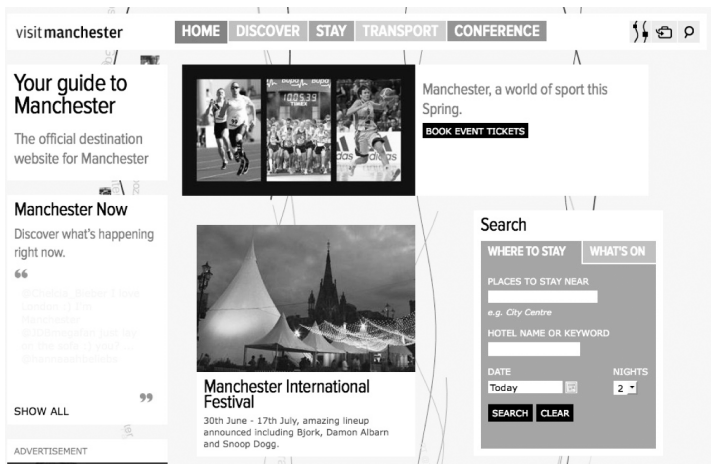
4.4. The official tourist Website for Manchester

The *www.visitmanchester.com* homepage (Figure 4) is the least traditional one, as here there is complete disruption of traditional reading practices.

The site layout is designed in such a way as to be ideally divided into three columns, each of them containing frames developing on the vertical axis and showing pictures, at the top, and very small texts, at the bottom. Lines of the same colour as the frame background look like streamers glued to the back of the frames forming the three columns.

Reading is not, however, a matter of scrolling down the page: whenever and wherever a link is clicked on (which may be either a photo or the heading of the text, either at the top or bottom of the Web-page), the page seems to rapidly scroll down by itself, giving the idea of great dynamism. This dynamism is supported by the appearance of pop-up texts, i.e., emails, Twitter and Facebook postings, apparently written by tourists in Manchester and published in the frame on the left-hand side, entitled “Manchester Now”, which is the only static frame of the whole Web-page as it is not involved in the scrolling-down technique. These pop-up texts guarantee on-line immediacy, and yet are written on a *wall* which turns into a virtual guest-book. Manchester, therefore, is seen as a lively metropolis with a cosy Bed-and-Breakfast atmosphere whose best feedback is through the on-line comments appearing in the guest-book and which can be perused by a virtual community.

FIGURE 4
www.visitmanchester.com/ (02/05/2011)



5. Linguistic analysis

The analysis of the visual elements of the Web-pages suggests that the layout is constructed in such a way as to invite the Web-tourist to *read* the texts. The reading of the selected Web-texts, however, suggests the impression that they are characterised by a bulleted-like style, without any instances of argumentation. These texts are extremely brief and, sometimes, characterized by just one single nominal group. The quantitative analysis has confirmed this impression: the corpus features a frequent occurrence of short sentences, as revealed in Table 2.

The data in Table 2 reveal that the average sentence length is measured as 23.33 words per sentence. Yet the corpus also shows the presence of sentences characterised by block language (Leech 1966) and corresponding to nominal groups, inserted as Web-links and usually relating to a tourist topic.

TABLE 2

Average proposition length

Website	Sentences separated by full stop	Number of words	Average sentence length	Nominal groups	Average sentence length
London	206	6,562	31.85	1,050	5.22
Edinburgh	173	3,958	22.87	430	6.56
Birmingham	240	5,002	20.84	540	6.41
Manchester	419	7,452	17.78	613	7.22
<i>Average</i>	<i>259.5</i>	<i>5,743.5</i>	<i>23.33</i>	<i>658.25</i>	<i>6.25</i>

If we take into consideration such an atypical textual device, we may add the numbers of clauses formed by a noun group to the general figures given in column two. In this case, the average number of words contained in a sentence would be reduced to 6.25. Clearly, these types of sentences seem too short to exploit any argumentative strategies to persuade the Web-tourist; this appears to be indirectly supported by the lack of argumentative connectors (Table 3 below):

TABLE 3
Breakdown of connectors

Connectors	Frequency
Nevertheless	0
Yet	2
However	1
Despite	0
Notwithstanding	0
Although	0
Even though/if	0
Though	1

The only conjunction found is *if* in hypothetical constructions (21 occurrences, TTR 0.77). Here, *if*-clauses in such expressions as *if you want, if you do, if you are interested, if you fancy* are the protasis bridging the gap between the tourist's (explicit or implicit) needs and the world where these can be fulfilled: in order to realise their own desires, tourists are virtually accompanied from the dimension of *possibility* to that of *reality* by the route indicated in the following apodosis:

- (1) Or if you want something a little lighter why not try Abodes Michael Caines Café Bar. (www.visitmanchester.com)
- (2) If you fancy something a little different and interesting on your trip to London, check into one of London's unique hotels. (www.visitlondon.com)

If argumentation is not present in Web-texts, tourism promotional material becomes persuasive by playing on the concept of authenticity. A destination is authentic when the pleasure the tourist gets from experiencing the holiday corresponds to her/his expectations (Urry 1990). One of the strategies exploited to achieve authenticity in tourism texts is the use of *key* emotive words (Dann 1996), which refer to the tourists' expectations about the holiday package (e.g. undiscovered, romantic, authentic) rather than to qualities related to the destination. The skilful use of keywords and, in particular, of their pre-modifiers stirs the tourist's imagination while reflecting consumer tastes. To make this possible, keywords must belong to the consumer's language, so as to allow potential tourists to recognise themselves in the text. Keywords, *per se*, do not reveal the emotional

impact words can have in persuading a potential tourist to buy a holiday package or select a promoted destination. Since “words enter into meaningful relations with other words around them” (Sinclair 1996: 71), the choice of words to construct a text is rarely a free one, because of the interrelation of linguistic patterns around and across them, creating both grammatical and lexical constraints (Manca 2008). Assuming that the emotional impact is responsible for positive evaluation in the meaning decoding process of the Web-texts carried out by the Web-tourist, that emotive interpretation is aided by adjectives, and since the Web-pages under investigation are mainly characterised by nominal groups, I will concentrate on the analysis of pre-modifiers. Wordsmith generated 41 key-adjectives, an excerpt of which is visible in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5
Breakdown of key adjectives

N	Key word	Freq.	%	RC	Freq.	RC	%	Keyness	P	Lemmas	Set
1	TOP	66	0.23	25,713	0.03	171.74	0.000000				
2	ONLINE	19	0.07	597		140.62	0.000000				
3	ROYAL	43	0.15	14,646	0.01	122.19	0.000000				
4	EDWARDIAN	15	0.05	474		110.85	0.000000				
5	HISTORIC	21	0.07	2,295		104.49	0.000000				
6	OUR	93	0.33	93,455	0.09	98.78	0.000000				
7	PARALYMPIC	7	0.02	8		93.44	0.000000				
8	FAMOUS	26	0.09	6,400		89.32	0.000000				
9	HUNTERIAN	7	0.02	13		88.27	0.000000				
10	GREAT	60	0.21	46,647	0.05	86.64	0.000000				
11	UNIQUE	22	0.08	4,309		84.97	0.000000				
12	FASCINATING	14	0.05	1,643		67.73	0.000000				
13	MAGNIFICENT	13	0.05	1,968		56.55	0.000000				
14	ACCESSIBLE	12	0.04	1,625		54.76	0.000000				
15	VIBRANT	8	0.03	336		54.58	0.000000				
16	SPECIAL	32	0.11	21,868	0.02	52.71	0.000000				
17	CONTEMPORARY	16	0.06	4,489		51.10	0.000000				
18	FANTASTIC	10	0.03	1,134		49.04	0.000000				
19	IMMERSIVE	3	0.01	2		42.20	0.000000				
20	THRIVING	7	0.02	470		41.44	0.000000				
21	PERFECT	15	0.05	5,595		40.17	0.000000				
22	PAMPERING	4	0.01	34		39.68	0.000000				
23	ICONIC	4	0.01	35		39.46	0.000000				
24	COSMOPOLITAN	6	0.02	289		39.40	0.000000				
25	GIG	7	0.02	555		39.17	0.000000				
26	GREEN	22	0.08	14,104	0.01	38.51	0.000000				
27	WINNING	13	0.05	4,144		38.49	0.000000				
28	TITANIC	5	0.02	154		37.20	0.000000				
29	INTERNATIONAL	26	0.09	22,026	0.02	34.10	0.00023				
30	LUXURIOUS	6	0.02	496		33.09	0.00059				
31	STUNNING	7	0.02	936		32.13	0.00116				

Analysis of the collocational profile of all the adjectives found has allowed their grouping according to the semantic categories listed in Table 4.

These semantic categories are not discrete but position themselves along a *continuum* into which adjectives can be divided.

TABLE 4
Semantic grouping of key adjectives

Semantic Category	Adjective	Keyness
<i>Accessibility</i>	– Paralympic	93.44
	– Accessible	54.76
<i>Aesthetic appreciation</i>	– Fascinating	67.73
	– Magnificent	56.55
	– Fantastic	49.04
	– Luxurious	33.09
	– Stunning	32.13
	– Amazing	28.34
<i>Authenticity</i>	Huntarian	88.17
<i>Credibility</i>	– (Award)-winning	38.49
	– Official	26.35
<i>Emotional Impact</i>	– Our	98.78
	– Vibrant	54.58
	– Immersive	42.20
	– Thriving	41.44
	– Pampering	39.46
	– Iconic	39.46
	– Gig (musical)	39.17
	– Tranquil	30.66
	– Live	29.26
	– Favourite	27.00
	– Stylish	25.73
	– Multi-	24.78
– Exciting	24.54	
<i>Exclusiveness</i>	– Unique	84.97
	– Exclusive	26.72
<i>Extraordinariness</i>	– Top	171.74
	– Great	86.64
	– Best (superlative of good)	77.39
	– Perfect	40.17
<i>Internationality</i>	– Cosmopolitan	39.40
	– International	34.10
<i>IT</i>	Online	140.62
<i>Money saving</i>	– Free	104.49
	– Special	52.71
<i>Newness</i>	– Contemporary	51.10
	– Latest	28.28
<i>Popularity</i>	Famous	89.32
<i>Tradition/History</i>	– Royal	122.19
	– Edwardian	110.85
	– Historic	104.49

As Pierini states (2009: 98-99), adjectives can be static or dynamic: the former describe fixed characteristics of the properties identified; the latter refer to properties either regarded as temporary or changeable, or applied as a value judgement, or experienced as sensory perception – all of them being not only socially-determined but also connotatively perceived and evaluated by the author and the recipient of the message. For instance, the adjective *iconic*, here used in a connotative sense, refers to the writer's subjective perception of a property attributing the status of a *symbol* to the nominal group which it refers to, rather than objectively referring to its visual aspects (my emphasis):

(3) This is the first exhibition which features the historic and radical customs of Harley-Davidson motorcycles, as well as the culture surrounding this *iconic* brand. (www.visitmanchester.com)

What emerges from the semantic positioning of the key-adjectives of my corpus is that their grouping goes from static to dynamic properties. Static adjectives are those describing the traditions (*royal*, *Edwardian*, *historic*), and the accessibility of both the destinations (*accessible*, referring to accessibility for both the disabled and bikers), and the Web (*online*). There is also a consistent group of qualifiers that are highly motivational as they refer to the receivers' needs (*Paralympic*, *special*, *free*). A great stock of pre-modifiers, mainly dynamic, expresses experiential emotions, such as *pampering*, *thriving* and *vibrant* (qualifying the noun group it refers to as full of life and enthusiasm), and positive evaluation, such as *fascinating*, *luxurious*, *amazing*. All the other adjectives are positive terms which seem to transmit both a sense of euphoria for the services the Website is promoting (*top*, *best*, *perfect*), yet maintaining credibility (*award-winning*) and distinctiveness (*exclusive*, *unique*). These locations are, at the same time, authentic (*Hungarian*) and yet popular (*famous*), internationally trendy (*cosmopolitan*, *international*), and up-to-date (*contemporary*, *latest*). All this is constructed in such a way as to obtain the potential tourist's involvement, wisely constructed by presenting a dialogic text between *we* (the Web-text author) and *you* (the prospective tourist), where an illusive personal relationship between the actors of the communicative event is created (Cogno and Dall'Ara 1994: 228), as the presence of the adjective *our* seems to reveal (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6
Concordance list of *our*

Concord							
File Edit View Compute Settings Windows Help							
N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	t. #	os. #	# os. #
1	they don't cost anything! Check out our competitions below and you could			4,391	168	4%	0 8%
2	support your studies. Plus make use of our research reports.			4,228	164	0%	0 5%
3	by youth, with 65,000 students at our three universities and two university			4,102	159	7%	0 2%
4	Follow our Flickr stream Subscribe to our RSS For more information call			3,854	150	4%	0 7%
5	to our YouTube Channel Follow our Flickr stream Subscribe to our RSS			3,849	150	7%	0 7%
6	Follow us on LinkedIn Subscribe to our YouTube Channel Follow our Flickr			3,845	150	1%	0 7%
7	sign up Register now to receive our newsletter and be the first to find out			3,659	148	3%	0 3%
8	events destination. Get support from our award-winning Birmingham			3,431	140	3%	0 9%
9	Sporting Events Keep up to date with our ever-changing programme of			3,226	134	8%	0 5%
10	is at the heart of the sporting action. Our city centre National Indoor Arena is			3,144	126	8%	0 3%
11	with toddlers or teens, to tackle all of our family fun, you'll need some staminal			3,096	124	5%	0 2%
12	with its Planetarium; just some of our stonking attractions. Or take a			2,985	113	0%	0 0%
13	with toddlers or teens, to tackle all of our family fun, you'll need some staminal			2,961	112	5%	0 9%
14	click to read more Culinary courses Our booming restaurant landscape now			2,794	108	2%	0 6%
15	Additional Restaurant Directories Using our directories will help you find your			2,736	106	3%	0 5%
16	by the sheer choice and quality of our restaurants. It's foodie heaven.			2,654	101	8%	0 3%
17	and very welcoming - but don't just take our word for it, get along there and find			2,536	98	2%	0 1%
18	comics raise a smile everywhere from our theatres to the pub circuit click to			2,379	93	2%	0 8%
19	endless rated restaurants. Then there's our champion comedy clubs, theatres			2,252	81	3%	0 5%
20	of London. Not surprising then that our club scene puts others to shame.			2,228	75	0%	0 5%
21	Find your ideal accommodation using our hotel map. Click here to read more			1,886	58	8%	0 8%
22	Find a hotel that suits your budget in our budget hotel directory.			1,843	58	1%	0 7%
23	rates available). You can also talk to our Convention Bureau about business			1,769	57	8%	0 5%
24	track. Let us help. After all, we know our way round. Call 0844 888 3883 or			1,745	55	5%	0 5%
25	just too much to choose from! Using our directories will help and you'll be on			598	21	0%	0 2%
26	little insight into your preferences, and our monthly email will be sitting in your			256	11	1%	0 5%
27	on in Birmingham Join Facebook Join our Facebook page for the latest events			203	8	0%	0 4%
28	Peter Blake. Book your vacation Visit our online shop Visitmanchester The			7,076	310	7%	0 5%
29	Northwest. Feel what life was like for our ancestors at one of the working mills			5,605	213	3%	0 5%
30	Modern History Discover the stories of our industrial past at a variety of places			5,588	212	4%	0 5%

In this way, agreement is more easily obtained: the recipient is drawn into the text and empathy is established, generating identification and loyalty.

The type of stylistic choices made by the author can trace the path for correct interpretation of the text: some readings are thus encompassed while others are closed off (Pierini 2009: 109). Such choices acquire meaning in relation to the cultural context and the lexico-grammar co-text. While some terms are only context-dependent, such as, for instance the adjective *Edwardian* which occurs only in the pattern *Radisson Edwardian*, or *royal* in the cluster *royal Edinburgh*, or even *online*, which refers to the Web, others are both context- and co-text-dependent. Because adjectives acquire different meanings according to the co-text, they can

be not only static/dynamic, but also clichés. Clichés in tourism discourse bridge the gap between the known reality of the potential tourist's world and the unknown cultural universe belonging to the destination, thus supplying "a sense of safety to potential tourists, and satisfy[ing] their expectations" (Pierini 2009: 112). Clichés are ideological because they impose stereotypical imagery, which is particularly true in the promotion of tourist destinations.

The cliché-clusters found in my corpus (Table 5) magnify a positive appraisal of the destination promoted on the Web and suggest a reading where positive judgment and evaluation are assigned to the destination. Clearly, the described tourist location is always the most famous, the most beautiful and the most popular one. The language is very emphatic and strongly evaluative, extolling positive characteristics of the places described (Gotti 2006: 27). Not only are such destinations unique but they are also authentic.

TABLE 5
Cliché-clusters

Adjectives	Cliché-cluster(s)
<i>Top</i>	Top attractions
<i>Famous</i>	Most famous World famous
<i>Great</i>	Great deal
<i>Vibrant</i>	Vibrant street Vibrant shopping area
<i>Special</i>	Special offers Special events
<i>Fantastic</i>	Fantastic trip Fantastic experience
<i>Immersive</i>	Immersive theatre Immersive multi-media performance
<i>Thriving</i>	Thriving cultural / musical scene Thriving international city / metropolis
<i>Perfect</i>	Perfect place / time / city
<i>Live</i>	Live music event / show
<i>Pampering</i>	Pampering treats
<i>Winning</i>	Award-winning restaurant / beaches
<i>International</i>	International Festival
<i>Stunning</i>	Stunning view / location / coast
<i>Latest</i>	Latest news / events
<i>Exclusive</i>	Exclusive tours
<i>Official</i>	Official site / Tourism Board
<i>Exciting</i>	Exciting time / experience / place

6. Conclusions

Tourist communication on the Net has non-verbal components which are highly emphasised because of reasons related to Web-reader attraction. Indeed, Web-texts present a careful selection of information designed in such a way as to attract attention by, paradoxically, disturbing any process of predictable reading of the screen in a conventional way. Amongst the strategies used by Web-authors, there is a tendency to combine visuals with short up-to-date texts because “text and image *mutually* contextualize one another” (Lemke 2002: 322). The hyper-texts forming my small corpus do not seem to be categorised according to Kress and van Leeuwen’s model (1996), since any division between *Given-New* and *Ideal-Real* is apparently sacrificed for the sake of Web-link interactivity; the resulting impression is a dynamism of the proposed destination, which is reflected in the text itself. The potential reader is thus invited to read the Web-texts.

The verbal component of digital communication for tourism shares the same features as more traditional tourist communication (Maci 2010). From a linguistic viewpoint, the language used on Web-pages is usually simplified to meet the requirements of internationalisation (Cappelli 2008: 107). 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 such places. Indeed, my corpus appears to be informative rather than argumentative, which seems to be implicitly confirmed by the minimal presence of argumentative connectors. This absence of argumentative connectors is interesting because it implies the absence of complex sentences. Infact, the sentences characterising my corpus have an average of 6.25 words per sentence. This results from the exploitation of block language and nominal groups, normally working as Web-links. The location is thus presented to the prospective tourist as a concrete destination. Nevertheless, the description of the location’s physical and cultural characteristics is embedded in a text which is extremely evaluative, as the static, dynamic and cliché key-adjectives present in my corpus confirm, and which represent, respectively, tradition, experiential emotions, and a bridge between the real (known) world and the expected (unknown) world of the destination. Thus a complex

discourse is constructed, enhancing the pull of the destination and producing in the receiver the desire to go there and have a unique experience, while at the same time allowing the tourist to cope with novelty thanks to the use of cliché-clusters. The destination promotion process is therefore achieved: the image of the individual site is transformed into a desirable and fashionable tourist destination (Giordana 2004: 75-9).

Clearly, the interrelation between text and visuals amplifies the meaning of the conveyed message: a text made up of language alone would offer a low-dimensional representation of the experience; a text comprising only images would afford a much greater display of the complexity of reality but its meaning might be non-explicit, if not ambiguous, without the verbal elements. When images and text are interwoven – together *and* with other Web-pages through Web-links – their very meaning goes beyond the default conventions of traditional multimodal genres (Lemke 2002: 301). Hypertexts are rich in interconnections but difficult, hierarchically, to organise in a sequential order. In other words, prospective tourists read such texts cross-modally. Meaning is constructed through traditional reading patterns integrated with semantic associations brought up by the Net (Lemke 2002). Meaning-making in hypertexts such as those analysed in this study is thus a complex process, which results from the overlapping multimodal semiotic strategies employed by readers rather than from a single modal reading.

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