

Adjectives in Destination Promotion Texts

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Abstract:

As tourism texts act as an important source of information for prospective tourists, this paper looks into the use of adjectives in English tourism texts by analyzing a small, specialized corpus of texts promoting destinations. The self-compiled corpus had its data taken from the official tourism website of Vietnam. Using TermoStat Web 3.0 (Drouin, 2003) and Antconc (Anthony, 2011) to identify adjectives in the corpus, the study seeks to explore adjectival usage in a discourse which is known for its hyperbolic language and offers a better understanding of ways adjectives help create persuasive texts. Results revealed a high percentage of adjectives in the analyzed texts. Besides, the extensive use and high selectivity of adjectives in the corpus help paint a complete picture of the destinations being described, hence connect those places with the reader. Notably, compound adjectives were found to be widely utilized for compact but detailed expressions. The findings are beneficial to instructors and learners of English for tourism and English writing as well as translation training and practice.

Keywords: *adjectives, language of tourism, specialized discourse*

1. INTRODUCTION

Countries have developed multilingual websites, aiming to reach various international markets rather than restricting to domestic markets. The language commonly used is still English for not only “global reach” but also “connotative richness” which this language offers (Francesconi, 2014, p. 10).

As Cappelli (2006) noted, the apprehension of language mechanisms needed for certain communicative effects can be achieved by analyzing different text types. Previous studies on tourism discourse have attempted to look into lexical and grammatical features of various genres like travel articles (Kiss, 2018) and hotel websites (Edo-Marzá, 2011), generalize a generic structure of tourist brochures (Luo & Huang, 2015), or examine a specific domain of tourism, i.e. adventure tourism (Muñoz, 2019). Other aspects of tourism discourse have also been examined such as Malenkina and Ivanov (2018), who observed the abundant use of metadiscursive markers and thematic lexicon of tourism websites as a way to inform and persuade tourists, and Frank (2021) with word formation analyses of tourism neonyms.

According to Cappelli (2007), as the Internet is acknowledged to significantly contribute to the way people do business, the quality of websites plays a special role, especially in the tourism industry. And whether a website is considered quality or not is very much determined by its linguistic quality. Stein (2006) argued that the language used on websites “carries a much higher perceptual information load than in spoken and written language” (p. 3). Additionally, websites are believed to be an interesting aspect of promotional media with rich content given limited space (Salim, Ibrahim & Hassan, 2012).

A close look at the language of tourism on websites to understand more about its role in tourism promotion is thus worthy of investigation. The present study aims to explore how adjectives are used in English web texts advertising destinations in Vietnam, and is believed to be significant in some ways. In particular, it will provide interesting insights into the role of adjectives in the representation of tourist destinations for the persuasive function of tourism discourse. More importantly, as adjectives are important in writing, especially descriptive writing, and tourism is a specialized discourse as will be discussed later, the study wants to inform the teaching and learning of English writing, tourism English as well as translation practice, especially with reported difficulties in translating tourism texts (Merkaj, 2013; Skibitska, 2013).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language of tourism

According to Dann (1996), tourism has its own discourse. Cappelli (2006) insisted that tourism has a “very special type of linguistic communication” (p. 9). Despite often being studied in the fields of social sciences and by economists and marketing strategists, language forms a special part in capturing interests of tourists (Cappelli, 2006).

The language of tourism, according to Nigro (2006), is multifarious with the convergence of arts, history, geography, archaeology, economy, and gastronomy. The language of tourism attempts to portray tourist destinations and attractions in a way that can lure potential tourists and turn them into actual ones. This language

variety is special as it represents tourism, a major industry of the world (Dann, 1996) though tourism discourse seems to be a general language variety and targets a diverse audience without requiring any specific knowledge (Nigro, 2006).

The language is also special for typical properties and techniques as found in previous research. Nigro (2006) summarized common techniques of this specialized language, including the use of metaphors, similes, and comparison to avoid unfamiliarity (Dann, 1996), the employment of keywords to spark the tourist's imagination (Hanefors & Larsson, 1993), the incorporation of humor to woo tourists (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981), and the technique of ego targeting to give the tourist a feeling of being personal and unique (Boyer & Viallon, 1994; Reilly, 1988).

Muñoz (2012) is also of the view that the language of tourism is a specialized discourse and has its own lexical, syntactic, functional, and textual features. In particular, lexical characteristics of this language variety lie in the way positive adjectives (e.g. *outstanding*, *spectacular*) are used to “give beauty and distinction to the text” (p. 337), the great reliance on the superlatives (e.g. *the most easternmost*), the use of keywords as well as foreign and invented words, and the adoption of cultural references whose equivalents cannot be found in the target language. Typical syntactic features of the language of tourism include the tendencies to favor nominalization (e.g. *upon arrival at the hotel*), imperatives (e.g. *to taste genuine food, go to one of the local open-air street markets*) and the present tense. At functional level, the predominant functions of this specialized language are referential and persuasive (or vocative), whereas secondary functions are expressive, conative, and poetic.

Nigro (2006) mentioned the three communicative functions in tourism discourse, which are vocative, expressive, and referential. However, she noted that there is no clear-cut distinction among the functions with regard to tourism text types as they tend to appear simultaneously.

Given such common features, Kelly (1997) noted stylistic differences in tourism discourse between different languages of tourism. For instance, the Spanish language of tourism favors “a formal, distant relationship with the reader” in comparison with the English language of tourism, which tends to be less formal and aim for “direct communication with the reader” (as cited in Mansor & Salman, 2016, p. 79).

Tourism texts do not simply describe certain places since it at the same time aims to arouse the attention and interests of the reader. Therefore, language in general together with linguistic elements is believed to be an effective tool to fulfill such tasks. Indeed, according to Muñoz (2012), the language of tourism has its functions fulfilled by lexical and syntactic techniques. Calvi (2006) also noted the rigorous word use which is intended to satisfy the tourist's expectations (as cited in Caruso & Ruffolo, 2014).

Besides linguistic elements, non-linguistic ones like pictures and symbols help serve the persuasive function of tourism discourse (Muñoz, 2012). Ashworth and Goodall (2012a, 2012b) held a similar view, highlighting the dependence on graphic, visual, and sound effects of texts with promotional purposes to promote destination branding (as cited in Francesconi, 2014).

Conducting a semiotic multimodal analysis of travel websites, Maci (2007) showed the alternation of visual and verbal elements to yield “a harmonious effect” (p. 62). However, texts alone are believed to play a significant part in tourism promotion. As shown in Maci’s (2007) study, while places and events are presented by visual elements as visible and concrete with factual aspects, “the accompanying texts generate more profound meanings in the would-be tourist’s mind” (p. 62). Francesconi (2014) also maintains that the multimodality of tourism texts, besides firing the interests of the audience, helps evoke pleasant and positive feelings among them. Sharing the view that multimodal communication of tourism texts and images works to serve a particular promotional purpose, Manca (2016) believed it expresses more than that and reflects “social and cultural choices which are characteristic of each country and each culture” (p. 1).

Muñoz (2012) also highlighted the cultural aspect of tourism discourse. In the view of Muñoz (2012), since tourism is where cultures meet, the language of tourism is considered “a joint element between the local and foreign cultures involved” (p. 336), which then needs tourist texts to be of high quality to ensure “effective and clear communication between local people and culture and real or potential tourists” (p. 336).

Some interesting stylistic features of tourism English have been found in corpus-based studies. For instance, comparing tourism English with general English, Kang and Yu (2011) found an overwhelming percentage of content words and shorter sentences with simpler structures in their specialized corpus of tourism English. Ding (2008) also reported on the preference for objective, concise, and prudent word choice of tourism English (as cited in Kang & Yu, 2011). Kiss’s (2018) analysis of travel articles showed lexico-syntactic evidence which demonstrates the persuasive power and captivates the imagination and excitement of the tourist such as the use of keywords, comparisons, metaphors, attribute-noun phrases, and intensifying adverbial-adjectival clusters.

It should also be noted that though specific lexical, syntactic and textual characteristics of the language of tourism have been pointed out to echo the view that it is a specialized discourse, this language variety has often regarded as general language and has a low to medium level of specialization, even when it is influenced by a number of other fields like geography, economics, history, and art (Muñoz, 2011, 2019). Gotti (2006) also maintained that tourism discourse’s level of specialization is variable (as cited in Pierini, 2009).

2.2 Adjectives in tourism discourse

According to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999) in their seminal work which describes the forms and functions of grammar, adjectives are a common word class in fiction, news, academic prose and conversation, but particularly frequent in the written registers. As for the functions of adjectives, they are generally used to modify nominal expressions, and hence enhance “informational density” (p. 504).

As Edo-Marzá (2011) argued, adjectives have “a strong interpersonal dimension” (p. 100) and are always utilized when it comes to convince, reason, narrate, and tell. The role of adjectives in the language of tourism was highlighted by Manca (2016), noting adjectives are essential to “present the beauty, allure, and uniqueness of destinations or of attractions” (p. 79). The pervasiveness of adjectives in tourism discourse has been found in previous studies (Ding, 2008, Sun, 2009, as cited in Kang & Yu, 2011). In a study of translational tourism English, Yifeng and Yang (2014) looked into the distribution of parts of speech in original tourism texts in Chinese and their translations in English, and interestingly they found a higher number of adjectives used in English translations.

Similarly, Kang and Yu (2011) in their corpus-based stylistic analysis reported that tourism texts in English use more adjectives than general texts. Their study also revealed a large number of descriptive adjectives with positive meaning, let alone general superlative adjectives. The ubiquitous presence of adjectives, despite in many contexts possibly being “unacceptable, redundant or overdone”, appears to be necessary for the tourism promotion context (Muñoz, 2019).

Adjectives are seemingly one of the elemental ways to convey the encoder’s stance towards a certain thing when constructing a discourse (Pierini, 2009). According to Pierini (2009), adjectives can be descriptive, delivering referential content and factual information, or evaluative, giving more subjective judgment. Having the same view, Edo-Marzá (2011) noted that one common way to achieve evaluation is to use evaluative adjectives. More particularly, they are often used in the types of discourse which intend to appeal to the reader since they can express the view of the writer or the speaker (Edo-Marzá, 2011) and cause the reader to have some kind of aesthetic feelings (Muñoz, 2019).

Edo-Marzá’s (2011) study of hotel websites revealed interesting results concerning the use of adjectives. In particular, this genre made use of positive adjectives to express subjective judgments and portray outstanding hotel qualities. Given this, evaluative adjectives were not employed by promotional hotel websites as much as expected, suggesting the tendency to use less subjective evaluations and provide unbiased information. A high number of descriptive adjectives displaying positive emotions instead of negative ones are also found in Ding (2008, as cited in Kang & Yu, 2011). In Salim, Ibrahim, and Hassan’s (2014) multimodal analysis of tourism

websites, adjectives, besides nouns and syntactic items, were found to be carefully chosen to portray the diversity of destinations.

Through the examination of adjectives in hotel promotion websites in terms of grammatical patterns, pragmatic meanings, and collocations, Pierini (2009) highlighted the essential role adjectives perform in this genre and how they add to the persuasive force. According to Pierini (2009), all adjectives obtained from the analyzed texts could find their places somewhere on a continuum, with descriptive adjectives and evaluative adjectives at the two extremes. Lying in between on the continuum are adjectives which are called experiential adjectives.

To make the tourism discourse appealing to the reader, adjectives, as pointed out in previous research, can be used on their own, be combined with nouns to become typical collocations (e.g. *spectacular views*), or be modified by intensifiers (e.g. *truly unique experience*) (Muñoz, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Research into the multifarious language of tourism can take advantage of the corpus-based approach to systematic analyses at lexical, morphosyntactic and textual level (Nigro, 2006). Therefore, with the aim to understand how word choices contribute to the persuasive purpose of tourism texts at lexical level, i.e. adjectives, the present study adopted the corpus-based approach, using textual data from Vietnam's tourism website, *vietnam.travel*. The study used both qualitative and quantitative data, starting off with the retrieval of adjectives and their frequencies of use and then the examination of occurrences of the identified adjectives in context.

3.2 Corpus of the Study

As a non-English-speaking country, Vietnam has worked to promote its tourism via different channels, including introducing tourist destinations and attractions on the travel website in multiple languages. The website chosen for the present study is publicly accessible, providing official information for would-be international tourists, covering a wide range of information, including destinations, travel experiences, recommended trips, transportation, visa policy, accommodation, and health and safety issues. However, only texts in the sub-domain of destinations on the website were selected for the manual compilation of a specialized corpus consisting of 10,836 tokens.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data from the website were kept in plain text so that it could be processed by corpus tools. The study made use of TermStat Web 3.0 (Drouin, 2003), a free web-based tool that can extract candidate terms, either single-word or multiple-word, according to their word classes, and the corpus toolkit Antconc's wordlist function (Anthony, 2011).

Though the retrieval of candidate adjectives and wordlists was assisted by the two tools, the essential next step was to manually review the adjectives which were proposed and at the same time checking them in context to remove any terms wrongly labeled as adjectives before analyzing them. For the present study, it should be noted that adjectives in the comparative and superlative forms were treated independently of their base forms and each adjective in such forms is considered an adjective type.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview of Adjectives in the Corpus

It is worth mentioning again that the corpus compiled for the present study was intentionally kept at a small size to allow for manual scanning, plus Koester's (2010) view that small corpora "allow a much closer link between the corpus and the contexts in which the texts in the corpus were produced" (as cited in Ngula, 2018, p. 210). After the review of candidate adjectives and wordlists, 452 adjective types (i.e. 452 different adjectives) of different frequencies emerged from the corpus.

Previous corpus-based research like Johansson and Hofland (1989) found adjectives in general make up some 7% of all running words (as cited in Yamazaki, 2002). Yamazaki (2002) himself noted the percentages of adjectives ranging from 7.1% to 7.6% in three different corpora. In the present study, interestingly, the proportion of adjectival occurrences of all word forms in the corpus is quite significant, 9.2%. Though tourism discourse has been famed for the prevalence of adjectives, such a figure was higher than expected.

Table 1. The 10 most used adjectives in the corpus

Adjectives	Occurrences	Adjectives	Occurrences
local	20	old	13
national	17	ancient	11
small	17	fresh	10
best	14	french	10
far	14	vietnamese	10

Such considerable adjectival usage in the corpus reflects Yamazaki's (2002) finding that adjectives are used more frequently in informative prose in comparison with imaginative prose. This, according to Yamazaki (2002), may be attributed to the fact that there is a stronger presence of noun phrases in the former, hence "more potential places for adjective use in informative writings" (p. 65).

The examination of the adjectives identified in the tourism corpus showed that there are common adjectives that often occur in general language. Such adjectives can even be found in the ten most common adjectives such as *small*, *old*, and *fresh* as

shown in Table 1 or with lower frequencies in the corpus like *warm*, *popular*, and *interesting*. The presence of the adjectives which are not so specialized like those is understandable due to the fact that the language of tourism has a low to medium level of specialization. This is also similar to the case of vocabulary in Pierini's (2009) analysis of hotel websites in which both common adjectives and specialized adjectives were observed.

4.2 Compound Adjectives

The extraction of adjectives from the corpus revealed the considerable presence of adjectival compounds which come in many different shapes (Biber et al., 1999) such as noun + adjective (e.g. *family-friendly*), adverb + *ed*-participle (e.g. *fast-paced*), adjective + noun (e.g. *white-sand*), and noun + *ed*-participle (e.g. *pine-covered*). Nevertheless, without considering adjectival compound patterns, there was a high degree of reliance on adjectival compounds with hyphens to advertise their destinations when this special kind of adjective made up approximately 17% of all adjective types used in the corpus. Such prevalence of multi-word adjectives is in agreement with Biber et al.'s (1999) observation that there was abundant use of adjectival compounds in the written registers of fiction, news and academic prose.

It can be seen from the identified adjectives and the tracing back of their use in context that most of the multi-word adjectives are used in an attributive way to qualify nominal expressions, for instance *awe-inspiring [lookout]* and *tree-lined [lanes]*. This agrees with Sari's (2018) finding that a majority of compound adjectives in tourism websites has an attributive function. Biber et al. (1999) also reported on the more common occurrence of adjectival compounds in attributive use than in predicative use.

Despite a large number of multi-word adjectives, this kind of adjective was found to occur less frequently compared to single-word adjectives. Indeed, as much as 85% of multi-word adjectives occur just once in the corpus. This may result from the tourism discourse's tendency to use central adjectives which, as Biber et al. (1999) observed, can have both attributive and predicative roles to modify a nominal expression. Meanwhile, adjectival compounds with their lower occurrences in the corpus tend to be used in specific situations to refer to a particular, sometimes unique feature of the place being described to make the portrait as specific and vivid as possible such as *mountain-top [lodge]*, *wood-framed [palace]*, and *UNESCO-listed [complex of abandoned temples]*. Besides offering a description of what a certain place is like, adjectival compounds provide a means of making evaluations like the cases of *fun-filled [water parks]*, *laid-back [vibes]*, and *much-loved [snacks]*.

English compound adjectives are known to be a powerful linguistic device which enables information to be compressed into a lexical unit with two or more bases and "provide a means to create neologisms and occasionalisms" (Pierini, 2015, p. 17). In

news and academic prose, the compact expression of attributive adjectival compounds “permit complex modification within the noun phrase, thus avoiding the lengthier relative clauses that could convey the same information” (Biber et al., 1999, p. 536).

In the same view, Adams (2001) noted that the frequent occurrence of adjectival compounds in attributive use is to serve the information-packing function when postmodifiers like relative clauses, *-ing* clauses, and prepositional phrases can be replaced with shorter premodifiers (as cited in Pierini, 2015). Such a purpose can seemingly be used to explain the pervasiveness of multi-word adjectives in electronic tourism texts as in the present study such as the case of *triangle-shaped [island]* instead of using *island which has a triangular shape*. This is also an example of right-to-left constructions in which dense noun phrases are formed and serve as keywords (Cappelli, 2007).

The compound adjectives identified in the corpus are consistent with Sari’s (2018) observation that a majority of such adjectives used by tourism websites are transparent in meaning as the meaning of a particular compound can be guessed from its constituents as can be seen in the aforementioned examples.

It can be seen that employing compound adjectives is a compact and effective way to express information, which is used frequently in the corpus. Tourism texts are informative to provide information about a certain tourist attraction, represent it, and make it recognizable (Culler, 1989, as cited in Francesconi, 2014). Through the extensive use of multi-word adjectives, attempts to provide the reader with a detailed description of what a destination is like, what it has to offer, or what feelings the reader may have become easier and more concise.

4.3 Adjectives with Negative Meanings

As Dann (1999) puts it, the language of tourism “tends to speak only in positive and glowing terms of the services and attractions it seeks to promote” (p. 65), hence careful word choice. It is also common thinking that in tourism discourse the language would always be positive and appealing to make the reader become an actual tourist. However, there still exist in tourism texts adjectives which do not seem to be as positive as they are thought to be.

For this reason, instances of adjectives with negative meanings were searched for, especially adjectives of very low frequency as Edo-Marzá (2011) suggested. As expected, not many adjectives of the kind were spotted in the corpus, but just a few instances rarely used such as *tragic*, *troubled*, and *modest*.

Tragic and *troubled* were used as collocates of *history*, which is seemingly intended to cause the reader to have certain feelings, thereby making him or her even more interested in the historical story associated with that particular place. These cases thus do not appear to give negative connotations, but instead, give the reader a

whole picture of the place. As for the case of *modest*, it was used in *a modest temple* to offer the spot a portrait as it is and help the reader know what is there to expect. As for adjectives delivering negative emotions, no instance of the kind seems to be present in the corpus. According to O'Connor, Buhalis, and Frew (2001) almost two decades ago, tourists are already careful in planning holidays, researching much information as they can to avoid mismatches between expectations and real experience (as cited in Maci, 2007). It subsequently appears that what is no less important than providing information with positive connotations is to provide accurate information.

5. CONCLUSION

With the help of the corpus tools, the study helps shed some light on adjectival usage in tourism discourse. A large concentration of adjectives was identified in the analyzed texts, including adjectives common in general language, and it can be seen that adjectives were carefully chosen to make the texts attractive enough to fire the imagination of the reader and help him or her easily relate to what is being described. Besides, there is a tendency to rely on adjectival compounds to express information in a compact way, facilitating the detailed description of the destination and feelings the reader may have. Adjectives with negative connotations do not seem to occur to give the reader all positive feelings.

The study's findings provide some pedagogic implications for the teaching and learning of English for tourism, as an area of English for Specific Purposes, writing in English as well as tourism translation practice. As Cappelli (2006) put it, "every professional in the tourism industry needs to master the language of tourism" (p. 9). The role of adjectives to portraying destinations has been highlighted, plus the fact that adjective is one of the major word classes, and therefore an understanding of adjectival usage in tourism discourse can be seen as one step closer to the mastery of this specialized language.

Besides, while writing in English is not easy for many learners, without discourse proficiency writing for a specific purpose in a specialized field might not be easier. Learners could thus be afforded a chance to have greater exposure to specialized vocabulary, which will get them to become familiar with the discourse and then aid their writing development (M.Nordin, Stapa & Darus, 2013). With this study, adjectives frequently occurring in tourism discourse could be one way to start with. Additionally, a deeper understanding of adjectival usage can help spice up writing and produce more quality writing. At the same time, learners of English find compound adjectives a problematic area (Dehham, 2014), whereas this type of adjective is a concise way to convey information and is common in written texts.

Despite being beneficial to teaching and learning practice, the study has its limitations. The study's self-compiled corpus was of manageable size. Using small data resources, as Conti (2006) explained, is meaningful in a way that the field of

investigation is narrowed, but the drawback would be its inability to give a complete insight on the issue under examination. The data used in the study were solely from one Internet source, thus other sources of travel information could be considered for further studies. Also, linguistic investigations across genres and text types in the field would be appreciated as “tourism texts are dynamic and constantly subject to innovation” (Calvi, 2010, as cited in Francesconi, 2014, p. 5).

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