

ECOTOURISM DISCOURSE - BETWEEN TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE

LE DISCOURS DE L'ECOTOURISME - ENTRE TOURISME ET ENVIRONNEMENTAL DISCOURS

DISCURSUL ECOTURISTIC - ÎNTRE DISCURSUL TURISTIC ȘI DE MEDIU

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Abstract

Ecotourism has developed as a fast growing sector within tourism industry, promoting concepts as conservation, sustainable travel, environmental and cultural awareness. Therefore, a new type of discourse has evolved within tourism discourse, namely ecotourism discourse or 'greenspeak'. Our aim is to analyze ecotourism language, identify specific linguistic patterns, and observe various discursive interactions. Ecotourism language exhibits a mix of discursive features related to moralizing, cultural, environmental, romantic and picturesque discourse.

Resumé

L'écotourisme a augmenté rapidement comme un secteur en développement au sein de l'industrie du tourisme, tout en promouvant des concepts tels que la conservation, le tourisme durable, la préoccupation pour l'environnement et la culture. Ainsi, un nouveau type de discours a évolué au sein du discours de tourisme, à savoir le discours de l'écotourisme ou « greenspeak ». Notre objectif est d'analyser le langage de l'écotourisme, identifier les structures linguistiques spécifiques et d'examiner les différentes interactions discursives. Le langage de l'écotourisme représente un mélange linguistique des éléments discursifs appartenant au discours moralisateur, culturel, environnementaux, romantique et pittoresque.

Rezumat

Ecoturismul s-a extins rapid ca un sector in curs de dezvoltare în cadrul industriei turistice, promovând concepte precum conservarea, turismul durabil, grija față de mediu și cultură. Astfel, un nou tip de discurs a evoluat în cadrul discursului turistic, și anume discursul ecoturistic sau "greenspeak". Scopul nostru este să analizăm limbajul ecoturistic, să identificăm modele lingvistice specifice și să examinăm diferite interacțiuni discursive. Limbajul ecoturistic prezintă un amestec de elemente discursive ce aparțin discursului moralizator, cultural, de mediu, romantic și pitoresc.

Key words: *ecotourism, green tourism, language, environment, discourse*

Mots-clés : *écotourisme, tourisme vert, langue, environnement, discours*

Cuvinte cheie: *ecoturism, turism verde, limba, mediu, discurs*

Introduction

Ecotourism has become a widespread concept since the mid 1980s and developed as an important sector within tourism industry. It is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES, 1990). According to specialists in the field, ecotourism is about responsible tourism, sustainable development, environmental awareness, the desire to explore natural surroundings, conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity. It also promotes greater understanding and appreciation for nature, local culture, tradition and authenticity. Ecotourism at its heart not only preserves natural habitats and indigenous cultures and species, but actually works in favor of conservation by bringing additional resources to local economies.

Along with the development of a new tourism form, a new type of discourse has emerged, meant to enhance the attractiveness and authenticity of some remote destinations, while focusing on the environment and sustainable development. The language of ecotourism imposes a new terminology which builds realms of unspoiled nature and pristine areas.

One of the registers of the language of tourism is 'Greenspeak', a promotional discourse which focuses on the environment and the corresponding motivations of the new green tourist. According to Dann, greenspeak tries to convert the themes of conventional mass tourism - 'sun', 'sea', and 'sand' - to those of eco-tourism - 'nature', 'nostalgia', and 'nirvana' [1].

Methodology

Central to this research is language choice and its use for picturesque, environmental, cultural and sustainable discourses within the realm of ecotourism. Our aim is to examine the mix of various competing discourses meant to lure the 'green' traveler into new adventures. We make the assumption that this new type of discourse has to be consistent with ecotourism principles, and reflect its characteristics at discursive level.

With a view to analyzing the language of ecotourism, the discursive genre selected for our research is the ecotourism website. Thus, we carefully chose nine websites promoting ecotourism and sustainable travel among which: greenliving.about.com; independenttraveler.com; nationalgeographic.com; naturesbestsweden.com, jaunted.com. We conduct a detailed content analysis of our corpus in order to identify specific discursive features that establish ecotourism language as a new register within tourism discourse. In order to assess the relevance of some words, the analysis is mainly quantitative, based on the frequency criterion. Recurrent word combinations are also observed within each discursive component.

Our approach was supported by several text analysis software programs, Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC), Diction and WordSmith 6. By means of LIWC we conduct a content analysis of the data and establish the recurrence of self-references, social words, positive emotions, negative emotions, overall cognitive words, articles and big words used across the texts selected in our sample.

Diction is a computer-aided text analysis program that helps determine the tone of a written message. It searches the text for five semantic features, activity, optimism, certainty, realism and commonality, as well as other thirty-five sub-features, and produces reports that include raw totals, standardized scores, word counts and percentages, thus generating a better understanding of the processed text. Diction helps us look for semantic features that indicate resoluteness, movement, change, optimism and positive entailments, realism, commonality, praise, satisfaction, inspiration, accomplishment, the degree of aggression, blame, familiarity, past or present concern, or human interest in order to observe the linguistic variations that render the ecotouristic message more alluring to the audience.

WordSmith provides great help with finding word patterns, all instances of a word or phrase, identifying salient words in the text or listing words on a frequency criterion.

Recurrent linguistic patterns in ecotourism discourse

As stated above, ecotourism language displays a wide array of discursive features, merging elements from various registers to create a new one called by Dann 'greenspeak'. Our findings reveal a preponderant use of environmental language across the whole corpus analyzed (Figure 1). The most frequent words are 'nature' and 'wildlife', their recurrent use being explained by the fact that all websites analyzed promote tourist destinations in the heart of nature, areas of unique natural landscapes, unspoiled wilderness off the beaten path. The verb 'preserve' is closely related to environmental issues, and appeared in our sample in the following contexts: 'tiny coastal villages preserve a way of life largely unchanged since the medieval era', 'preserve the pristine beauty of Norway's famous fjords', 'preserve the area's natural and cultural heritage', 'preserve the rainforest', 'preserves natural habitats and indigenous cultures and species', etc. The adjective 'green' is unarguably the mark of ecotourism discourse, whether we refer to the green tourist, green accommodation, green tourism, green measures, green living, green travel, green hotel, green resorts, or green lodges. We therefore notice that in the realm of eco-destinations everything is or has to be 'green', environmentally-friendly, eco-friendly, eco-adventurer, nature-friendly at least at discursive level.

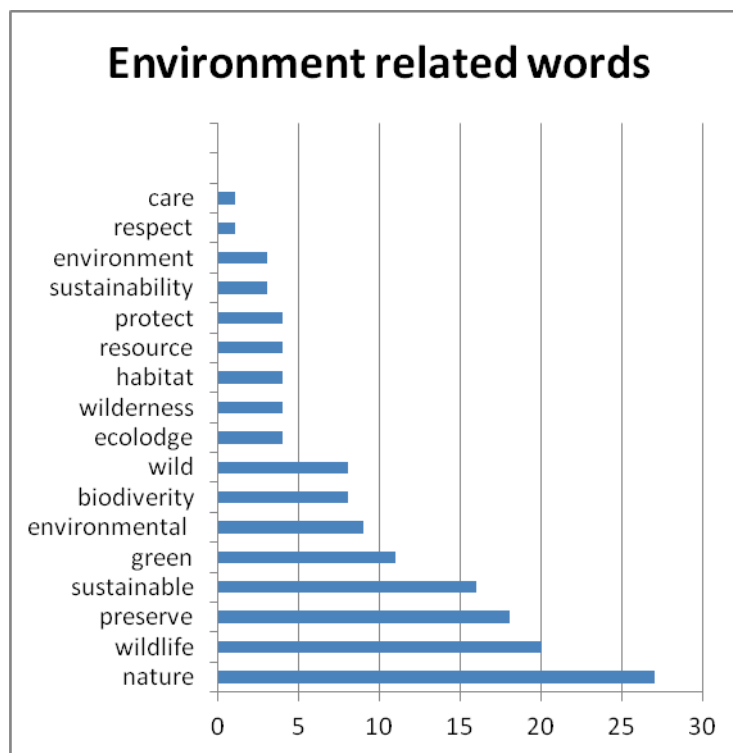


Figure 1

Another pervasive discursive feature obvious within the environmental language throughout the entire corpus is the moralizing register: 'encourage sustainable development to protect the islands' fragile ecosystems'; 'it's more important than ever to follow our tips for green travel to ensure that these places remain beautiful and unspoiled for many years to come'; 'it wasn't enough for a place to be blessed with extraordinary natural resources; it was equally important that those resources are being cared for'; 'local commitment to maintaining the beauty and integrity of these places', 'to shield both its natural resources and its cultural traditions from the detrimental effects of mass tourism'; 'working to make sure the island paradise stays pristine well into the future', etc.

As for qualifying words used to describe the eco-tourism destinations, we notice the frequent use of the adjectives *natural*, *endangered*, *protected*, and *preserved*, which are closely related to the environmental language. The authenticity feature of all areas located off the beaten

path is created by means of adjectives such as remote, untouched, pristine, off-limits, unspoiled, unique, untouched, genuine which are the most recurrent in our corpus (Figure 2).

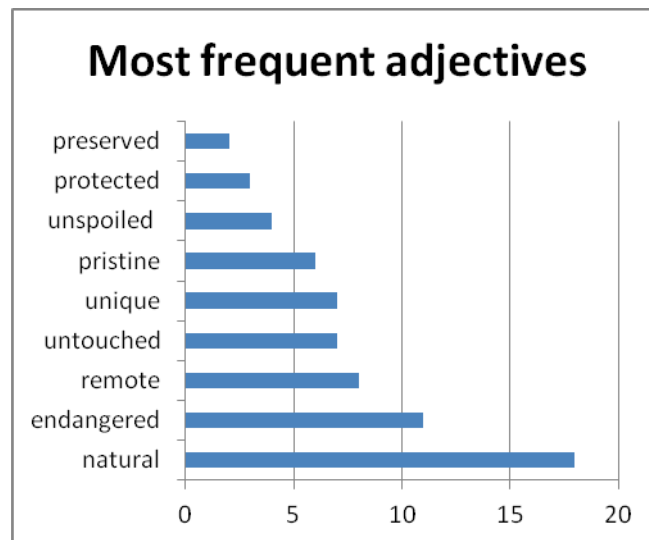


Figure 2

The Diction analysis of the corpus reveals a high score for optimism, certainty, praise, variety, spatial terms and complexity, and low values for the variables aggression, ambivalence, denial, hardship and blame, which is consistent with the general image of the destinations described.

The LIWC analysis shows a low value for self references, negative emotion words, and overall cognitive words and high scores for positive emotion words, articles, and big words. The consistent use of positive words creates a fantasy realm of charm, happiness, romanticism, and adventure. The description of the eco-touristic product tends to enhance features such as uniqueness, diversity, authenticity, calmness, warmth, relaxation, tranquility, while inducing a mood of must-see.

The idea of uniqueness and authenticity is also enhanced by the frequent use of superlative forms: 'the earth's most distinctive ecosystems'; 'the most threaten', 'the world's foremost diving destinations'; 'most endangered'; 'India's most unspoiled corners'; 'some of the most remote and beautiful locations on earth'; 'the world's most spectacular', 'one of the most unusual nature destinations', 'one of the most remote places on Earth', etc.

The cultural discourse is intermingled with environmental language, promoting the culture and history of these remote locations. Ecotourism websites advertise local cultural traditions, cultural heritages, ancient treasures, ancient temples, cultural getaways, cultural activities, traditional practices, traditional villages or ethnic groups that define the ecotourism realm.

Last but not least, the language of ecotourism is a language of romanticism and adventure in a new land. It promotes dream destinations, scenic boat rides, lush jungles, colorful reefs, sprawling savannas, fabulous towering fjords, crystal-clear sea, colorful underwater wonderland, unspoiled beaches, snowcapped mountains, tumbling waterfalls, rugged terrain, exotic marine life, lush tropical playground, lush virgin forests, etc. As Dann contends, tourism promotion is based on glamour and the language of tourism "tends to speak only in positive and glowing terms of the services and attractions it seeks to promote" [2].

The landscape becomes the foundation stone of ecotourism language, as all environmental, romantic, moralizing, cultural discourses interconnect around it. The tourist can escape the dull present to relocate in a nostalgic past. The authenticity is at the heart of tourists' pursuits and stands for the one of the most recurrent feature of ecotourism sphere. The genuine location in the middle of the wilderness becomes a retreat from civilization and modernity, a return to peace and tranquility.

Concluding remarks

Ecotourism discourse promotes the exploration of remote and unspoiled areas, natural beauty and picturesque landscape, the exploration of flora and fauna, the escape from civilization and the discovery of new habitats and cultures. It is a complex discourse that brings together a wide array of genres, unifying in an original manner environmental, moralizing, cultural, picturesque, and romantic language. However, as its final aim is to promote ecotourism destinations and attract the target audience, linguistic patterns related to tourism advertising are pervasive throughout the entire corpus. In addition, we notice the abundance of environmental language that creates areas of pristine nature, promotes environment awareness and respect.

To sum up, the language used in ecotourism websites is consistent with the discourse of sustainability, environment, authenticity and culture. This new type of discourse negotiates and interconnects tourism and environmental language, cultural, romantic and moralizing speech altogether.

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