



Conceptualizing Portugal as a tourist destination through the textual content of travel brochures

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ABSTRACT

This research adopts phenomenology as a methodological conception that assumes an ontology that coalesces the destination's attributes and the tour operators' perception of the destination. The main focus of this paper concerns the analysis of tourism packages' discourses and its linguistic signs which evoke an understanding and factual (conceptual) knowledge of mainland Portugal as a destination. The results suggest that a new language of tourism is being articulated and transferred to society (main inbound markets) through a network of concepts that bring to fruition a new prototype of mainland Portugal through a wider set of signifying structures. Observed lexical reiterations across all tour operators' discourses suggest that representations of mainland Portugal are implanted with dominant ideological constructs. Despite the overlapping articulations of meaning and interpretation the tour operator's discourse exhibits a richer semantic structure and unveils the implication of places as organizers of space into centres of meaning.

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1. Introduction

The conceptualization of place through the textual content of brochures (Dann, 1996) consists in connecting the “objective (place)” with the “subjective (tourist experience of that place)” (Ryan, 2000, p. 123). It is therefore a form of scenography built to encourage the anticipation of the tourist experience through “daydreaming and fantasy” (Urry, 1990, p. 3). This is typically engendered through narratives of control (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006, p. 827) which are “sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices” (Urry, 1990, p. 3) and “based on signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism” (Urry, 1990, p. 12; Culler, 1990). These arguments evoke an “institutional/professional gaze” (Hollinshead, 1999, p. 7) that transfers to society a prototype of the destination supported by the “power of institutional truth” (Hollinshead, 1999, p. 12) that conceives “signifying structures that mark and reduce” otherness (Culler, 1990, p. 10). The “tourist place becomes a locus of selected meanings” (Ryan, 2000, p. 121), in this case through the “quiet power of text in tourism” where meaning and perception are “pre-built into and within texts” (Hollinshead, 1999: 18) by “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

The exercise of experience control (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006) in a pre-trip phase by tour operators that some authors describe as monologues or “one-way ‘push’ process of mass communication” (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007, p. 978), has undergone profound changes particularly with regard to further fragmentation and transience of the mosaic of signs and symbols that contribute to the creation of an image and imagery of places, namely through tourism (Harvey, 1989, p. 293). The new post-modernizing scenario has been introducing greater complexity and specialization in developing and structuring tourist packages (Sharpley, 2002, p. 316). This change is the result not only of the maturing of the tourist experience that moves further away from standardized and mass tourist experiences in search of a greater diversity of forms of leisure experiences (Urry, 1990, p. 50; Richards, 1997, p. 7) but also of a new economic configuration that has evolved namely towards economies of scope with increased “flexibility in the assembly of package holidays” allowing tour operators to “enter certain niche markets” (Kärcher, 1996, p. 229).

Tourist geographies that have developed as pleasure peripheries (the case of Portugal) as a result of minimizing the diversity (Turner & Ash, 1975), may reveal in the contemporary discourse of tour operators an adjustment towards greater signaling by increasing the diversity of markers that point to new nodes and places (Guedes & Jiménez, 2015).

The development of a fuller image of the destination may, via the upsurge of a new “language of tourism” (Dann, 1996, p. 2), which is sustained on a more elaborate and complex semantic structure, provide a wider lens through which anticipation of the tourist experience is constructed (Urry, 1990).

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The acknowledgement of semantic models and structures latent in the tour operator's written discourse will enable to identify those changes and build a proposal of a shared mental model as well as "knowledge representation of a user group or knowledge domain" (Allen as cited by Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006, p. 812).

The goal of this research is to apprehend the tour operator's conceptual knowledge of mainland Portugal by analyzing their travel brochures' texts from an exploratory perspective, which is typified by the question "What does the text contain?" (Carley & Palmquist, 1992, p. 607).

2. Phenomenology as a methodological conception

The analysis of tour operators' conceptual knowledge of mainland Portugal (object) through their written discourse (package tours) entails a non-dual ontology that coalesces the object (destination) and the subject (tour operator). Hence, it transcends a descriptive observation of the destination, i.e. what is seen, and plunges into the "essence of consciousness" (Husserl, 1983, p. 67) of the tour operator (subject) by examining how the destination is perceived.

Therefore, this study convenes phenomenology, which examines the structure of consciousness, or mental phenomena, which "includes something as object within itself" (Brentano, 1995, p. 68), in our case the destination within the tour operator's consciousness. This "directedness of experience towards objects (and the world) in phenomenology is characterized as the study of intentionality" (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056). In our research the institutional/professional expert (tour operator) is the first-person structure from whom proceeds the intentionality, which "characterizes consciousness in the pregnant sense" (Husserl, 1983, p. 199), and the perception of the object (destination) or the way it is conceived or thought about.

Package tours' written discourse "includes more than what is expressed in language" which summons the "study of meaning" (Smith, 2013, p. 8) and how the subject (tour operator) experiences a phenomenon, i.e. phenomenology. Yi-Fu Tuan distinctly conveys phenomenology's essence and the importance of the experience (act of consciousness) from the subject's perspective through the following description:

"On a map the two routes are identical and may be shown by the same line with arrows pointing in opposite directions. However, strictly speaking, what is mapped is the route of the car and not that of its human occupant, for whom not only does the scenery change in major ways, depending on whether he is moving in one direction or another, but the route itself acquires different feeling-tones" (1979, p. 401).

Accordingly, the tour operator's written discourse is composed by lexical elements arranged in conformity with syntactical conventions, but what phenomenology seeks to uncover is the structure of consciousness and intentionality of the tour operator through his written discourse by interpreting latent "semantic structures" (Carley & Palmquist, 1992, p. 603) that evoke an implicit meaning. This can be understood as the object (destination) "as intended to" (Husserl, 1983, p. 244) by the subject (tour operator), what Husserl termed *noema*. Based on Husserl's basic theory of intentionality, the tour operator's discourse can also be understood as a "medium of intention" (Smith, 2013, p. 292) that seeks to construct the tourist experience in a given space.

Thus, phenomenology illuminates the "intentional or semantic force of ideal meanings" (Smith, 2013, p. 11) which "are shareable by different acts of consciousness" (Smith, 2013, p. 7). Such contention means that the "sharing is made possible through 'intersubjectivity'" (Tuan, 1979, 403), which is attained when "we come to an understanding with our fellow human being and in common with them posit an Objective spatiotemporal actuality as our factually existent surrounding world to which we ourselves nonetheless belong" (Husserl, 1983, p.

56). In that sense, phenomenology confronts "each individual to examine his own experience, to become subject rather than object of research inquiry, and then reach for common denominators in the experiences of others" (Buttimer, 1976, p. 288). Furthermore, phenomenology proposes a "mode of knowing which recognizes the validity of both modes, but is identical with neither" (objective and subjective) and "...it seeks to encounter, rather than master, the object to be known." (Buttimer, 1976, p. 282). As Li (2000) points out, phenomenological analysis "starts with the content of consciousness (whatever that content may be)" and it "does not concentrate exclusively on either the object or subject of experience, but on the point where being and consciousness meet" (p. 866).

Tour operators' written discourse is accordingly a prolific field for phenomenological analysis by encapsulating and preserving a subconscious knowledge and "stable existence of place" (Tuan, 1979, 411), i.e. the "sense of place" (p. 410).

This underlies the circumstance that understanding of existence and experience "is always an understanding of the world" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 186) which is "governed by the concrete situation of the interpreter" (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1064), in this case the tour operator.

The tour operator's conceptualization of mainland Portugal through written discourse (travel brochures) implies an understanding and interpretation of the "World", which "is the context within which consciousness is revealed" (Buttimer, 1976, p. 281). Therefore, travel brochures capture the tour operator's intelligibility of mainland Portugal as a tourist destination "articulated according to significations; and discourse is this articulation" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 206). In addition, the "way in which discourse gets expressed is language. Language is a totality of words" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 206) and discourse is "existentially language, because that entity whose disclosedness it articulates according to significations, has, as its kind of Being, Being-in-the-world" (p. 206).

Hence, phenomenology, which "signifies primarily a methodological conception" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 50), serves "as a theoretical avenue towards describing or understanding the experiential, and lived existence" (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056) of tour operators by analyzing their written discourse which is expressed through language, i.e. "the house of being" (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1064).

3. Words as units of meaning

The study of written language of tour operators' holiday programs falls into the research framework of cognitive linguistics (dating back to the 1970s) that has had a major incidence on semantics, which is based primarily on the assumption that "words denote concepts, units of meaning" (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 7) which can be compared (e.g. stallion and mare) according to structural semantics. Other approaches to lexical semantics suggest that "concepts can be broken down into semantic features" (e.g. stallion is [equine, male] and mare is [equine, female]) or defined by their "truth conditions" (p. 7), which validate and enable to determine the adequacy of the concept to a particular situation in the world.

The extent and complexity of organizing concepts has expanded research models in cognitive linguistics introducing the notion of context, i.e. "the concept of prototype or paradigm case, the notion of «frame» or «schema» (...) and the notion that sometimes goes by the name of «semantic memory»" (Fillmore, 1976, p. 23).

According to Fillmore the concept of meaning materializes in numerous different contexts and therefore the knowledge of word meanings involves knowledge of prototypes, i.e. the notion of «frame» (Fillmore, 1976, p. 24). Thus "words and constructions evoke an understanding, or more specifically a frame" (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 8). Frames can be described as "any of the many organized packages of knowledge, beliefs, and patterns of practice that shape and allow humans to make sense of their experiences." (Fillmore & Baker, 2009, p. 314). Concurring with Fillmore and Baker (2009) the "frames we

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