Chapter 14

Through the Eyes of the Tourist: The Language of Tourism From the Traveller’s Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter takes into consideration the language needs of those that wish to learn a foreign language with the purpose of becoming independent travellers. That perspective has not been overtly addressed from a scholarly perspective so far and that is precisely the authors’ attempt: to fill that gap and make the case for the explicit inclusion of the Language of Tourism from the traveller’s perspective within Tourism Discourse. After consultation with a panel of experts and the thorough analysis of published materials, the authors indicate—through the example of Spanish for Tourism—how this specific area deserves a place within the field of Languages for Specific Purposes.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism discourse has not been as developed as other areas of specialised discourse, often ignored despite being a fruitful field of inquiry (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2006; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011). Furthermore, when it has been researched, it has often been considered from the perspective of the professional, not from the side of the tourist (see, for example, Calvi, 2005, 2006, 2010). However, the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) takes both viewpoints into account when providing a definition of Tourism and clearly states that “Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” (http://www2.unwto.org/). In line with this, this chapter intends to make the case for Tour-
ism Discourse and Language Learning considered from the perspective of the tourist or traveller, as a specific type with its own peculiarities that distinguish it from the Language of Tourism (LT onwards) used by professionals in the Tourism Industry.

The UNWTO distinguishes among traveller, visitor and tourist, defining “traveller” as “someone who moves between different geographic locations for any purpose and any duration” (UNWTO, 2010: 9), “visitor” as “a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited” (UNWTO, 2010: 10), and the “visitor […] is classified as ‘tourist’ […] if his/her trip includes an overnight stay” (UNWTO, 2010: 10). Thus, it could be concluded that “traveller” is more of an umbrella term and “tourist” conveys a more restricted conceptualisation. Some authors (Calvi, 2006) point out that the term “tourist” is often associated to mass tourism and package holidays, whereas “visitors” tend to be perceived as autonomous, independent and even intrepid travellers, with a more positive connotation than the former ones. However, for the purpose of this paper, the authors will not get into such fine-grained distinctions and consider all three denominations –traveller, visitor and tourist- as loose synonyms.

THE LANGUAGE OF TOURISM AS A SPECIALISED DOMAIN

Having done in-depth research in the context of Spanish for Tourism for the past few years, these researchers follow Aguirre (2012), Calvi (2005) and Moreno & Tuts (2004) in envisaging LT as a broad area which is double sided: it comprehends the language needed by a tourist to get by in most common communicative situations (hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, etc.) and on the other hand it necessitates specialised linguistic knowledge specific to the professional sector, understood as those who will have to use the language as part of their job. It is only recently that LT has been considered a specialised language, through the work of authors such as Calvi (2005, 2006, 2010, 2016) classifying it as an autonomous field, opposed to the previous classification as merely a sub-type of Business (Moreno & Tuts, 2004; Calvi, 2006; Pinilla, 2012). For the authors of this paper LT should clearly be included within Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP henceforth), following Gotti’s enlightening definition of specialised discourse as “the specialist use of language in contexts which are typical of a specialised community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice” (2008: 24). LT would fit within the latter. It is also essential to cite Hutchinson & Waters’ understanding of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and their focus on learner need, which would also apply to LT, regardless of the language:

*Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need. The foundation of all ESP is the simple question: Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? From this question will flow a whole host of further questions, some of which will relate to the learners themselves, some to the nature of the language. The learners will need to operate, some to the given learning context. But this whole analysis derives from an initial identified need on the part of the learner to learn a language. ESP, then, is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning.* (1987, p. 19)
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