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Väitöksiä - Dissertations

Linguistic and Multimodal Insights into the Tourist Brochures

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This article summarises the results of my doctoral dissertation, which studied how the tourist brochures combine language, images, layout, and maps to promote the destination and to guide the reader. The data consisted of the English-language tourist brochures published by the city of Helsinki between 1967 and 2008, which were annotated for their content, layout, rhetorical, and navigation structures, and stored into an XML database. I used this data to create models of the tourist brochures' structure, which revealed common structural patterns, longitudinal changes in these structures, and factors that affect the brochures' overall structure and appearance. The main finding was that following 1985, when graphic design became a computerised process, the tourist brochures began to organise their content into short, easily digestible pieces. In contrast, the brochures produced before 1985 were characterised by longer written texts.

Keywords: tourism, advertising, promotion, multimodality, discourse

Introduction

Have you walked past a landmark in your hometown and witnessed tourists, with cameras hanging around their necks, crouched over brochures or leaflets? You probably have, because the tourist brochures are important for promoting a destination and informing the visitors (Molina & Esteban 2006), and help the tourists to perform their role (Österlund-Pötzsch, 2010; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2014). These functions are familiar, but what can be said about the brochures themselves? Scholars of communication and culture may suggest that the brochures mediate an elaborately constructed image of the destination, which reflects its culture, history, and politics (Jokela, this

volume, 2014). The linguists, in contrast, may ask: what enables the tourist brochures to mediate an image of the destination and how they do it?

This article summarises the results of my doctoral dissertation (Hiippala, 2013), which studied the tourist brochures using linguistically inflected methods, focusing on how the brochures combine language, images, layout, and other modes of communication. The data consisted of 58 English-language tourist brochures published by Helsinki City Tourist Office between 1967 and 2008. Situated in the emerging field of multimodal research, the dissertation sought

1. to identify which factors shape the tourist brochures,
2. to reveal how they are structured, and
3. to determine whether the brochures have changed over time.

By modelling the brochures' generic structure, the dissertation aimed to complement and support the previous detail-oriented analyses of the tourist brochures (see e.g. Hiippala, 2007; Francesconi, 2011). To some extent, the dissertation also responded to Molina and Esteban's (2006, p. 1051) call to "establish some criteria for brochure design in order to adapt brochures to the specific needs of tourists and, consequently, to improve their appeal and efficacy in forming images." What follows is a broad description of the theoretical framework, methods, data, and results.

Background

Since the 1990s, the field of linguistics has increasingly studied how spoken and written language interact with other modes of communication, such as images, typography, layout, gesture, posture, and gaze, to name a few (for a historical perspective, see Kaltenbacher, 2004). This stream of research has challenged previous considerations, which treated non-linguistic contributions to written texts or spoken situations as 'paratextual' or 'paralinguistic'. What has come to be known as multimodal research, in contrast, places language on an equal footing with other modes of communication. Following the publication of several influential works, such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's *Reading Images* (2006) and Michael O'Toole's *The Language of Displayed Art* (2011), multimodal research has expanded into several approaches and is rapidly establishing itself as an independent subdiscipline (Jewitt, 2014; Norris & Maier, 2014).

Many contemporary approaches to multimodal research are strongly rooted in Michael Halliday's linguistic theories of grammar (2013) and language in society (1978). Instead of approaching language using formal, rule-based descriptions, Halliday considered language a resource, which is shaped by its users in the contexts of culture and situation. For Halliday, language is a semiotic resource – the epithet 'semiotic' refers to language's potential for making meaning. Multimodal research, in turn, assumes that language is one semiotic resource or *mode* among many: hence the approach is called multi*modal*. The concept of mode is therefore the cornerstone of any multimodal framework: the rest is built on this foundation. In the follo-

wing discussion, I explicate how I identified the semiotic modes active in the tourist brochures.

Unravelling the Multimodal Fabric of the Tourist Brochures

Departing from the assumption that the tourist brochures are multimodal, I faced the question: which concepts besides mode are required to describe their structure? Following Bateman (forthcoming), I chose to approach the brochure – the kind of printed artefact – as a *medium*, which can carry various *genres*, including that of the tourist brochure. As a medium, the brochure is characterised by its production and consumption: mass produced for a relatively short lifespan and sized for easy distribution and use. Contrasting the brochure with other print media, such as newspapers and magazines, may clarify the distinction between a medium and a genre. A medium can carry "an unrestricted range of genres" (Bateman, forthcoming, p. 12): whereas the newspaper medium may carry a tabloid or a broadsheet genre, the brochure may contain genres ranging from health information to tourist brochures. Because the aforementioned examples fall under the umbrella term of print media, they can also share certain features, such as page numbers and margins, which help the reader to navigate and use the media. To maintain a sharp analytical focus, these features had to be distinguished from the content, which I described using the concept of genre.

The content and structure of a tourist brochure are shaped by its communicative functions, which manifest themselves in the linguistic and multimodal structure. Compare, for instance, your expectations towards a brochure that describes the destination, as opposed to one that guides you around it. These expectations and their structural foundations are precisely those that I aimed to capture using the concept of genre. To do so, I used the genre and multimodality model (hereafter GeM; see Bateman, 2008). The model operates on the premise that multimodal texts could be better understood by describing their structure using multiple analytical layers, which cover the content; its hierarchical structure, placement in layout, and typographic and graphic characteristics; the rhetorical structures holding between the content; and the structures that help to navigate the content. Additionally, the model provided an XML-based annotation schema for creating a multimodal corpus, that is, storing the data from the different annotation layers in a cross-referenced database.

Methodologically, the GeM-annotated corpus contributed significantly to uncovering the tourist brochures' multimodal structure: it enabled the analysis to move away from direct observation and allowed a look beneath the surface of the brochures. To support the analysis, I also developed a set of analytical tools to search, transform, and visualise the data stored in the corpus. The visualisation tools, in particular, revealed patterns in the rhetorical structure, which the GeM model describes using the rhetorical structure theory (hereafter RST; see Mann & Thompson, 1988; Taboada & Mann, 2006). RST is an established theory of text structure and coherence that provides a set of relations, supported by pre-defined criteria, which may be assigned between parts of text. The GeM model extends these RST relations to cover both text and images (Bateman 2008, pp. 158–159).

The RST analysis revealed three prominent rhetorical relations in the written texts: ELABORATION, ENABLEMENT, and SEQUENCE (Hiippala, 2013, pp. 153–159). The texts introducing the destination and its various locations used ELABORATION to present additional detail: this mechanism provided the means to introduce and highlight selected aspects of the destination. ENABLEMENT, in turn, was used to inform the reader about typical touristic activities: accessing the locations, undertaking social and cultural activities, suggesting itineraries, and so on. Finally, the SEQUENCE relations were used to guide the reader around the destination – in many cases, by using a navigation structure to integrate a map and the written text (Hiippala, 2013, p. 172). Essentially, what this shows is that RST analysis can reveal *how* the tourist brochures inform and guide the reader. Alternatively, if the focus were to be shifted towards representation, the analysis would benefit from deploying functional grammar to identify the participants, processes, and circumstances, among other linguistic features embedded in the rhetorical structure. However, such work fell outside the scope of my dissertation (see e.g. Hiippala, 2007; Francesconi, 2011, 2014).

The aforementioned relations, which had prominent functions in the written texts, were naturally accompanied by other relations as well (Hiippala, 2013, p. 150). The written texts, however, constituted only one aspect of the multimodal brochures: graphic elements, such as photographs, two-dimensional elements, illustrations, and maps, occupied on the average 50.5% of the layout space (Hiippala, 2013, p. 141). Among the graphic elements, the photographs proved particularly interesting, because the brochures used two distinct structures to integrate the photographs into their overall rhetorical structure.

The first structure, which I termed an image-text-complex, involved a RESTATEMENT relation between a photograph and one or more text segments, which constituted a caption for the image (Hiippala, 2013, p. 162). This simple structure bound together the photograph and the caption, constraining their interpretation, while simultaneously opening up the possibility of invoking more complex meanings using multimodal metaphor (Forceville, 1996) or intersemiosis (Liu & O'Halloran, 2009). The second structure involved photographs which I termed 'conceptual', because they lacked captions and thus had an illustrative function (Hiippala, 2013, pp. 163–164). This kind of rhetorically weak structure could nevertheless project a powerful mental image of the destination, particularly if the brochures established strong cohesive ties between the verbal and visual content. Cohesive ties were formed, for instance, by including a nominal group such as 'sandy beaches' in the descriptive text, and portraying the same entity in a photograph (Hiippala, 2013, pp. 163–164). The RST analysis, however, could not capture these cohesive ties, because they were embedded in the linguistic structure, whereas RST describes discourse structure.

While the brochures' rhetorical structure remained consistent from 1967 to 2008, a significant change took place in the layout structure after 1985, when computers became the main tool for graphic design. This change was reflected in the GeM layout structure, which describes how the content forms hierarchies: consider, for example, the photograph and its caption, which constitute an image-text-complex, or a header followed by several paragraphs, which make up a descriptive text. Following 1985,

the brochures began to organise their content into short, easily digestible units, which replaced the previously dominant long written texts. This resulted in deeper layout hierarchies as the content spread out over the entire two-dimensional layout space on the page (Hiippala, 2013, pp. 201–203).

Based on these observations, I argue that the structural differences before and after 1985 result from two different semiotic modes operating in the Helsinki tourist brochures. These semiotic modes may be characterised using two abstractions proposed in Bateman (2011): *text-flow* and *page-flow*. Text-flow is a semiotic mode based on linear-interrupted written language, which may be occasionally interrupted by photographs, diagrams, or illustrations, to name a few. This semiotic mode does not, however, take advantage of the layout space to communicate additional meanings to the reader. Page-flow, in turn, does precisely the opposite and uses the layout space to organise written text, photographs, illustrations, maps, and other types of content, and to signal rhetorical relations between them (Bateman, 2008, p. 176).

These semiotic modes, provided by the medium of a brochure, can be configured to realise different genres. For the tourist brochure, text-flow and page-flow adopt a particular configuration: this configuration is precisely what I attempted to capture in my dissertation. At the same time, certain aspects of the tourist brochures remained unchanged despite the transition from text-flow to page-flow after 1985. For instance, the medium of a brochure included both staple-bound brochures and folded leaflets, but how the brochures were bound did not affect the choice of the semiotic mode. Furthermore, the degree of visuality, that is, how much layout space was allocated to the graphics remained consistent throughout the studied period (Hiippala, 2013, p. 203). In short, the tourist brochures remained superficially visual between 1967 and 2008, but their internal multimodal structure changed remarkably.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I wish to underline the role of multimodality in the tourist brochures. The brochures have a clear communicative function, which they seek to fulfil by exploiting the available semiotic modes. Cartography, for instance, cannot present a rich narrative about the destination in the way language can. Language, in contrast, can tell a story, but it often struggles to communicate precise geographical and spatial meanings. What multimodality does, then, is this: it strikes a balance between these individual strengths and weaknesses, and draws on their combined meaning potential for novel configurations. For instance, when page-flow became the dominant semiotic mode, certain brochures began to integrate aerial photography, maps, guiding sequences and image-text-complexes located on different pages using navigation structures (see e.g. Hiippala, 2013, p. 67). This does not only reflect the printed brochure's limited capability to render all this content on the same page, but possibly a shift in the readers' expectations towards the forms of tourism discourse as well. Both stand in stark contrast to digital media, which can render and manipulate content dynamically and on demand. Scholars of tourism discourse should therefore pay attention to digital media, while keeping in mind that the core semiotic modes do

not evolve rapidly: new forms of tourism discourse may rely on the genre patterns in traditional printed tourist brochures.

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