



Research note

Metaphors and tourism paradoxes

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ABSTRACT

Metaphors can be viewed as discursive elements, in which an image is borrowed from one semantic field to re-describe a quality or attribute in another field, usually, in a symbolic and/or poetic manner. Inspired by previous studies that analyzed metaphors in tourism-related discourses, this paper seeks to further develop this sociolinguistics angle in order to pinpoint three paradoxes of modern tourism: the familiarity paradox, the staging paradox and the attractiveness paradox.

Sociolinguistics research on metaphors provides in-depth insights into their role as a rhetorical device for shaping ways of thinking and behavior, and even teaching about the set of values that characterize communities that consistently use the same set of images (Fairclough, 1992; Gradey, 1997; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Richards, 1936; Ricoeur, 1981). At the same time, and somehow paradoxically, while drawing our attention to unique characteristics that it highlights, a metaphor also obscures other features of the described object or quality. Inspired by this link between metaphors and paradoxes, as well as by previous work on metaphors in tourism studies (Adu-Ampong, 2016; Ashworth & Page, 2011; Chaney, 2001; Dann, 2002; Grimwood, 2015; Heimtun and Lovelock, 2017; Pons, 2003), the current research note asks to utilize key metaphors from various tourism-related discourses in order to pinpoint three paradoxes of modern tourism: the familiarity paradox, the staging paradox and the attractiveness paradox.

Etimologically, it is customary to relate the linguistic roots of tourism in Hebrew, which is admittedly my mother tongue and therefore a convenient language to start this exploration, to the biblical story of the spies sent by Moses to explore (*la-tur*) the Land of Canaan. This original meaning of exploration and search, which can be seen as an example of what sociolinguistics Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call: “orientational metaphors”, helps explain the dynamic between the modern tourist and the destination, as the image of the locale and its associated meanings are what attracts us there to seek out the experiences we desire. Banal examples can be found in the romantic image of Paris, which over the years has made it a popular destination for couples seeking romance, or India as a desirable location for spiritual exploration. Despite the similar sound, there does not appear to be a clear etymological connection between the ancient Hebrew verb *la-tur* and its Germanic, Romance and (some) Slavic languages counterpart (e.g.,

tourism, tourismus, tourisme, turismo, toerisme, туризм, turystyka, туризм). It is also not clear whether its source is in the ancient Greek *tornos* or the Latin *tornare*, but in both these ancient languages, the root has to do with a circle or cycle (see also Leiper, 1983). The circular metaphor, which also demonstrates Lakoff and Johnson’s “orientational metaphors”, indicates yet another common denominator of all forms of excursion as a circular voyage from the familiar to the less familiar and back. In other words, the orientational qualities embedded in the etymology of tourism capture the interplay between the intentional spatial defamiliarization and the desire to be more aware, familiar and connected to our desires while traveling.

A popular allegory in contemporary travel writings, and tourism marketing discourses relates to a stay at a destination as an alternative reality in space and time, which differentiates it from the routine. This quality is achieved through the frequent use of metaphors of magic, dream, fantasy, or paradise. For example, Forbes journalist, Alexandra Talty (2018), provides “the Ultimate List of Dream Vacations for 2018,” and National Geographic reporter, Justin Fornal, discloses that as a child he “placed Zanzibar in that exalted class of fantasy destinations with Kathmandu and Timbuktu” (Fornal, 2016). Paradise or heaven is one of the most common metaphors used to describe the special tourist reality in the travel news sections, which can be found these days in almost all newspapers, websites, and travel blogs. For example, BBC journalist, Catherin Drake (2019), wonders whether Arkoi is “Greece’s last island paradise?” Forbes journalist, Ralph Jennings (2019), who wrote about the recent rehabilitation of Boracay, in the Philippines, refers to it as the “Island Paradise,” and according to the Belgian travel couple, Camille Demyttenaere and Jean Hocke, Velassaru Resort in the Maldives is “a picture-perfect paradise island...basically heaven on Earth!” (DestinationDelux, 2019). To create an enchanting reality it seems necessary to

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engineer the tourism space and turn it into a type of stage, where the tourism experience is played out.

The dreamy and magical experiences tourism promises are made possible by the employees in the tourism sector. The basic image that is associated with a large number of tourism businesses is of a theater, in which the employees move from front stage to back stage. This is reflected in the notion of “staged authenticity,” coined by MacCannell (1973), which has become a key concept in academic discourse regarding the tourism industry and the experiences it provides. The theater metaphor is particularly prominent among workers in hotels, theme parks, and some restaurants, where the theatrical experience is clearly divided in the organizational discourse into front stage, back stage, and the “dressing room,” where workers begin and end their work day. Inspired by the sociological theory of dramaturgy, Hochschild (1983), who coined the term “emotional labor” in her study on flight attenders and debt collectors, suggested that service employees can be viewed as an actors who try to comply with feeling rules by engaging in two forms of acting: surface acting and deep acting.

The academic body of literature on tourism produced several metaphors to describe the qualities of destinations, some of which became canonical (Chaney, 2001). “The tourist bubble”, which is associated with Cohen (1972), for example, relates to the experience of tourism from the point of view of the tourists’ (dis)connection to the local culture and lifestyle. The bubble may be expressed physically in the experience of travel in an air-conditioned bus, from site to site, by staying at a resort area or a “backpacker enclave”, from which tourists rarely venture out. Another popular metaphor found in academic literature is Butler’s “tourist area life cycle,” intended to describe the development of a destination (1980). The metaphorical idiom, “carrying capacity,” which is embedded in the Butler’s (1980) managerial suggestions for tourism planners, is used occasionally by scholars to describe the paradoxical relationship between the attractiveness of the site and its deterioration. Recent attempts to describe this paradox have also utilized the metaphors of “overcrowding” and “resilience” (e.g., Cheer, Milano, & Novelli, 2019).

In conclusion, the focus on metaphors in tourism discourses sheds new light on three paradoxes embedded in modern tourism: The familiarity paradox, the staging paradox and the attractiveness paradox. First, regardless of the motivation for the tourism journey, it can be decoded based on the orientational quality of the etymological origins of the word tourism. The search (in Hebrew) and circular movements (in English, Romance and Slavic languages) indicate that the most basic and broad-based understanding of tourism includes some kind of yearning for temporal change that is reflected in motion in a foreign space, including a return to the familiar routine that motivated the tourist to take the trip. Tourism, in this context, represent a psychological need of modern humans to take break from their familiar routine in order to satisfy some familiar needs in an unfamiliar setting (Gnoth, 1997). Second, as an organizing metaphor of the tourist space, the theater is indicative of the complexity of the process of commercializing the tourist experience. In this theater setting, every aspect of the tourist experience is in danger of being staged: the space, the cultural artifacts, and even the hospitality or any human interactions within the tourist setting. This also explains why any tourism object contains the seed of its inauthenticity version when played out in the staged setting. The third and final insight concerns the paradox of the attractiveness of the tourist destination. The nature of the landscape or culture is what often attracts the first tourists to a place, which later becomes a destination, but the increasing presence of tourists at the location detracts from its attractiveness and marks the end, or the start, of the decline in the lifecycle of the tourist destination.

Author contributions

Yaniv Belhassen: Conceived and designed the analysis, Collected the data, Contributed data or analysis tools, Performed the analysis, Wrote the paper, Other contribution. An earlier version of this paper was published in Hebrew in Alaxon.co.il - a digital magazine for thoughts, articles and new ideas.

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