

Gazing at Italy from the East: A Multimodal Analysis of Malaysian Tourist Blogs

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates Malaysian tourist perceptions about Italy and their cross-cultural representations (Hall 2002) through blogs. Bloggers hold a dynamic role in communicating the cultural meanings they build through both tourist texts and images. Therefore, the analysis starts by focusing on the features of blogs as a new digital genre, as they have emerged with the development of the Internet, displaying an intermingling of posts, commentaries and links, thus building a sense of community through interpersonal communication (Garzone 2012). To this purpose, it examines the textual organisation, the participant relationships and the communicative purposes of the tourist blogs taken into account (Orlikowski and Yates 1994; Bhatia 2005; Lemke 2005 and 2009). It looks at the language used to portray Italy, together with its semiotic patterns, in order to identify the image of the land, beliefs, ideas and impressions inherent in the relationship between the Malaysian tourist and the destination itself. Particular attention is devoted to the analysis of the perception of authenticity.

Keywords: authenticity, Malaysian blogs, multimodality, perception, tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present paper will be to investigate Malaysian tourist perceptions about Italy and their cross-cultural representations (Hall 2002) through blogs. Bloggers hold a dynamic role in communicating the cultural meanings they build through both tourist texts and images. Internet blogs have significant implications for destination marketers that

have however been disregarded by researchers (Pan, Maclaurin, and Crotts 2007). Malaysia has been chosen because the author has come into contact with its culture, traditions and people, very different from those of Italy, especially in terms of the varied ethnicities involved.

The analysis will start by focusing on the concepts of authenticity and tourist perception. Then, it will deal with the features of Malaysian identity (Butler et al. 2014) and of the blog as a new digital genre, which has emerged with the development of the Internet displaying an intermingling of posts, commentaries and links, thus building a sense of community through interpersonal communication (Orlikowski and Yates 1994; Campagna et al. 2012; Garzone 2012; Rowley-Jolivet 2012; Cacchiani 2014). The methodology applied has integrated the collection of texts and the analysis of their frequency and content, textual organisation, participant relationships and communicative purposes (Bhatia 2005), syntactic and semiotic patterns, text types and the wording of authenticity perception.

Taylor (2001) defines our age as the age of authenticity. On the one hand, this phenomenon is enhanced by the increasing interest that tourists express towards forms of tourism experiences which enable them to be in contact with the identity and the authenticity of the places visited. On the other hand, and symmetrically, tourist destinations and companies claim the role of authenticity as an intangible asset, leading their differentiation strategies, their value proposition and competitiveness (Pearce and Moscardo 1986). Because authenticity is an intangible asset, dealing with it and developing it is not straightforward.

Authenticity is a universal value influencing the tourist motivation and choice, his/her value experience (Cohen 1972; MacCannell 1989). Therefore, authenticity should be present in communicative concepts, meanings and pitches integrated with communication strategies, selection and socialisation strategies, language and symbols. These elements contain instrumental and rational purposes, represent values, emotional, significant, psychological and sociological meanings which enable the locals to retain their collective identity and offer the world a recognisable identity.

However, the concept of authenticity is still ambiguous. Unlike earlier tourist practices of the 1950s and 1960s, today the aim of the traveller has become educational again, a persistent exploration of cultural origins. This type of cultural tourism emerges in the search for authenticity and for the retrieval of peoples' own historical and artistic roots. MacCannell highlights that "[t]he rhetoric of tourism is full of manifestations of the importance of the authenticity of the relationship between tourists and what they see [...]" (1989, 14).

In other words, *authentic* means typical, original, actual, real, true. “Tourists have developed an interest in the *real life* of others, of the visited, and they try to see and experience their life, possibly getting in touch with them” (MacCannell 1989, 91). Moreover, “the ‘real’ thing must be marked as real, as sightworthy; if it is not marked or differentiated, it is not a notable sight” (Culler 1990, 6). Therefore, representation plays an important role as the tourist industry artificially builds a staged authenticity. Culture has become “more businesslike” and therefore cities compete by promoting their cultural heritage to attract people and capital, occasionally to the detriment of authenticity and spontaneity (MacCannell 1973 and 1989; Meethan 2001, 118). Sometimes, tourists fail to distinguish between front, staged authenticity, a *mise en scène* by the tourist industry, and backstage authenticity, a real authentic experience: on the one side, we find those tourists who experience authenticity in the back areas, far from tour operating, on the other we see those who take part in those activities strategically planned for tourists, and thus far from being authentic, or real. In recent years, the decline of tourists and revenue has forced destinations to look for new semiotic patterns, to achieve and agree on a balance between tradition and innovation, which could boost the industry while retaining a degree of authenticity, in itself a much disputed concept. Semiotic patterns contribute to building identity (Denti 2012, 110).

Recently, authenticity has been dealt with from several approaches: objectivist, constructivist, postmodernist and existentialist perspectives (Wang 1999). The tourist experience is strongly affected by the interaction between the experienced objects, places, people’s personal characteristics and their representation of the reality they come across. MacCannell (1973) identifies authenticity as a unit of measurement and representation of experience and perception. This leads to distinguish between the concept of authenticity of an object and of an experience: the former derives from tradition, and tourism is one of its rituals; the latter results from the interaction between the subject and the object, either an item, a destination or a landscape. A third aspect to be considered regards language authenticity, which aims at building social collaboration and cooperation.

Expectations, real experience, including what tourists find at destination (e.g., services, transport, hotels, climate, scenery, food, etc., subject to budget constraints), culture and other people’s opinions, affect their perception and gaze (Van Raaij 1986; Urry and Larsen 2012). Therefore, understanding the blogger’s main features (in terms of age, income, personality, tastes, preferences, purposes, etc.) could help to better evaluate his/her perception of the destination and of the whole experience: “visual

perception is key to defining a tourist destination image and experience, plays a major part in framing the tourist gaze, and motivates the distinctive bias towards procedural place descriptions” (Cacchiani 2014, 195).

Communicating one’s experience has acquired a greater and active role, due to the development of IT and Web 2.0 technologies. Thanks to the use of media such as blogs, reviews and apps, tourism information has become faster and easier to access, more effective, pervasive and participatory. Anyone can be involved in the creation of content, of the tourist destination image, before, during and after the trip. The consumer does not only use the product but contributes to producing it, becoming a *producer* of shared knowledge (Bruns 2008, 2).

An approach based on user-led content creation matches perfectly the rules of Web 2.0 considered as a tool to engage with other users, sharing data and services with them. The concept of *produsage* links different and changing cultural, social, commercial, intellectual, economic and societal domains. Technology represents the real accomplishment, with media integration, new affordances, such as the lack of constraints or limitations on language, geography, background, financial status, etc., or the possibility to filter and evaluate collaborative processes and output.

Therefore, as tourism blogs encourage and ease sharing and word-of-web, the represented experience will probably affect the reader’s travel choices and decision-making processes (Cacchiani 2014, 196).

2. THE MALAYSIAN IDENTITY

Malaysia has always had a strategic geographical location in Southeast Asia and its past was characterised by the colonisation of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, as well as by territorial instability and economic and political migrations (Butler et al. 2014, 199).

The *Bumiputera* (‘Sons of the soil/earth’), comprising ethnic Malays and indigenous people, both Muslim and Christian, represent 61.4% of the population. The rest is mainly made up of Chinese (23.7%) and Indian people (7.1%) (ibid., 200).

The Chinese and the Indians have affected the cultural, social and religious traditions of the *Bumiputera*. While on the one hand Malaysians have been trying to represent themselves under a single, unique and equal multicultural national identity, on the other it seems that many have preferred diverse but parallel cultural, social and religious systems. This is probably due to the nation’s development and increasing economic impor-

tance, as well as to the influence of European and Australian immigrants (ibidem).

However, the difficulties in building a post-colonial Malaysian identity of unity in diversity (from the cultural, social and religious viewpoint) have also risen from internal political divergences. Moreover, there was no agreement on the iconographic representation of an essentially Malay-centered national culture, while the government tried to better include both Indian and Chinese cultures and communities. The result was “an ethnically homogeneous nation-state onto an ethnically-divided society” (ibidem).

Malaysia’s modern identity is conveyed through tourism and institutional promotional campaigns. Therefore, natural heritage is used to represent the nation, supported by the depiction of all three ethnic groups.

Today’s society is characterised by tensions yet greater social, ethnic and religious tolerance and openness (Butler et al. 2014, 202).

In order to gather Malaysians’ perceptions, experiences, feelings and emotions about Italy and its attractions, we should also comprehend how they understand and interpret their own world.

Butler et al. (2014, 211) claim that “there is a division of identities and [...] these identities are closely linked to religion and the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of others. However, [...] young Malaysians [...] have developed collective Malaysian identities”. They have also grown the necessity to better comprehend Malaysia’s multiple ethnic and religious societies. Notwithstanding their attachment to their specific ethnic group and identity, Malaysians feel they belong to a cross-cultural collective national identity. The differences in terms of culture and especially religion, the various heritage sites regardless of their own religion, just make them feel special and proud. Unlike Tucker and Hall (2004), Butler et al. (2014) observe that present-day tourism practice does not show post-colonial bonds, as we could expect, given that institutional communication focuses more on historic than on religious and ethnic sites.

However, in analyzing the perceptions Malaysians have of Italy as their holiday destination, we need to allow for additional elements: Malaysia as a post-colonial land, the traditional power relations between the West and the ‘rest’, and Malaysians’ either reiterating or rejecting approach towards them. These facts influence the way Malaysians gaze at the destination, both socially and politically, and what they retain and represent through their blogs either on trip or once they get back.

As Dann and Liebman Parrinello underline, the interactive dimension of tourism is seen by some as a “simultaneous emergence of indigenous and touristic identity through a process of role negotiation [...] through tourism and the verbal exchange of touristic experiences” through CMC

(Dann and Liebman Parrinello 2007, 8, 11). Others, such as MacCannell (1989), see this dimension as the tourist's search for his/her self-identity on the authentic Other.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The corpus used for the present paper is made up of ten Malaysian blogs on Italy. They are:

1. *Malaysia food & Travel Blog* <http://www.vkeong.com/2010/08/my-europe-trip-2010-rome-italy/> (*vkeong* henceforth);
2. <http://tarts-and-pies.blogspot.com/2010/06/italy-day-1-part-2-rome.html>;
3. <http://jasondan.wordpress.com> (*JD Chronicles* henceforth);
4. <http://swigmeetsworld.com/2014/05/12/photo-blog-italy/> (*Swig Meets World* henceforth);
5. <http://afsmasalumni.blogspot.com/2011/03/en-ying-in-italy.html> (*AFS Malaysia Alumni*);
6. <http://lsheryl.blogspot.com/2010/04/malaysians-in-italy-lunch-in-milan.html>;
7. <http://lifeabouttravel.com> (*Life About Travel* henceforth);
8. <http://emilayusof.com/category/travel-holidays/italy/rome/> (*Emilatopia* henceforth);
9. <http://nasilemaklover.blogspot.com/p/my-travelogue.html> (*Nasi Lemak Lover™*);
10. <http://cheeserland.com/2013/06/10-countries/> (*Cheeserland* henceforth).

These blogs are dated from 2010 to 2015. We have focused on posts and comments on the city of Rome. The results of the analysis are only preliminary as they are part of a broader on-going research on tourism blogs.

Our methodology has integrated multimodal discourse and genre analysis, and some elements of corpus analysis. The first step of the study was to identify the main features of the blogs chosen, in terms of textual organisation, participant relationships, communicative purposes and images. Then, we focused on the main semiotic patterns and the detection of text types. Finally, we analyzed the texts, seeking for key words, their concordances and collocation patterns in search of the concept of authenticity. The analysis is mainly qualitative, as our first quantitative analysis, carried out by means of Wordsmith Tools 5.0, has only provided few interesting outcomes. In the future we will try to enlarge the corpus and the topics. So far, in the concordance list for each key item selected, collocates, patterns and clusters have not proven quantitatively meaningful.

One of the key issues we focused on was the role of description and perceptual/spatial standpoint: while the former, “grounded in the cognitive process of perception”, collocates events in space and time as recognised through the five senses, through visual perception we get into contact with the destination, by looking at pictures in the pre-trip, taking pictures during the trip, and looking at pictures in the post-trip (Cacchiani 2014, 200).

Blogs are one of the new non-literary discourse genres. They greatly vary according to communities, topics, aims, media and affordances. Cacchiani defines them as “virtual public spaces for spatially and temporarily discontinuous, asymmetric communication designed by active community participants with special attention to elements that are seen as meaningful to ‘like-minded people’” (2014, 197).

The genre of weblogs is a hybrid of diverse genres: (a) the logbook (which records the management of a ship), the ordinary book, the media monitoring service (which puts together portions of specific media content), the scrapbook (which puts together newspaper extracts, opinions and pictures, chronologically planned); (b) the journal and the diary (which report personal views); (c) the leaflet, the editorial and the opinion columns (with an even closer and more personal stance) (Garzone 2012, 223).

In the corpus, the structure of the blog sometimes resembles a personal diary (*Cheeserland*), sometimes an objective and impersonal journal (*JD Chronicles*). Occasionally, the blogger seems to follow an itinerary in a short time lag. Information is not always sequentially and logically structured. Reverse sequences of bits of conversation are sporadically present, sometimes in both posts and comments, other times only in comments. The latter stress the image beauty, the choice of topics (especially food) and the detailed information provided, thanking the blogger for sharing his/her personal opinions and feelings with them. Now and then they are not in English but in Malay. Most comments come from people who have been following the blogger for some time. Exchange of personal details and events may be present. Posts enhance inspiration and desire to visit the destination. Practical information may be asked on the camera used to take the beautiful pictures shown, on the duration and timing of the trip, on other cities visited, on accommodation (rare occurrences in *Emilatopia* and *JD Chronicles*).

Social sharing (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Pinterest, placed at the top of the page or after the post) is another feature of blogs, “whose constant updating (of information) and interactive qualities contribute to the evolution of public, self-initiated verbal exchange among equals” (Dann and Liebman Parrinello 2007, 7; Herring et al. 2005),

aiming at “self-clarification, social validation, relationship development, and social control” (Garzone 2012, 221).

In particular, they all display a title in bigger font size, centred at the top of the page. Texts and pictures are located either in the central or left/central part of the page, where the focus should be, and they develop vertically as one single document (*JD Chronicles*), or as more (*Emilatopia* and *vkeong* respectively).

Secondary attributes, such as posts, display date, time and a permanent link (i.e. an URL which identifies the post), personal details and the photograph of the author and, sometimes, of the travel companion, a list of internal and external links (*Categories, Archives, Travelogues, Travel, Labels, Food*), search windows (on the right), comments to the posts, normally at the bottom of the page, followed by tags, related posts to trips in Europe or Italy, and the space to submit a comment. External links broaden the quantity, reach and pervasiveness of the available information. The count of shares rates the blog popularity.

The purpose of the blog (e.g., “*Emilatopia* – where Emila blogs about art, travel and things she likes”) is not always expressed.

4. RESULT DISCUSSION

From the syntactic point of view, utterance structures change from blog to blog and within the same blog. In particular, sentences vary from short and elliptical ones, as in:

1. Some golden angels found in the Basilica (*vkeong*),

to longer ones:

2. Remember that Roma Pass? After visiting the Colosseum we still had one use for another museum, which we eventually spent on the Musei Capitolini (Capitoline Museum) – the world’s first public museum of ancient art. The museum is actually just next to the Vittorio Emanuele II monument. (*ibidem*)

Few cohesive devices are used to link chunks of text mainly aiming at elucidating the photographs and expressing personal opinions and feelings.

A mainly qualitative analysis, supported by a rough quantitative analysis, has revealed that posts, and at times also comments, contain some

type of advice (must-do's and must-see's). Therefore, we looked into each sentence trying to highlight Malaysians' positive, neutral and/or negative opinions.

Afterwards, through Wordsmith Tools 5.0, we compared our overall wordlist with the English lemma list¹, thus obtaining a Keyword list. By investigating the list, and according to the frequency of the words, we found that topics range from practical information, such as travel and accommodation, food, museum opening hours, churches, monuments, buildings, sports, activities, nightlife, festivals and events, the weather, to traditions, views and details to describe the strengths, as well as the weaknesses, of tourist experiences. The most frequent keywords relate to the beauty of Rome, the niceness of the trip, itineraries, nature (the coast, the mountains, parks), travel costs and times, local facilities and infrastructures, where to eat, cleanliness, crowdedness, atmosphere (relaxing and familiar or adventurous), hospitality and friendliness, cultural differences, quality of service and convenience. June, July and August are the most recurring months for this trip.

Almost all of them start by depicting and describing the Colosseum, then continue with other monuments, but also recount of street artists and performers, cafes and restaurants, food, including cappuccino, pork, pastrami, coffee, and wine, a flea market, the Pantheon, the Trevi Fountain, Capitoline museums, basilicas.

Most bloggers are not bothered by the high number of tourists at certain sites. On the contrary, their justification is that they are must-be-visited destinations. Some of them, however, prefer moving to less crowded and 'more real' places (D'Egidio 2014), seeking authenticity and tranquillity.

In investigating linguistic elements showing Malaysian search for authenticity, we started by looking at the frequency and concordance of synonymous words: original*, real*, true, typical*. However, both the latter and authentic* are not broadly used. Few instances are found in the *JD Chronicles*:

I like the homely feel of a family run establishment. It gives an authentic touch which you cannot get anywhere else.

Then we compared the concordances of Italy/Italian and Malaysia/Malaysian, keeping in mind the features of Malaysian identity. We could observe that this identity, involving unity in diversity, is mirrored in their different

¹ Compiled by Yasumasa Someya in 1998 and available at http://www.lexically.net/downloads/BNC_wordlists/e_lemma.txt. Also, cf. D'Egidio 2014, 148.

approaches to the city (diverse aspects), to food (often collocating with ‘Italian’), to people (e.g., the Italian way, crazy Italian drivers, tourists). The cultural comparison aims at emphasising the authenticity of what they experiment.

Tourist destinations are all well represented through photographs, contributing to determining the relationship between the writer and the reader, the visitor and the visited, the tourist and the destination. The text seems to hold a subordinate role: it functions mainly as a title to a picture, or a caption, apart from the *JD Chronicles*, which provides longer texts. However, although short and elliptical, texts and photographs correspond to those markers (information or representation) that “constitute a sight as a sight, by giving information about it, representing it, making it recognizable” (MacCannell 1989; Culler 1990), and therefore authentic: “The existence of reproductions is what makes something an original, authentic, the real thing – the original of which the souvenirs, the postcards, statues (photographs and descriptions) etc. are reproductions” (ibidem).

Pictures become the tourist’s demonstration of reality, evidence of having been at the destination, of their perceptions and feelings, in those places already seen in and mediated through brochures and travel guides (Francesconi 2014) before leaving. Through pictures, readers identify those places worth going sightseeing and the memories to bring back (Urry 2002) (*Fig. 1*).



Figure 1. – Colour saturation, light and details (vkeong, 2010, Rome).

Most pictures in the blogs depict inanimate objects: they become the object of the viewer's observation. The viewer is invited "to enter the represented natural or artificial space, which seems to be waiting to be visited" (Francesconi 2014, 82). The blogger gives evidence of the authenticity of the represented, trying to share it and persuade the reader to experience it.

People are rarely present in pictures, they appear at a certain distance, both physical and interpersonal, normally walking away from the viewer. They represent tourists suggesting the reader to follow them (see *Fig. 2*). The presence of several people symbolises public distance (*Fig. 3*), tourists who want to differentiate themselves from other tourists. When locals are portrayed, they are normally undertaking traditional, real, routine activities. Most of the times guests and hosts are co-present. They hold diverse roles and perform different functions (e.g. client/service-provider). This picture encourages "in the tourist-viewer a process of identification" (Francesconi 2014, 82). The co-presence of tourists and locals also symbolises the acceptance of the former by the latter, their welcome, their sharing of places and situations, the tourist's experience of the 'real thing'. Moreover, if we consider circumstantial elements, which "provide information concerning the setting of processes" (*ibidem*), generally foregrounded through size, position, light, colour effects and details, the beauty, uniqueness, authenticity of the represented is enhanced.



Figure 2. – Interpersonal relationships in pictures (vkeong, 2010, Rome).

We used the Roma Pass and didn't have to queue at the turnstile.



During the course of centuries the Colosseum interior has undergone numerous damages that made the complex structure hardly recognizable today. The interior you see today is overgrown with plants and trees.

Figure 3. – Blog page with image and text (vkeong, 2010, Rome).

Perspective enables a distinction to be made between two types of images: subjective images, with a central perspective and, therefore, the blogger's 'built-in' point of view, and objective images, without a central perspective, and without a 'built-in point of view' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). In this type of relation we weigh the position and predominance of images and texts, which help create an impression of depth, of semantic hierarchy, the system of foreground and background, the position of the viewer within a natural world or facing a continuum of forms (ibidem). Most pictures show a built-in standpoint, which marks the transition from the representational to the signification, from the perceptual to the conceptual, the relationship between the photographer and the viewer. In *Figure 3*, the blogger is one of those tourists portrayed in the picture, and dominated by the Colosseum's magnificence. The angle represents a subjective, although socially influenced, attitude toward the represented, an imaginary relationship of power and involvement between the represented and the reader being addressed. The high angle of *Figure 3* gives the idea that the represented is small and dominated by the viewer (Denti 2007, 2012). These different perspectives, sizes of frames and social distances between the viewer and the represented, filtered by the blogger's eye, affect the interpersonal relations between the participants, essential to build the tourist gaze.

When food is represented, colour saturation, differentiation and modulation, together with light and space representation, play an even more important role. They function as modality markers, making the represented more or less real, true, certain, credible and reliable. The combination of colours, light and details in *Figure 1* above, evokes our senses and we almost smell the aroma and feel the taste of the food. Reality and authenticity are in the eye of the observer, influenced by social and cultural beliefs, located in a social setting and time.

Only *Emilatopia* (*Fig. 4*) displays drawings, instead of pictures, considered as objective, factual information (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). She draws sketches from pictures, and the choice of the topic also changes: a wine bar with a nice view on the Colosseum, a window (because “Italian windows are beautiful”), plants, the B&B where she stayed, adding a map of it, her self-portrait while typing on her computer or sitting at a café. These images emphasise her ethnicity, her look and give us the idea of familiarity, of cultural contact, of a personal and closer relationship with the reader.

Text types, classified on the basis of their *dominant contextual focus* (Werlich 1983, 19-20) in a communicative situation, were also examined, highlighting the contextual factors and circumstances the addressee’s attention predominantly lies on. The textual organisation of the domain is reflected in the way linear relations develop: “they stand for temporal, causal, spatial, or social relations between referents in the world described by that text” (Ramm 2000, 156). Narrative, descriptive, expository, instructive and argumentative texts were recognised (Werlich 1983; Fodde and Denti 2008, 161-163).

First of all, narration is characterised by historic/temporal factual or conceptual events, action-recording sentences (Werlich 1983, 55). Events and participants are chronologically portrayed through temporal circumstances or participant roles. Narration is often agent-oriented. Narration refers to the development of the trip the blogger and his/her companions have undertaken, through the use of predicate verbs such as *start* and *change*. Facts develop along an itinerary: *we spotted, we continued, we came across*, etc. Adverbials of place but especially of time are frequent.

4. My itinerary was a 3 day one, during the peak of summer in Mid July. The 1st night I stayed in Pisa, from memory the last train from Pisa central to Monterosso was at 9.30pm and to be conservative I did not think I would arrive in time to make the train. (*JD Chronicles*)

We observe that the first person singular and the simple past characterise this text. A more objective, impersonal, technical and formal style of narration is the report, whose addressee is shown particular respect and consideration (Werlich 1983, 56, 60, 274).

Emilatopia

- where Emilia blogs about art, travel and things she likes.

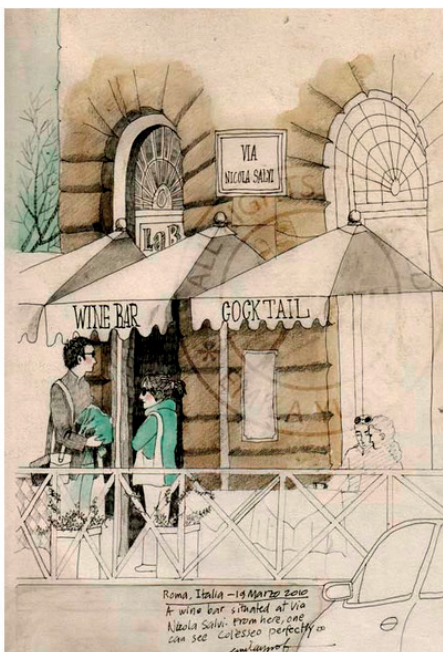
[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [PORTFOLIO](#) [ARTWORKS](#) [CONTACT](#) [COPYRIGHT](#) [TRAVEL](#) [PICTURE BOOK REVIEWS](#) [EMILA FAQ](#)

Illustrato Schizzi di Italia X

FEBRUARY 19, 2011 7:56 PM \ 10 COMMENTS \ BY EMILA

Been quite a while since I posted my sketches on Italy. Here's a wine bar situated at Via Nicola Salvi. From this bar, you can see the Colosseo perfectly.

Still on Rome subjects on the first day I arrived, 19 March 2010, during my trip to Italy for the [Bologna Children's Book Fair](#) last year.



mixed media on sketchbook

POSTED IN: [ITALY](#), [MIXED MEDIA](#), [ROME](#), [TRAVEL ILLU](#)

Figure 4. – Blog page with sketch.

Secondly, descriptive texts are characterised by the analysis of places, people and relations (subject matter), by the use of spatial chaining strategies indicated by spatial positions in the sentence. This means that spatial circumstances occupy the theme position opening the whole message:

5. The museums are actually contained in three palazzi surrounding a central piazza, a plan by Michaelangelo that was executed over a span of 400 years. At the center of the piazza is the *Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius*, a Roman Emperor. (*vkeong*)

Descriptions range from technical, objective neutral properties to, and more frequently, attitudinal and evaluative/hyperbolic, metaphorical, comparative and evocative viewpoints (Werlich 1983). While the previous example refers to positions and directions in space, and to technical objective descriptions, the following focuses on subjective impressions of relations and qualities, on impressionistic descriptions (*ibidem*). Adverbials of place often reinforce the style.

6. There's only so much panini, pizza and pasta you could stomach everyday so we went to a Chinese restaurant just downstairs our hostel for dinner. The food was not bad but we had the most ridiculous fried wantan here, which was a deep fried ravioli actually lol. (*vkeong*)

The use of the simple past and simple present of static or motion verbs (not leading to a change) is existential (e.g., *There's*) and shows timelessness (Werlich 1983). The blogger tries to give a vivid image of his experience. We can perceive the writer's surprise, a sort of aversion through the use of the words "not bad but ... ridiculous" and the comparison between *wantan* and ravioli, to juxtapose diverse cultural domains but familiar words in this context. This difference, this unusual experience, makes this dinner "authentic in its otherness, a sign of an alien culture" (Culler 1990, 5; Dann 2007, 20), and as such worth being told on the blog.

The writer's colloquialism becomes more explicit with the use of the acronym lol (laughing out loud). Colloquialism is also conveyed through expressions such as *gonna*, *kinda*, first and second personal pronouns, and question forms, e.g.,

7. Remember that Roma Pass? (*vkeong*)

The features of the descriptive text type are more evident in the following example:

8. Italy is a magnificently beautiful country bursting with luscious landscapes, friendly locals and is the undisputed culinary capital for all types

of cuisine. After exploring the North, South, East and West of Italy I have compiled my favorite moments into a photo blog, which were captured over a few years and various trips to Italy. (*Swig Meets World*)

While in example (5), a non-personal third person viewpoint prevails, in examples (6) and (8) we also find the first person pronoun, together with the second person singular, more typical of impressionistic descriptions. In the latter one, the blogger emphasises the uniqueness of Italy, its originality and authenticity, through the use of hyperboles, the encounter with “the other” and their reproduction in his blog. Here we refer to MacCannell’s concept of sight sacralisation: “it is the mechanical reproduction phase of sacralization that is most responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the true object. And he is not disappointed. Alongside the copies of it, it has to be ‘The Real Thing’” (McCannell 1989, 45).

When the writer suggests tours, instead, the instructive text type is used: stages to be followed by the reader, an evident future behaviour (Werlich 1983), an action-demanding sentence, constructed through sequential chaining strategies of temporal circumstances or processes. The reader is expected to follow the steps, through the use of the imperative form, e.g., *Trust me, always remember*, the passive voice and modal verbs. *Would* is used to give advice and when history is uncertain; *must* shows evaluation, e.g. “must be painful”; *will* is employed when giving recommendations and introducing the following site on the itinerary, as in “you will need to spend at least three good hours to see [...]”, “you will also see [...]”. *If* clauses are employed with the same purpose: persuasion. Directions are followed on the authority of practical validity, i.e. the blogger’s expertise that makes reference to the visible properties of the physical phenomena described. The point of view may be subjective, as in instructions, or objective, as in directions and regulations. It is expressed through the first person or the second person (Werlich 1983, 124 ff.)

We often find a concoction of text types, as in the following extract:

9. Of the many churches we visited in Rome, the *Basilica of St. John Lateran* is on the top of my list after Vatican City’s St. Peter Basilica. Despite being located in Rome, it has been granted a special extraterritorial status as a property of the Holy See. The cathedral is the oldest and ranks first among the four major Basilicas of Rome (meaning it is the head church in the world) and this was actually the reason we went to see it despite its far location from the city center. (*vkeong*)

where we find descriptive, narrative and expository text types. The expository type deals with generic concepts, the de-composition into constituent

elements (analysis), or the composition (synthesis) from constituent elements of concepts (Werlich 1983, 19-20, 71), the summary or analysis of ideas and impressions, a definition or explanation, along various degrees of subjectiveness. As in the previous example, verbs are often in the present tense, passive voice and impersonal forms. According to Werlich (1983, 72 ff.), also in the expository type we may identify five styles: the formal, the comparative, the informal, the illustrative, and the technical/formal ones. In particular, the informal style is based on shared knowledge between the writer and the reader, while the illustrative one reveals the writer's aspiration to be intelligible for everyone.

This extract shows some elements of the contrast between a commonly "ought-to-see" in Rome (St. Peter Basilica), considered as inauthentic because touristy, and the Basilica of St. John Lateran, which is off the beaten track, unusual and therefore authentic (Culler 1990).

The argumentative text type is present, through the use of through- and counter-argument patterns, and of a conjunctive theme:

10. Summer would be the best time to see Rome, when the temperature is at an average 25°C and the weather is calmer too. But that is also during the tourism peak season so plan your trip early, especially the accommodation part. (*vkeong*)

However, what is more common is the blogger's presentation of the statement and his/her stance within the post, aiming at persuading the reader and generate consensus, followed by comments that are the real argumentative schemes: the reader replies evaluating what the blogger has stated. The expression "The food was not bad", in one of the previous examples, is a negated quality-attributing sentence, distinctive of the argumentative text type (Werlich 1983, 106). Typical expressions are opinion verbs, or expressions of intention, decision, expectations and beliefs. Expectations may not be fulfilled:

11. But honestly most of the food did not really suit our tastebuds, and I am not a drinker so I wasn't able to appreciate their wine too. So, only the spicy roast pork managed to leave us with a memorable taste. (*vkeong*)

Negative sentences and contrastive expressions are common in this text type. Therefore, we find five types of argumentative style in our corpus: informal, ironical, appreciatory, depreciatory, and persuasive. The writer most often uses the first person singular pronoun and the present tense to express his/her opinion (Werlich 1983, 108, 118).

Depreciation has the function to express the tourist's negative perceptions of crowded places and food. In this example, the Italian savours and

food experienced by the blogger does not match the markers of representation previously observed (Culler 1990, 6). However, as Urry claims, tourism is a sort of game with “no single, authentic experience” (2002, 91).

An interesting aspect here is the relationship between the tourist, the locals and their culture:

12. Be less of a tourist. Tourists have their long checklist of historical monuments to see and always seem to be in a rush to the point, they don't enjoy the complete Italian scene. Be more of a traveler and take some share of your time to see the countryside and try blending with locals and their culture. (*Life about Travel*)

This example, on the one hand, is representative of what MacCannell identifies as *the tourist code*, a sort of prevalent modern consensus, a shared knowledge of what is noteworthy, whose effect, though, is “not to create solidarity within the international community of tourists but hostility, as each wishes the other tourists were not there”. Tourists dislike tourists (MacCannell 1989; Culler 1990). On the other hand, it explicates the importance of the tourist's contact with the local culture as an essential element for the tourist to feel more as a traveller (Cappelli 2008). The tourist has “the chance to be part of a country and discover authentic places” (D'Egidio 2014, 157).

Recommendation is often introduced by expressions such as *It is advisable, would be the best time, or*

13. If you are staying in Rome for more than 3 days it is highly recommended to get the Roma Pass (€ 25). The major benefits of the Roma Pass would be the free use of the city's public transport network [...]. (*vkeong*)

Recommendations focus on must-visits, saving money and avoiding queues.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has tried to understand how Malaysian bloggers depict and evaluate Italy, what aspects they perceive as more typically Italian and what features are more likely to produce a cultural clash, if and how they attempt to influence their readers on their travel decisions and experiences. Therefore, we have considered both Malaysian identity and the new features and affordances of the Web 2.0 and of web genres. Through CMC, tourist identity expands and modifies the relationship between the blogger and his/her co-protagonists who read, witness and participate in the communicative process. The blogger's perceptions and experiences are also influenced by

the tourist industry in the form of brochures, travel guides, websites and apps, which draw his/her gaze on distinctive markers and sights, on tourist places that are famous or just unusual and worth visiting (D'Egidio 2014).

Unlike most studies on the language of tourism, which focus on tourist communication by the industry, the present paper has tried to elicit the tourists' perceptions of the destination as expressed and represented through blogs. The blog genre facilitates communication as it allows a straightforward, immediate analysis of authenticity and identity, a personal involvement of the blogger, a closer relationship with the reader and the creation of a virtual community characterised by C2C exchange of spontaneous and freely expressed information for the benefit of other travellers (Dann 2007; D'Egidio 2014). The more detailed the descriptions and narrations, the more credible and reliable the bloggers. Their descriptions are less formal, structured and strategic, more personal and subjective, a source of inspiration to their like-minded peers. Bloggers become opinion leaders, and their followers opinion seekers who rely on their expert opinions for their purchase decisions.

The analysis of positive, neutral and negative appraisals (Dann 2007, 24 ff.) has shown intense to moderate feelings about the places visited, their architecture and history, the Italian culture and heritage (e.g. traditions and food), and the relationship with the locals. The blogger's choice of the proposed topics is linked both to what is considered authentically Italian, and to what is culturally, socially and politically relevant for a Malaysian tourist: history, ethnicity and religion. Thus, the choice is for those monuments that represent power relations, Christianity and politics. Perception mingles with cognition, events, emotions and social sharing to result into unique experience representations, taking into account both the destination's features and the traveller/blogger's needs and expectations.

The traveller's search for authenticity is fulfilled through the encounter with the local and the experience of the places reproduced in travel books, brochures, etc., despite the presence of tourist crowds.

However, as different stances are present in our corpus, we plan to carry out a deeper quantitative analysis in order to reach more robust findings (e.g., Maci 2013), also broadening the corpus by considering additional Malaysian blogs and Italian destinations.

Argumentative structures, rhetorical strategies and emotional appeals, functioning as persuasion devices, convey the bloggers' feelings about Italy, seen as a gorgeous destination, the dream destination for many, as explicitly uttered both in the posts and in the comments. Italy symbolises the beauty and fineness of its architecture, history, archaeology and food, notwithstanding the occasional loss of authenticity.

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