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SOLE ALBA ZOLLO

SEE BRITAIN BY TRAIN

A Diachronic Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Tourist Railway Posters

PAOLO LOFFREDO

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To a railway man who has taught me devotion to and honesty at work. Thank you, papà!

FROM A RAILWAY CARRIAGE WINDOW

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle;
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill and there is a river;
Each a glimpse and gone forever!

Robert Louis Stevenson

Introduction

Tourism is a global phenomenon that affects every aspect of society from politics to economy to culture. It supports a global system and is characterized by a complex and massive structure aimed at satisfying individuals' specific needs. Tourism studies are characterized today by a trans-disciplinary approach with different applications: various disciplines tackle tourism or some aspects of it. It is thus not an integrated field of study, but instead made up of countless approaches and theories, including the fields of geography, economy, sociology, art, linguistics, and so forth.

The discourse of tourism has become pervasive in our society both in old and new media. It uses multimodal promotional strategies in order to convince people to visit places, often turning anonymous places into tourist resorts. The language of tourism has some features typical of specialized languages, for example, it is structured, it has specific lexical and syntactical features and, since it aims to reach a wider audience, it may contain elements from dialects or different registers. It is rooted in discourse, as context is fundamental for meaning making. Accordingly, it is value-committed; that is, it has ideological implications. It tries to foresee potential clients' needs and then meet their expectations. It is not a unidirectional language as tourists are not just the target of its discourse but themselves contribute to it: they can provide feedback to friends, relatives and strangers when they write on blogs, forums or websites. Tourists themselves become promoters and contribute to shaping the language of tourism itself. The language of tourism does not have a well-defined content (Calvi 2009) as it can fulfil various communicative functions – informative, persuasive and argumentative.

This work is an attempt to give an overview of British railway posters from a diachronic perspective, focusing on the posters used by UK rail companies to promote holiday destinations. A corpus of 150 posters from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century has been gathered together from the York National Railway Museum collection. Through a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach, the research aims at identifying the verbal and visual tools used by campaigners to persuade British people to travel by train. In particular, the study aims to:

- identify potential similarities and differences in the discursive patterns and visual features used over the years by British railway companies to persuade potential customers;
- detect the changing models of holiday-making, the development of advertising standards, and the approaches and aspirations of the different train operating companies throughout the years;
- verify to what extent the posters were also used by railway companies as an instrument of self-promotion and as an expression of corporate identity.

The book is divided into the following sections:

Chapter 1 presents a short outline of the history of British tourism, from the religious pilgrimages of the Middle Ages to the development of the *Grand Tour* between the 16th and 18th centuries, up until the birth of mass tourism in the 20th century and the development of leisure travel. Referring to Urry's study (2002), this chapter focuses on the social changes of a phenomenon that is no longer the preserve of an élite but is now available to the masses.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the discourse of tourism from a multidisciplinary viewpoint, referring in particular to the seminal works in this field by Dann (1996) and Gotti (2006). Moreover, since many scholars have investigated the language of tourism as a specialized discourse offering diverse and sometimes contrasting theoretical models, this section summaries these debates as a basis for the investigation that will be carried out in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 focuses on two main theoretical approaches to discourse analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis. They have recently converged in another method of enquiry known as Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis which will be used for the analysis developed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 4 describes the corpus and subcorpora of railway posters collected from the York National Railway Museum. Due to the intertextual and interdiscursive nature of the posters under investigation, this chapter briefly illustrates the museum's history, its present organization and main collections.

Chapter 5 offers a diachronic Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the corpus collected. After analyzing a sample of early posters from the end of the 19th century, a wider enquiry is devoted to the so called *Golden Age* posters designed from the 1920s to 1930s, when the railways were organized into four main companies: the Great Western Railway (GWR), the Southern Railway (SR), the London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS) and the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER). The following subsection investigates a smaller corpus of posters issued during the war when leisure travel was discouraged. Another subsection focuses on the posters produced after the war up until the 1950s when the railways were nationalized and began to promote holidaying in the UK again. The last part of the analysis is based on a sample of the 1960s – 1990s posters, when there was a decline of domestic holidays due to the spread of cheap package holidays abroad and a reduction in train travel due to the substantial growth in car ownership.

Chapter 6 focuses on three main thematic areas. The first section is a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of posters promoting seaside resorts, identifying the linguistic and visual features of the texts used to represent social actors. The second section focuses on the posters aimed at advertising cultural tourism through the topoi of heritage and authenticity. The last section concentrates on the concept of Britishness as a strategy to promote nature, sea and cultural tourism at home.