

## Tourism as Language – Summary

This section explores the idea that tourism can be understood as a form of language. Scholars argue that tourism uses a structured and symbolic system—much like language—to communicate messages of modernity, promotion, and consumerism. While “language” may seem neutral, the discourse of tourism carries ideological power, shaping perceptions and actions. Discourse is not only what is communicated, but also what is practiced and performed, often involving competing narratives.

Furthermore, researchers highlight tourism’s rhetoric, which involves persuasion, storytelling, and emotional appeal—especially in the work of tour guides. Narrative also plays a key role in tourism, as destinations, guides, and museums construct stories that reflect and shape cultural identities. These narratives often involve power struggles, as dominant stories try to overshadow others.

In addition to discourse, rhetoric, and narrative, tourism is increasingly described with linguistic and semiotic terms such as vocabulary, idioms, speech, text, and even propaganda. Scholars also employ semiotic analysis to interpret tourism advertising, imagery, and communication, viewing tourism as a coded system that reflects and constructs cultural meanings and global relationships.

Four Major Theoretical Perspectives on Tourism and Their Sociolinguistic Correlates:

### **Summary of the Four Perspectives on Contemporary Tourism**

Modern tourism can be interpreted through four major theoretical lenses: authenticity, strangerhood, play, and conflict. Each offers a different understanding of tourists’ motivations and the sociocultural dynamics involved in the tourism experience.

#### 1. The Authenticity Perspective

Rooted in the work of MacCannell, this approach views tourists as seekers of authenticity — looking for genuine, unspoiled experiences that contrast with their alienated modern lives. It emphasizes the division between frontstage (staged for tourists) and backstage (authentic life) realms. Authenticity is often linked to the idea of “deep” cultural immersion, although critics argue that even “authentic” experiences can be constructed or commodified.

#### 2. The Strangerhood Perspective

Developed by Erik Cohen, this perspective focuses on the tourist as a “stranger” temporarily removed from everyday obligations, entering unfamiliar cultural contexts. This detachment allows for reflection, personal growth, and exploration of different ways of life. The tourist is not just an outsider but an active interpreter of cultural meanings, often navigating between curiosity and discomfort.

#### 3. The Play Perspective

Influenced by Huizinga's concept of "homo ludens" (man the player), this view emphasizes tourism as a space for play, imagination, and creative experimentation. Tourists enter a "liminal" zone — a break from everyday rules and roles — where they can adopt temporary identities, engage in fantasy, and experience symbolic adventures. The tourism encounter becomes a performance and a game, offering both freedom and escape.

#### 4. The Conflict Perspective

This emerging framework examines tourism through the lens of power, discourse, and ideological struggle. Heavily influenced by Edward Said's Orientalism and Foucault's theory of discourse, it critiques how tourism often reproduces colonial narratives, stereotypes, and unequal power relations. Representations of the "Other" in guidebooks, brochures, and performances are seen as misrepresentations shaped by dominant interests. Scholars like Hollinshead and Bruner argue that tourism constructs realities through language and that heritage sites and cultural performances reflect contested versions of history and identity. This perspective highlights the need for counter-discourses, especially by marginalized groups, to reclaim their voice and agency within tourism narratives.

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#### Conclusion:

While differing in focus, all four perspectives converge on a central idea: language and representation are crucial to understanding tourism. Whether exploring authenticity, the experience of being a stranger, the playful nature of travel, or the underlying power dynamics, each framework emphasizes that tourism is not merely about places, but about how those places — and the people within them — are narrated, staged, and interpreted.

#### **Summary: Properties of the Language of Tourism**

This chapter explores the main properties of the language of tourism by comparing it to general language use. It focuses on four core functions—expressive, conative, referential, and phatic—as described in Roman Jakobson's (1960) communication model, derived from Bühler's earlier framework. Additionally, it briefly highlights metalinguistic and poetic functions, offering insights into how these operate in tourism discourse.

Two key case studies apply Jakobson's model to tourism:

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### **1. Written Tourism Promotion (Febas Borra, 1978)**

In a study of over 250 Spanish tourism pamphlets from 1960–1975, Febas Borra found that:

- There was an imbalance in the use of Jakobson's six functions. The expressive function was dominant, especially in the early years, with high use of emotive and superlative language (e.g. "best", "prodigious", "incomparable").
- The conative function (addressing the audience) was weakly expressed, often with vague or generic calls to action and little tailoring to specific tourist segments.
- The referential function (providing objective information) was compromised by subjective, romanticized portrayals of Spain, with an overemphasis on cultural heritage and little on modern life.
- The phatic function (maintaining communication) was poorly handled in print, often lacking a conversational tone.
- The metalinguistic and poetic functions were underused or cliché-ridden, filled with hackneyed metaphors and redundant phrases.
- Overall, the language promoted an outdated, romantic vision of Spain, ignoring modernization and real-life contexts, and failed to engage tourists meaningfully.

Febas Borra's analysis concludes that most Spanish tourism materials lacked balance and effective communication, often favoring subjective over objective content and prioritizing form over useful information.

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## 2. Oral Tourist Guiding (Fine & Speer, 1985)

Fine and Speer apply Jakobson's model to oral communication in a guided tour at the Lindheimer Home in Texas:

- The expressive function is fulfilled by the guide's emotional engagement with the site and her desire to preserve its heritage.
- The conative function is prominent through direct engagement with the tourists (e.g., rhetorical questions, prompts for interaction).
- The referential function supplies factual details about the site's history and objects.
- The phatic function helps establish rapport through small talk and emotional connection.
- The metalinguistic function emerges as the guide reflects on her own performance and vocabulary.
- The poetic function is conveyed through metaphors and dramatization, enhancing the experience.

The tour aligns with MacCannell's stages of sight sacralization (naming, framing, enshrinement, mechanical reproduction, and social reproduction), showing how all six linguistic functions contribute to transforming a place into a meaningful tourist attraction. The enshrinement stage is particularly emphasized, where emotional and symbolic depth peaks.

Unlike the written case, this oral setting allows for mutual interaction, audience feedback, and a richer, more engaging tourist experience. Fine and Speer argue that this dynamic nature of oral tourism discourse makes it superior to static promotional texts in conveying meaning and creating shared understanding.

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## Conclusion

The chapter demonstrates that while written tourism discourse often overuses emotive language and neglects audience engagement, oral communication allows for a fuller, more balanced use of language functions. Jakobson's model proves effective in both contexts, but its communicative potential is better realized in interactive settings like guided tours. Ultimately, the study suggests that improving tourism language requires better balance, authenticity, and audience-centered communication strategies.

## Summary – Structure in Tourism Discourse

This section explores how the structure of tourism language, particularly in advertisements and brochures, contributes to its persuasive effect. A key idea is that effective tourism communication balances multiple language functions, especially the conative/appellative function, which is central in advertising.

Tourist advertisements often follow a common structure: headline, body text, signature, and slogan—a format that captures attention and motivates action. An example is Urbain's (1983) analysis of Tunisian ads, where slogans like "Tunisia, heart of the Mediterranean" and images of coastal villages and desert drummers create a metaphorical voyage from sea to land to desert. This structure invites tourists to "discover themselves" through an encounter with the exotic and the "authentic," ultimately reinforcing identity through consumption.

Urbain further notes that advertisements turn formerly feared or chaotic places (like the desert) into sites of adventure and self-discovery. Tourists are portrayed as anti-tourists—heroic, off-the-beaten-path explorers, rejecting conventional tourism symbols like guidebooks and postcards. Yet, paradoxically, these "authentic" locations are marketed to millions, thus turning them into tourist sites and trapping the traveler in a double bind: the desire to escape tourism ends up reinforcing it.

Additionally, tourism ads often rely on binary oppositions (e.g., center/periphery, modern/ancient, hot/cool, artificial/authentic), which reflect mythological structures (cf. Lévi-Strauss). These contrasts are used to frame the tourist product as a solution to existential tensions—e.g., identity, freedom, happiness.

Uzzell (1984) builds on this analysis by examining brochures aimed at young British tourists. He emphasizes the role of images, showing how they address psychological needs (e.g., escape, excitement, self-actualization) more than destination-specific features. Thus, advertising uses “push” motivations (desire to escape, to feel special) before “pull” factors (destination characteristics). Images are polysemic, so brochures must provide verbal anchorage or rely on symbolic transference (e.g., a smiling woman in a pool holding wine evokes pleasure and freedom, not realism).

These images and texts work together to mythologize the product: turning everyday people, objects, or places into signs of “the good life.” For example, bearded priests and peasants in Corfu evoke spirituality and timelessness, contrasting with modernity and stress. Even nature is idealized—sanitized and free from unpleasant realities. Such semiotic manipulation transforms “real” experiences into cultural myths that reinforce the consumer’s imagined identity.

However, Uzzell acknowledges a key issue: signs (e.g., a wine bottle) are open to multiple interpretations, not all of which may support the intended message. This ambiguity explains why brochures favor images over text, but also why they must control how visuals are read.

Summary: The Use of Tense in the Language of Tourism

Tourism is not only about movement through space but also a symbolic journey through time. As Cohen (1986) notes, tourists often escape from the unattractive, materialistic present by seeking either the past (through nostalgia and traditions) or, less commonly, an idealized future. This longing for a different time manifests in promotional language that emphasizes antiquity, timelessness, or futuristic transformation.

Advertisements frequently highlight destinations as untouched by time, portraying them with reverence for the old, or as “last chances” to witness vanishing cultures and traditions (MacCannell, 1989). Sometimes, by contrast, they present utopian futures shaped by technology (e.g., Disney’s Tomorrowland).

Tourist time is often framed as “out of the ordinary”—qualitatively different from routine time at home. The nature of this time experience varies depending on the type of tourist: recreational tourists seek temporary escape and leisure (“flow” experiences), while those seeking authenticity may experience something akin to sacred or “eternal” time.

Tourism companies organize time differently depending on tourist behavior. Sightseers or package tourists face rigid schedules, while independent travelers (e.g., drifters) experience more temporal freedom. However, the mass nature of tourism and attempts to manipulate or package authenticity often reduce the depth of temporal experiences.

In promotional discourse, time is manipulated to create an appealing vision. One common strategy is denial of time, where holidays are depicted as symbolic inversions of routine life, full of leisure and spontaneity. This is often illustrated with present tense narration, evoking timelessness and reader immersion. For instance, travelogues or ads might use vivid present tense to describe dreamy, static scenes that feel detached from real time (e.g., “We linger over drinks... It is siesta time...”).

Another widespread technique is nostalgia—idealizing the past as simpler, purer, and more authentic. Destinations (especially in the Global South) are portrayed as timeless, untouched, and inhabited by “ageless” people. This portrayal supports a romanticized, mythic past that offers escape from modern complexity. Even elements of non-Western cultures are sometimes appropriated and recast into biblical or Western narratives to lend historical or spiritual authority.

Alternatively, future-oriented language is used to suggest transformation or escape. Many advertisements speak entirely in the future tense, presenting tourism experiences as fantasies yet to be realized. These fantasies displace present dissatisfaction, offering projected experiences (“I will study a sunset,” “I will eat a mango”) that invite readers to imagine themselves already enjoying the advertised moment. The consumer completes this message by mentally casting it into the future perfect (“I will have experienced...”), which becomes a personal motivational force.

Advertising avoids focusing on the negative aspects of the present and instead encourages the reader to project themselves into a better, future state. In this sense, even when selling the past (heritage, tradition), advertisers are ultimately selling it to the future. As Berger (1983) observed, promotional images never truly speak of the present—they always point elsewhere: backwards or forwards in time.

### **Summary: Magic in Tourism and Advertising Language**

Two major works—Judith Williamson’s on advertising (1983) and Winfried Nöth’s on semiotics (1990)—explore the link between magic, language, and advertising, highlighting how promotional discourse, especially in tourism, often adopts a magical framework.

Williamson argues that advertising strategies like transference and invisibility function as modern forms of magic, allowing instant transformations (e.g., using bubble bath to gain attractiveness or

pushing a button to fly a plane). The consumer is drawn in not as a passive recipient but as an active participant through incantatory language, mimicking spells or rituals that promise sensational outcomes. Magic, in this view, also distorts time and space, offering a timeless, placeless utopia where individuals can be magically transported and transformed.

Nöth discusses the semiotic roots of magic, noting that many words have both magical and linguistic meanings—like spell, glamour (from grammar), and image. He distinguishes magical signs as either non-verbal (icons, amulets) or verbal, with further distinctions between explicit formulas and implicit taboo language. While some argue magic is a semiotic fallacy, others like Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss see it as therapeutic communication. Magical discourse also overlaps with mantic codes (astrology, tarot, palmistry), sometimes bypassing natural or scientific laws altogether.

In tourism, magical language and imagery are widespread. Promoters use glamour and envy to create a desire for magical transformation. For instance, ads for luxury resorts like the Four Seasons in Bali or Ritz Carlton use mystical imagery and language to suggest escape, pampering, and personal renewal. Hotels like The Mirage, Sun City, and especially Excalibur in Las Vegas explicitly invoke fantasy, mythology, and medieval themes, using wordplay, old-style English, and enchanted icons to collapse centuries and blur the line between reality and illusion. This magical framing encourages consumers to become royalty, adventurers, or transformed beings simply by booking a stay.

Naming is another powerful magical strategy. Names like Aix, Monte Carlo, Ritz, or Chez X evoke elegance, intimacy, or exoticism. Changing names (e.g., Blackwall Basin to Jamestown Harbour) can reinvent places entirely. Sometimes names merge past and future (e.g., Jorvik Viking Centre) or turn bleak places into romanticized destinations like Catherine Cookson Country or England's Northern Jewel.

Fantasy names in Caribbean hotels (e.g., Golden Palm, Mango Bay, Treasure Beach) allow consumers to engage in magical naming fantasies, often reinforced through wordplay—like Captiva Island in Florida, where ads link historical pirate myths with romantic escapism.

Touristic portrayals of Third World destinations are especially prone to mystification, presenting locals as joyfully primitive, in harmony with nature, and surrounded by exotic rites. This discourse minimizes suffering and romanticizes the “other,” allowing Western tourists to relive colonial fantasies of discovery and escape. Scholars like Weightman and MacCannell criticize this process for amplifying the exotic and mystifying the mundane.

The language of tourism also mimics spells and rituals, using incantatory verbs (e.g., escape, discover, explore) and mythical catalogues of experiences. Ads construct an idealized dream world full of abundance, simplicity, and enchantment, often invoking romanticized archetypes like sleeping princesses or exotic lovers.

Typography and script contribute to the magical effect: Roman capitals for modernity, Gothic fonts for authenticity, or a shift from Latin to Arabic scripts as the tourist “penetrates” exotic interiors. These graphical elements reinforce the magical aura of destinations and align with ancient signs or runes.

In short, the language of tourism is inherently magical, using words, images, and signs not merely to describe but to transform. It promises escape, transformation, and enchantment, creating fantasy worlds where time, space, identity, and even history can be manipulated at will.

### **Summary: Divergent Properties of the Language of Tourism**

This section outlines four distinct characteristics that set the language of tourism apart from other types of discourse: lack of sender identification, monologue, euphoria, and tautology.

#### 1. Lack of Sender Identification

In tourism discourse, the source of the message is often unclear or anonymous. Unlike most forms of communication, we rarely know who created brochures or advertisements. This anonymity is heightened by the circular nature of tourism, where tourists also become senders of messages (e.g., via photos, stories). Discourse becomes depersonalized and can even reinforce stereotypes, including those internalized by local populations.

#### 2. Monologue

Tourism communication is generally one-way, lacking real dialogue. The speaker delivers a persuasive message, and the receiver listens passively. Touristic discourse often resembles commercial advertising in its asymmetry—professionals selling to uninformed consumers. While there may be occasional feedback (e.g., word-of-mouth, tour guides), interaction is minimal, and the audience is treated as generic and anonymous.

#### 3. Euphoria

Like advertising, tourism language emphasizes only positive aspects—beauty, pleasure, and exoticism—while omitting real-life challenges faced by local people. This idealized narrative seeks to enchant consumers by presenting destinations as paradises. Any critical or realistic representations, such as those found in travelogues, are exceptions rather than the norm.

#### 4. Tautology

Tourism communication is often circular and self-referential. Tourists are shown images of what they are expected to see, then confirm those images by reproducing them (e.g., in photos and stories). The reality is shaped to match preconceived representations from brochures. This reinforces clichés and stereotypes, turning tourism into a self-validating cycle where destinations become interchangeable and authenticity is staged and commodified.

In conclusion, tourism language is shaped by rhetorical strategies that foster illusion, repetition, and emotional appeal, often serving goals of persuasion and social control.