

Chapter 13

Teaching the Sociolinguistics of Tourism

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ABSTRACT

In the spring semester of 2012 the author taught a new course in the graduate program in linguistics at a comprehensive state university in a large American metropolis: Language and Tourism. For the first time in at this university, a graduate course focusing solely on the analysis of tourism materials, e.g. of official tourism websites, travel programs, brochures, etc., was offered as an elective to students who had taken a sociolinguistics course without such a narrow focus. Thirteen students pursuing their Master of Arts (MA) degrees – twelve in the MA Program in Linguistics and one in the MA Program in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) – enrolled in and successfully completed this course. This chapter, which provides an overview of a graduate level linguistics course in Language and Tourism based on the author's critical reflections on teaching (Brookfield, 2017), offers suggestions for how sociolinguistic concepts can be taught through the study of tourism and encourages more linguistic-based research in the instruction of tourism studies.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring semester of 2012 the author taught a new course in the graduate program in linguistics at a comprehensive state university in a large American metropolis: Language and Tourism. For the first time in the history of the Linguistics Department at this university, a graduate course focusing solely on the analysis of tourism materials, e.g. official tourism websites, travel programs, brochures, etc., was offered as an elective to students who had previously taken a more general sociolinguistics course. Thirteen students pursuing their Master of Arts (MA) degrees, i.e. twelve in the MA Program in Linguistics and one in the MA Program in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), enrolled in and successfully completed this course. This chapter, which provides an overview of a new Language and Tourism course based on the author's critical reflections on teaching (Brookfield, 2017), offers suggestions for how sociolinguistic concepts can be taught through the study of tourism and encourages more linguistic-

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based research in the instruction of tourism studies. The author hopes that teaching the sociolinguistics of tourism will address the issue of cross-cultural competencies raised by Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Woeber, Cooper, and Antonioli (2008). Moreover, the author seeks to promote more cross-disciplinary research in the seemingly disparate areas of tourism and linguistics.

(Socio)linguistics and Tourism

Any serious discussion of the sociolinguistics of tourism must begin with Dann's (1996:2) seminal work in which he argues "that tourism is grounded in discourse." Nonetheless, the discourses of tourism remain understudied in the field of sociolinguistics (See Pritchard & Jaworski, 2005; Jack and Phipps, 2005; Phipps, 2007; Thurlow and Jaworski, 2010:10; *inter alia*). On the bright side, as noted in Hallett (2015), sociolinguistic studies of tourist discourse have become more sophisticated in recent years (See, for example, Whalen, 1998; Mühlhäusler & Peace, 2001; Hannam and Knox, 2005; Thurlow, Jaworski, and Ylänne-McEwen, 2005; Aiello and Thurlow, 2006; Ferreira, 2007; Thurlow and Jaworski, 2010; Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger, 2004, 2010; Hallett, 2011, 2015).

Of course, sociolinguists may question why tourism discourse needs to be examined at all. The answer lies in the ubiquity of tourism promotion around the globe, and with it the promotion of imagined place. Cohen (1984:373) writes of the sociology of tourism as an "emergent specialty". For Cohen (1984) there are at least eight theoretical approaches to the sociological study of tourism, i.e. tourism as commercialized hospitality, tourism as democratized travel, tourism as a modern leisure activity, tourism as a modern variety of traditional pilgrimage, tourism as an expression of basic cultural themes, tourism as an acculturative process, tourism as a type of ethnic relations, and tourism as a form of neocolonialism. In a similar vein, Graburn (1989:28) argues that the goals of tourism have changed over time: "For traditional societies the rewards of pilgrimages were accumulated grace and moral leadership in the home community. The rewards of modern tourism are phrased in terms of values we now hold up for worship: mental and physical health, social status, and diverse, exotic experiences" (Graburn 1989:28).

Crick (1989:314) concurs with Cohen's recognition of this specialty and calls for academic interdisciplinarity in its study: "[the] complexity [of international tourism] must be respected, and one way of doing this is to acknowledge that a large range of academic disciplines have an interest in it. The complexity will be fruitfully registered if these disciplines pursue unabashedly their own interests and utilize their own distinctive methodologies". In a later article he re-emphasizes the importance of the systematic sociological study of international tourism, stating, "nowadays one cannot be serious or systematic about world political economy if one leaves international tourism out of the picture" (Crick 1995:210).

Edensor (2002:84-85) notes,

As tourism becomes the world's largest industry, national tourism strategies increasingly seek to compete in this global market by advertising their distinct charms; trying to carve out a unique niche that might attract the 'golden hordes.'

Indeed, there is a popular perception that tourism provides a solution to much of what ails nations of all sizes. For Jayapalan (2001:160), tourism serves to heal social and cultural rifts: "Tourism helps to break down prejudices, barriers and suspicions that exist between nations. The very best way of getting to know another country is to go there, and when vast numbers travel, the narrow, rigid boundaries that keep people in compartments naturally tend to shrink and a positive more [sic] towards better inter-

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