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Analysing Promotional Tourism Discourse from a Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective: A Comparative Study

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***Abstract**: In promotional tourism discourse, the lexicogrammatical resources which are used to negotiate interpersonal meanings with readers have a crucial influence on communication effectiveness. This study uses Systemic Functional Linguistics, including the APPRAISAL theory, to analyse two tourism texts in English, which may function as the leading part of a promotional travel guide. The results show how linguistic resources are used to achieve the discourse purposes of the sample texts and how the two texts differ from each other in their focuses and communication strategies. This study illustrates how Systemic Functional Linguistics, especially the APPRAISAL theory, could be applied to help discover strengths and weaknesses of writings in the target genre in terms of communication strategies.*

***Keywords**: Systemic Functional Linguistics; APPRAISAL; Tourism discourse; Travel guides*

Introduction

Travel guides are a hybrid genre with various combinations of discourse purposes, which include describing a destination, informing readers, narrating the history, giving practical advice and promoting a destination (Ventola, 2000). This paper analyses two tourism texts (see Appendix) that may function as the leading part of a promotional travel guide, each offering a general overview of a destination. Text 1 was written by a Chinese student, while Text 2 was retrieved from the official travel site of the USA. The two texts are analysed and compared using Systemic Functional Linguistics (as explained by Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000). As the lexicogrammatical resources which are used to negotiate interpersonal meanings have a crucial influence on the effectiveness of such promotional texts, the use of such resources in both texts are examined based on the APPRAISAL theory proposed by Martin and White (2005), with reference to two domains of interpersonal meanings: ATTITUDE and GRADUATION.

This paper begins with a description of the genre, including a brief review of literature on the language and structural characteristics of the genre. This is followed by a description of the data collection methods and a comparison of the sample texts in terms of context and text structure. Then, the methodology for coding ATTITUDE and GRADUATION is introduced and the results of the appraisal analysis are presented and discussed. Finally, some major findings and pedagogical implications of the study are discussed.

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Genre

The purposes of promotional travel guides are to inform about, describe and promote a destination. The aim of persuading readers to visit the destination they feature is what distinguishes promotional travel guides from travel guides that offer or claim to offer impartial tourist information. From this perspective, promotional travel guides are similar to advertisements. The influential advertising model AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action) ("AIDA,") may therefore be applied to this genre: successful promotional travel guides should gain attention, stimulate interest, create desire and finally move readers to actions.

The common purposes of promotional travel guides shape their language and structural choices. Previous studies have shown that their language is characterized by abundant epithets which are frequently intensified (Gandin, 2018; Mattiello, 2018), a dominant reference to the present (Stoian, 2018) and in some cultures, a direct address to readers by using second person pronouns (and occasionally first person pronouns) or imperatives (Manca, 2018). All of these language features are closely related to the communicative purposes of this genre and the requirements suggested by the AIDA model.

The description of common structural features here is limited to the type of texts which is represented by the two sample texts analysed in the present study, namely promotional tourism texts that may function as the leading part of a promotional travel guide. This type of text is often found in the “about [name of the destination]” section on tourism websites sponsored by governments or commercial providers. Huang (2015) refers to such texts on the websites of tourism destinations as brief tourist information texts. For this genre, Huang (2015) identifies an obligatory move, namely “establishing credentials”, and two other prevalent moves: “headline” and “soliciting response”. Huang (2015)’s study of this less researched genre offers us valuable insight into the generic structure of such texts, which are drawn on to examine the structure of the two sample texts in the present study.

Context and Text Structure

This section begins with a description of the data collection methods, which is also a brief description of the context of the sample texts. This is followed by a comparison of the sample texts in terms of context and text structure.

Text 1 was written by a Chinese college student responding to this writing prompt: *Choose a city you are familiar with and introduce it to international readers online. The purpose of the writing is to promote the city as a tourist destination. You should write in the style of travel guides. You should write 150-200 words. There is no time limit for the task.* The city which the student chose for the writing was Guangzhou. Lexical and grammatical errors in Text 1 were not corrected, as their influence on the meanings were considered minimal. Text 2 was retrieved from the official travel site of the USA. It was the leading part of the text (see Appendix for the full text) presented on www.visittheusa.com/destination/miami.

The two texts were compared regarding the CONTEXT OF SITUATION and CONTEXT OF CULTURE (Butt et al., 2000). The analysis of field, tenor and mode showed several similarities. Both texts aim to promote a

tourism destination that is a metropolis and a popular tourism destination, which ranked among the world's top 15 cities by tourism market size in 2018 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019). They both give a general overview of the destination instead of focusing on a particular aspect (e.g. cuisine). The authors are not identifiable as a person via a mention of the writer's name or a self-mention in the text (Ramm, 2000). Both are written texts intended for non-specific readers online. Regarding the CONTEXT OF CULTURE, the writers of the two texts have distinctively different cultural backgrounds, but both texts are intended for international readers.

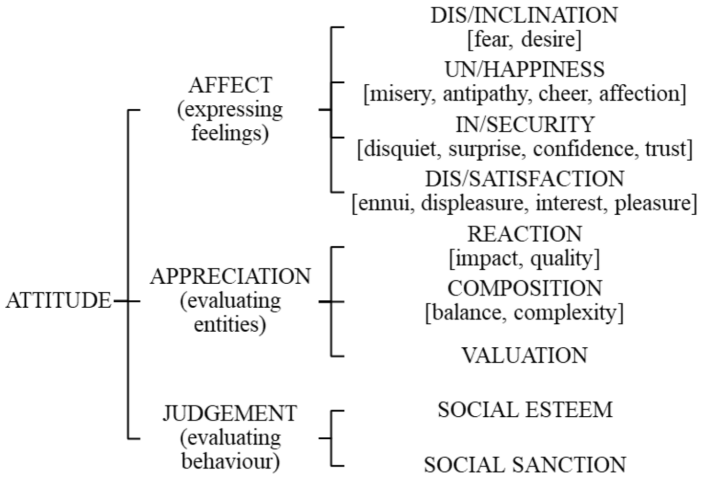
The text structure was then examined with reference to Huang (2015)'s study. While Text 1 only contains the obligatory move "establishing credentials", Text 2, though shorter than Text 1 and only an excerpt, contains all three prevalent moves identified by Huang (2015). With attractive headlines and the use of imperatives to solicit responses, Text 2 seems to be more effective in catching readers' attention and in moving them to actions, which are key features of successful promotional discourse.

Appraisal Analysis

Methodology for Coding ATTITUDE and GRADUATION

To conduct the appraisal analysis, which focuses on "the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned" (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 17), instances of ATTITUDE and GRADUATION in the sample texts were coded according to the frameworks proposed by Martin and White (2005) and Hood (2006) (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 for the frameworks).

Figure 1. The System of ATTITUDE



Note. Based on Martin and White (2005).

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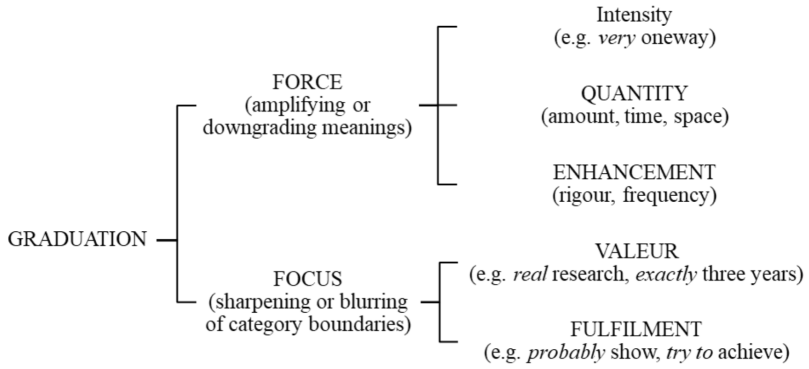
Figure 2. The System of GRADUATION



Note. Adapted from Hood (2006, p. 39).
One example for VALEUR is from Martin and Rose (2007, p.47).

As illustrated by extract [1], inscribed or explicit ATTITUDE was underlined, invoked or implicit ATTITUDE signalled by "t-" and highlighted in grey, GRADUATION italicised, and polarity signalled by "+" / "-".

> [1]The history of Guangzhou, a [+APPRECIATION (VALUATION)] historical city, [t-+APPRECIATION (VALUATION)] can be traced back to *[+FORCE (QUANTITY)] more than 2,000 years ago*.

Analysis of ATTITUDE

This and the following sections present and discuss the results of appraisal analysis. This section focuses on attitudinal resources and the next section on graduational resources.

The use of different kinds of attitudinal resources in the two texts is summarized in Table 1. As expected, the main kind of ATTITUDE expressed in both texts is APPRECIATION of the destination or its related elements. It is also clear that Text 2 employs both APPRECIATION and AFFECT much more often than Text 1 and also uses a wider range of attitudinal resources.

Table 1. Frequency of Different Types of Attitudinal Resources

Types of ATTITUDE	**Text 1**	**Text 2**
APPRECIATION (QUALITY)	8 (4.4)	13 (9.0)
APPRECIATION (IMPACT)	3 (1.6)	7 (4.9)
APPRECIATION (COMPLEXITY)	0 (0.0)	6 (4.2)
APPRECIATION (VALUATION)	5 (2.7)	2 (1.4)
APPRECIATION	**16 (8.8)**	**28 (19.4)**
AFFECT (DESIRE)]	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)
AFFECT (CHEER)]	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)
AFFECT (INTEREST)]	1 (0.5)	1 (0.7)

AFFECT	**1 (0.5)**	**3 (2.1)**

Note. Numbers in brackets denote frequencies per 100 words.

As shown in Table 1, Text 2 uses all types of APPRECIATION much more often than Text 1 except APPRECIATION (VALUATION). In both texts, the dominant type of APPRECIATION expressed is QUALITY. Text 1 appraises Guangzhou as a destination with increasing "international popularity" and positively evaluates its three aspects, namely "complete public facilities", "excellent infrastructures and traffic system", and "local delicious food". In comparison, Text 2 appraises the QUALITY of many more aspects, from "**picture-perfect** weather, **pristine** beaches, **top-rated** attractions", "natural tropical **beauty**", to "lavish hotels", "**authentic** cultural diversity" and the "many unexpected **gems**" [instances of APPRECIATION (QUALITY) in bold]. The city Miami in general is appraised as a "destination that **defies all expectations**" and "has everything you need for the vacation **of your dreams**". As QUALITY deals with the emotional impact that things have on us (Martin & Rose, 2007) and whether or not we like them or want them (Martin & White, 2005), it is closely connected with the function of promotional texts to create desire. By including substantially more expressions of positive APPRECIATION (QUALITY) and directing them to more aspects, Text 2 highlights the attractiveness of the destination and a wide range of its elements, creating a more alluring picture of the destination, which may trigger a stronger desire in readers to plan a journey there.

QUALITY and IMPACT, both belonging to the type of ATTITUDE called REACTION, are both concerned with the power of things to trigger our feelings (Martin & White, 2005). While QUALITY is related to the desiderative aspect, IMPACT has to do with the power of things to catch our attention (Martin & White, 2005). In Text 1, such attitudinal resources (IMPACT) are used with a much lower frequency than in Text 2 and only in relation to fame ("famous", "well known") or in a less evaluative term ("places of interest"). In Text 2, IMPACT is used to evaluate both cultural aspects (e.g. "thriving arts and culture scene") and more concrete aspects, namely "amazing weather and beaches". Such inscriptions of APPRECIATION (IMPACT) seize readers' attention, which is important for the promotional genre.

Text 2 also frequently draws on the resources of APPRECIATION (COMPLEXITY), which are not used in Text 1. They are mainly used to emphasize the diversity, as in "**eclectic** dining", "cultural **diversity**" and "a **mix** of international **sophistication**, natural tropical beauty and authentic cultural **diversity**" [instances of APPRECIATION (COMPLEXITY) in bold]. Through these expressions, various target groups can be attracted: people who prefer activities in the city, natural beauty, or seeking novel cultural experience or certain/different styles of food.

In Text 1, the second most frequent type of APPRECIATION is VALUATION, which is related to "our considered opinions" (Martin & White, 2005). The importance of Guangzhou was positively assessed by using the terms "core" and "capital" and by mentioning its large population and long history (see extract [1] above). Text 2 only uses this kind of resources twice, highlighting the cultural significance of the destination's elements, as shown in extract [2].

> [2]Discover the heritage of the Caribbean in Little Haiti, or the city's Bahamian foundations in West Coconut Grove.

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While almost all ATTITUDES expressed in both texts are obviously positive, Text 2 also skilfully uses the word "hidden" (as in the term "hidden gems"), which may generally be seen as encoding a negative APPRECIATION of an entity's IMPACT. Used in combination with the noun "gem", which encodes an explicit positive APPRECIATION, the word "hidden" evokes positive feelings in a particular target group: people who prefer to stay away from places crowded with tourists and explore the less explored parts.

In addition to expressing APPRECIATION which "reworks feelings as propositions about the value of things" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 45), both texts also directly construe emotions with inscriptions of AFFECT, which are tokens of appreciation of the destination. While the only instance of it in Text 1 ("*a large number* of foreign tourists have been [+AFFECT(INTEREST)] attracted to visit Guangzhou") is more based on fact, Text 2 uses inscribed AFFECT in combination with imperatives in the stage of soliciting responses, directly encouraging readers to align with the writer's positive evaluation of the destination: "[+AFFECT (DESIRE)] Look forward to [+AFFECT (CHEER)] enjoying […]".

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Inscribed and Invoked ATTITUDE

	Text1	**Percentage**	**Text 2**	**Percentage**
Inscribed APPRECIATION	12 (6.6)	75%	24 (16.7)	86%
Invoked APPRECIATION	4 (2.2)	25%	4 (2.8)	14%
APPRECIATION	16 (8.8)	100%	28 (19.4)	100%
Inscribed AFFECT	1 (0.5)	100%	3 (2.1)	100%
Invoked AFFECT	0 (0.0)	0%	0 (0.0)	0%
AFFECT	1 (0.5)	100%	3 (2.1)	100%
Inscribed ATTITUDE	13 (7.1)	76%	27 (18.8)	87%
Invoked ATTITUDE	4 (2.2)	24%	4 (2.8)	13%
ATTITUDE	17 (9.3)	100%	31 (21.5)	100%

Note. Numbers in brackets denote frequencies per 100 words.

As expected, APPRECIATION is mainly explicitly expressed in both texts (see Table 2). They are primarily realised via epithets or nominalized attributes. The use of invoked APPRECIATION is substantially more often in Text 1 in terms of percentage, although it is slightly more often in Text 2 in terms of normalised frequency. Text 2 tends to use the invoked APPRECIATION relatively independently of the inscribed ones, as illustrated by extract [2] above. Text 1, on the other hand, always uses the resources of invoked APPRECIATION as a means to extend and support the explicit evaluative terms, as illustrated by extract [3] (and [1] above).

> [3]From the perspective of urban construction, public facilities are complete in Guangzhou, parks, shopping malls and stadiums are distributed in each area of the city.

Analysis of Graduation

The use of different kinds of graduational resources in the two texts is summarized in Table 3. As expected, most of such resources amplify the force of attitudes. The frequent use of amplification construes both writers

as "maximally committed to the value position being advanced and hence as strongly aligning the reader into that value position" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 152). The only instance of downgraded quantity was used by the writer of Text 1 to highlight the small number of cities that are considered as "core cities", thus implicitly strengthening the positive assessment of Guangzhou's social significance, as shown in [4].

[4]Guangzhou is one of *four* core cities in China

Text 1 uses a wider range of graduational resources than Text 2. A closer examination shows that GRADUATION in Text 1 emphasizes objective parameters, with most instances grading the attitudinal meanings in terms of temporal or spatial extent ("*more than 2,000 years ago*", "*international* popularity") or amount of entities (e.g. "a lot of places of interest"). In Text 2, the graduational resources give more prominence to the quality of various aspects of the destination (e.g. "*top-rated* attractions", "*amazing* weather and beaches").

The two texts also use different ways to grade meanings. In Text 1, GRADUATION is mostly encoded via isolated terms ("*a large number* of foreign tourists") and occasionally via repetition ("*higher and higher*") or via assembling words which are semantically closely related ("*convenience and efficiency*"). In Text 2, GRADUATION is mainly realized via inherently intense lexis (e.g. "*spectacular*" vs "beautiful") and sometimes via isolated terms (e.g. "defies *all* expectations").

One more difference between the two texts is the intensity of attitudes. The maximisation of intensity, which is often observed in promotional travel guides, is sometimes used in Text 2 ("*picture-perfect*", "defies *all* expectations", "has *everything* you need for […]"). In Text 1, there is only one instance of maximisation: "in *each* area of the city".

Table 3. Frequencies of Different Types of Graduational Resources

	Text 1	**Text 2**
[+FORCE (INTENSITY)	1(0.5)	6 (4.2)
[+FORCE (QUANTITY)	9 (4.9)	4 (2.8)
[-FORCE (QUANTITY)	1 (0.5)	0 (0.0)
[+FORCE (ENHANCEMENT)	2 (1.1)	0 (0.0)
[-FOCUS (VALEUR)	1 (0.5)	0 (0.0)
Total	**14 (7.7)**	**10 (6.9)**

Note. Numbers in brackets denote frequencies per 100 words.

Conclusion

The analysis of the genre, the context, and the text structure not only provides a basis for further analysis through the Appraisal framework, but also carries pedagogical implications. In particular, the text structure analysis suggests that the inclusion of both attractive headlines and the move "soliciting response" is a strategy that student writers (including the writer of Text 1) could learn from the professional writer(s) of Text 2 to improve the effectiveness of a promotional text.

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The appraisal analysis shows how linguistic resources are used to achieve discourse purposes in each sample text. The kind of attitudinal resources which are used most frequently in both texts is APPRECIATION, with the dominant type of APPRECIATION being QUALITY, which is related to the desiderative mental process. This is related to the purposes of the texts to inform about, describe and promote a destination. Text 2 shows a wider range and higher frequency of instances of APPRECIATION. Multiple instances of QUALITY, IMPACT and COMPLEXITY in Text 2 act to project an attractive and impressive image of Miami and to attract various target groups. Compared to Text 2, Text 1 gives more prominence to VALUATION, focusing more on aligning readers around the social significance of the destination.

As is typical of promotional travel guides, there are many instances of inscribed APPRECIATION realised via epithets or nominalized attributes. While there are much fewer instances of invoked ATTITUDE in both texts, Text 1 shows a higher percentage of instances of implicit evaluation and always uses them to extend and support the explicit expressions of evaluation, thereby making the evaluation sound more objective and credible. Such a close relationship established between implicit and explicit evaluation is not found in Text 2. Instances of GRADUATION in Text 1, emphasizing objective parameters and rarely maximising the intensity of attitudes, also amplify the positive evaluation of the destination while retaining the objectivity. Text 2, on the other hand, frequently intensifies, sometimes to a maximum extent, the attitudes towards the quality of various elements of the destination, compelling readers to align with the value advanced by the text.

The analysis of attitudinal and graduational resources shows the comparative strength and weakness of the two texts. Text 1, which was written by a Chinese student, strategically uses implicit evaluation and focuses graduational resources on objective parameters to make the text more objective and credible. Text 2, which was written by a professional organization from the USA, is likely to be much more effective in catching attention, stimulating interest and creating desire, because it uses substantially more attitudinal resources, especially resources of explicit evaluation, whose meanings are further intensified or even maximised with graduational resources.

The present study illustrates how Systemic Functional Linguistics, especially the APPRAISAL theory, could be applied to analyse the linguistic choices which are made to achieve the purposes of promotional tourism discourse. Such a discourse analytic approach could help discover comparative strengths and weaknesses of writings in the target genre in terms of communication strategies. Using this approach to compare students' writings with model texts which are produced by professionals could give students a better understanding of linguistic choices that are available to them and of areas in their writings that may need improvement.

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Appendix The Sample Texts

Text 1

Guangzhou is one of four core cities in China, located in the southeast of China. It is the capital of Guangdong province, with a population of about 15 million. The history of Guangzhou, a historical city, can be traced back to more than 2,000 years ago.

From the perspective of urban construction, public facilities are complete in Guangzhou, parks, shopping malls and stadiums are distributed in each area of the city. What is more, Guangzhou has excellent infrastructures and traffic system, which dramatically improves the convenience and efficiency of people's travel.

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As China continues to open wider to the world, the international popularity of Guangzhou is getting higher and higher. Thus, in the past decade, a large number of foreign tourists have been attracted to visit Guangzhou. There are a lot of places of interest in the city, such as Sun Yat-sen Memorial, Shamian Island and Tomb of the King of Nanyue. The other reason why Guangzhou has become a famous tourist city is the local delicious food, like Dim Sum and Roast Goose, both of which are well known Cantonese cuisine.
(Number of words in Text 1: 182)

Text 2 (the italicised part of the following text):

A destination that defies all expectations
From picture-perfect weather, pristine beaches and top-rated attractions, to lavish hotels, eclectic dining and a thriving arts and culture scene, Miami has everything you need for the vacation of your dreams. Look forward to enjoying a mix of international sophistication, natural tropical beauty and authentic cultural diversity.

A City of Hidden Gems
Miami is most famous for its amazing weather and beaches, and they are spectacular, but the city also offers many unexpected gems. The best place to start is the diverse array of neighborhoods, where visitors are encouraged to explore the cultural roots that make Miami an incredible melting pot. Discover the heritage of the Caribbean in Little Haiti, or the city's Bahamian foundations in West Coconut Grove. Get immersed in the African-American experience of Historic Overtown or the thriving Miccosukee Native American community in South Dade.

Art Deco on Miami Beach
It's not just the colorful lifestyles and fashions that bring South Beach to life. Admire the colorful architecture lining iconic streets like Ocean Drive. Springing to life in the 1920s and 1930s, and often called the American Riviera, Miami Beach Art Deco was inspired by European trends in Paris and the Mediterranean, and introduced the city to new possibilities of vibrant colors and unique design. Thanks to preservation efforts, visitors can still enjoy these eye-catching beauties. Join a walking tour at the Art Deco Welcome Center to explore the area with an expert.

Museums by the Bay
Miami has long been home to fantastic and fascinating museums, such as The Bass Museum of Art and The Wolfsonsian in Miami Beach, but the city has added something spectacular to its cultural scene. Downtown Miami is now the proud home of Miami's Museum Park, a sprawling plaza of green with perfect bayside views. Within this gorgeous park are two of the city's most exciting new museums – Perez Art Museum Miami and the Frost Museum of Science. Perez, or PAMM for short, features nearly 18,600 square meters of artistic wonders, including experiential art. Frost Museum spans six floors of interactive exhibit areas, including Frost Planetarium and the 500,000-gallon Gulf Stream Aquarium. You can even reach out and touch some of the creatures of the sea.

International Flavor
Little Havana is a center for Miami's vibrant Cuban community. You'll find food trucks, the best Cuban

sandwiches around and late-night salsa clubs like Ball & Chain, a Little Havana favorite. Calle Ocho on Southwest Eighth Street is where Carnival Miami takes place each year. Stop by the family-owned Cuban cigar factory El Titan de Bronze and watch skilled craftsmen roll authentic Cuban cigars. Miami is also home to the ever-evolving Little Haiti, which features an authentic flavor of Haiti alongside new, hip businesses.
(Number of words in Text 2: 144)