A twofold commodification of "place" in hotel websites and its consequences for the discursive creation of a tourist identity

Rosana Dolón Herrero
Universitat de València (España)
dolon@uv.es

Abstract

Tourism is a global cultural industry and one of the world's largest international trades (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011). As far as tourism is understood as an agent and channel of globalisation (Pritchard & Jaworski, 2005), it makes sense to investigate it from a critical perspective and analyse how its discourse shapes the tourist experience. The aim of this study is to explore ways in which hotel websites project a place identity for the hotel and, in doing so, for the town or city in which the hotel is located. I will ask how, and in what ways, this representation relies on socio-cultural conventions, which in turn may influence the discursive construction of the social actor "tourist". Using Critical Discourse Analysis (see e.g. Fairclough, 1999, 2002) as a framework, I will also draw on Halliday's (1985) transitivity system to identify the representational choices underlying the semantic encoding of the services the hotel offers made by the promoter of the hotel on its website. Using the concordancing tool *AntConc* 3.4.2 (Anthony, 2014), I will trace patterns of use, allowing for a further qualitative analysis of the data. The study is also of interest to the tourist industry inasmuch as it offers an insight into the social construction of a "tourist" identity, shaped according to prevailing symbols and codes in modern society.

Keywords: discourse of tourism, Critical Discourse Analysis, hotel webpages, qualitative corpus analysis, place identity.

Resumen

La doble mercantilización de la categoría "lugar" en páginas web hoteleras, y sus consecuencias para la creación discursiva de una identidad de turista

El turismo representa una industria cultural global, y es uno de los mayores comercios internacionales (Thurlow y Jaworski, 2011). Entendido como agente y canal de globalización (Pritchard y Jaworski, 2005), cobra sentido investigar el turismo desde una lente crítica, y analizar de qué manera su discurso da forma a la experiencia turística. Mi objetivo es analizar cómo la página web hotelera proyecta una identidad de lugar para el hotel y a su vez de su ubicación. Tengo interés en hallar de qué manera dicha representación se apoya en convenciones socio-culturales, que pueden influir en la construcción discursiva del actor social "turista". Partiendo del Análisis Crítico del Discurso (ver e.g. Fairclough, 1999, 2002), me remonto al sistema de transitividad elaborado por Halliday (1985) para identificar las elecciones de representación que subyacen a la codificación semántica de los servicios que el hotel ofrece, y que realiza el promotor del hotel a través de la página web. El uso de la herramienta de concordancias *AntConc* 3.4.2 (Anthony, 2014), me permite aislar patrones de uso, y aplicar a posteriori un análisis cualitativo a las muestras seleccionadas. El estudio es de interés también para la industria turística, al ofrecer una visión de la construcción social de una identidad "turística", creada a partir de los símbolos y códigos que prevalecen en la sociedad moderna.

Palabras clave: discurso del turismo, Análisis Crítico del Discurso, páginas web hoteleras, análisis cualitativo de corpus, identidad de lugar.

1. Introduction

The power of tourism in a globalized society has been explored extensively (see e.g. Dann, 1996; Heller 2003; Pritchard & Jaworski, 2005; Favero, 2007; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010, 2011). Indeed, the social, economic and political impact of tourism has become so pervasive that the tourist can be said to embody a metaphor for the world he/she lives in (Dann, 2002).

Tourism websites as a genre have received a great deal of attention (see e.g. Dann, 1996; Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010; Hung & Law, 2011; Koskensalo, 2012; Dolón, 2014), yet much of this research has focused almost exclusively on the genre as a marketing tool. This is particularly the case with hotel websites (see e.g. Cheng & Ab Hamid, 2011; Hsie, 2012).

My interest in the promotional genre of the hotel website lies in analysing its potential to construct a discursive identity of place. While engaged in persuading, encouraging and even seducing the potential tourist to use the services offered by a hotel, the discourse practice of such websites creates a place identity for the hotel and its location. This frames the tourist experience in terms of the consumption of place, and implies the notion of commodification of place identity (see e.g. Urry, 1990; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Heller, 2003; Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010; Torkington, 2012): tourists consume the symbolic characteristics and values attached to the discursive projection of the place.

The study of identity has been a major focus in tourism research (see e.g. Urry, 1995; Dann, 1996; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; McCabe & Stokoe, 2004; Favero, 2007; Suen, 2009). Starting from a dynamic, social constructivist approach, it is interesting to characterize the discursive creation of a "tourist" identity while analysing how a hotel website constructs and projects a place identity for itself and for the town or city in which it is located.

2. The hotel website: Promoting tourism in post-industrial capitalism

Although webpages in general have been studied extensively (see e.g. Porter, 2004; Shepherd, Watters & Kennedy 2004; Santini, 2007), the literature on tourism websites understood as discourse practices, and not specifically as commercial/marketing tools, is not as extensive as one might expect. As Arfin Bin Salim et al. (2012: 136) observe, this is so despite tourism being "an intensely social and communicative business" given the pervasive nature of its socio-economic and political weight in today's society (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011).

Tourism websites are efficient promotional media: being essentially informative and persuasive, they offer a rich characterization of the tourist destination. Consequently they reveal themselves as an important means for the representation of place, and as such contribute significantly to travellers' decision-making processes in choosing a destination (Afin Bin Salim et al., 2012: 139). They also portray a hidden dialogue between the tourist institution or business and the potential customer, one which might exhibit interpersonal persuasive strategies (Suau-Jiménez, 2012).

Hotel websites engage in the activity of promotional marketing, offering a representation of the destination that reflects the way a tourist is meant to look at it. The hotel and its location are, therefore, represented as socio-cultural constructions rather than as simple physical spaces (Aitcheson & Reeves, 1998: 51), ones which enclose a set of symbolic characteristics that are commodified for the consumption of the prospective tourist. In doing so, the discourse practice enacted by the hotel promoter can be said to have the potential to shape the identities of the hosts, the tourists, the tourist attractions and the place destination itself (Pritchard & Jaworski, 2005).

This representational potential is important, inasmuch as it empowers the hotel, for whom the hotel webpage constitutes an important tool in leading the prospective tourist to a particular vision of the cultures and places represented, offering a specific characterization of cultural otherness (Favero, 2007). What we see here is a process of globalization, one which capitalizes on "the elaboration, representation and display of cultures, places and the world" (Favero, 2007: 52). Interestingly enough, hotel websites can be said to promote a world vision of diversity, of the "different experience" (Urry, 1990, 1995), yet with an underlying interest in controlling this representation. It can be claimed, therefore, that hotel websites project framed characterizations of place, offering experiences to the tourist that are only possible within these "regulated spaces" (Favero, 2007: 67).

3. The discursive construction of an identity "place"

The culture of tourism promotes and sells symbolic capital, of which "place" is a major exponent. Tourists are encouraged to see and experience other places, where a tourist's perspective and imagination shape the individual's expectations and knowledge about the world that surrounds us (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). Tourism is to be understood in terms of symbolic consumption aimed at attaining pleasurable experience, which is also expected to be different from everyday life (Urry, 1990, 1995). The discursive articulation of place contributes to the construction of both individual and collective identities (Torkington, 2012: 72) inasmuch as touristic representations utilise and reflect identity while marketing places (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001: 168). As Torkington (2012: 76) notes, we can understand "place" identity as an intrinsic link between place(s) and the multiplication of the individual and collective self. This reflection leads us to

think of a dialectical relationship holding between the discursive construction of the identities of tourists and that of places, where places are given meanings and identity traits by people (both individuals and the collective entity) and places may be said to shape tourists' identity in some way. It is a discourse practice that shows how place is constituted and is also constitutive of who we are (see Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

The symbolic consumption of "place" in the tourism industry necessarily conveys a polarisation between a "here" and a "there", i.e. a place that is known and familiar to the everyday experience of the tourist as opposed to a place that is different and somewhere else. This echoes a parallelism in the discursive construction of the tourist identity, which recreates the tension between the individual self and the "tourist" self. These juxtapositions recall the concept of "otherness", where the tourist engages in a social activity, "capturing glimpses of 'other' worlds at high speed, and bringing these glimpses home in the shape of material culture (such as souvenirs or photos)" (Favero, 2007: 57).

When we think of "place" in terms of "otherness", the consumption of a "different" location, the tourist comes to embody some kind of temporary "lifestyle migrant" (Torkington, 2012). In our context this lifestyle migration is to be understood as the activity of tourism itself, where the tourist temporarily embraces lifestyle values that a particular place evokes in his/her mind as pleasurable experiences.

Commodification of place necessarily involves commodification of language and identity, since the promotional discourse of hotel websites is intended to sell a symbolic representation of place, and calls forth the construction of social actors (see e.g. van Leeuwen, 1996) whose mental representations of the values of a place are being addressed. This commodification of language and identity is, as Heller (2003: 474) observes, an unavoidable consequence of our globalized economy

4. The study

When considering how "place" is discursively constructed on hotel websites, two place representations seem to interact in what at first glance looks like symbiotic interplay: the website promotes the hotel as a destination in itself, while at the same time depicting itself as a place within

a place, a threshold to the location the tourist is set to enjoy as the targeted destination. The hotel consequently offers a specific "place" experience within a broader one, and hence we can expect the hotel's webpage to construct discursively a twofold place identity, where the broader space of the location "lends" its symbolic values to highlight the "place" values of the hotel space; and vice-versa, where the hotel location is represented in such a way that it adds value to the broader space of the town, city or other location the tourist seeks to enjoy.

4.1. Research objective

The paper explores how place identity is discursively constructed in terms of its complexity, as described above. A qualitative analysis will be presented of how hotel promoters project through their discursive behaviour on hotel websites a place identity for both the hotel and its host location. More specifically, my aim is to establish what shape this twofold place representation takes, and how this may affect considerations about the discursive creation of a tourist identity. The starting point here will be that of a social constructivist approach to identity, where identity in itself does not in principle exist in isolation, but is construed discursively, and is shaped according to the social pressures at play (see e.g. De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006). Ultimately, the use of homogenised discourse practices with prevailing, unchallenged forms that may call for emancipatory discourse behaviour, will also be questioned.

4.2. Research framework and procedure

The methodological framework to be used is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), itself evolved from Critical Linguistics (Kress & Hodge, 1979), and drawing in particular on Halliday's (1985) functional view of language, as well as being influenced by critical theorists such as Foucault and Habermas.

More specifically I begin with the socio-cultural approach developed by Fairclough (see e.g. 1999, 2002), which considers discourse as a social practice, where social structure, social action and agency are dialectically related. Discursive constructions of forms of dominance, power abuse, and general social inequalities are among the main areas of research within this framework. My interest in the present study, however, lies rather in challenging a hypothetical perpetration of forms of place representations, often standardized by a global culture. Fairclough (see e.g. 2002) claims that

we understand discourse as a relatively "stabilised" form of social activity, recreating "specific" forms of both language use and social interaction. One of the purposes of CDA is to challenge social or semiotic structures that are often accepted and hence consciously or unconsciously legitimised as common and familiar practices (see e.g. Fairclough, 2002).

Recalling Habermas' concept of emancipatory knowledge interest, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 29) argue for the development of language practices that assert particularity and individuality, as a means of emancipation from increasingly homogenised discourse practices. Such a concern advocates a need for critical language awareness that necessarily implies a challenge to prevailing discourse practices. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: vii) note that in service economies specifically, language itself has become part of the service, the goods being produced having an increasingly linguistic character. This commodification of language is understood as a form of and contribution to globalisation in that it perpetrates homogenised language use. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) encourage the study of language awareness as a central concern in CDA, in order to challenge and unveil conventional uses that serve to cancel out particular and individualistic identities.

As noted above, Halliday's (1985) transitivity system has been of considerable use in my analysis. The choice of a specific transitivity pattern encompasses specific types of process representation, which correspond to ways of representing reality. I am particularly interested in the representation of *material* processes, where the process is encoded in terms of "doing", with the hotel in subject position standing as the "doer", the Actor in charge of the process in Halliday's (1985) terms.

The present study is also corpus-driven, which allows for access to large amounts of data on patterns of linguistic use and systematic choices therein (see e.g. Hundt, Nesselhauf & Biewer, 2007). Baker (2006: 13) reflects on the importance of corpus-driven research enhancing critical linguistic studies, noting the potential of these for uncovering other discourses that underlie, quite often subtly, the discourse practice under analysis.

The research procedure was as follows: a corpus of 224 hotel websites was compiled from our research team's database (COMETVAL). These represented an equal proportion of one-, three- and five-star hotels from both the UK and the USA. Attention was also paid to the geographical locations of hotels, making sure that these were distributed throughout the

two countries, avoiding the possibility of certain geo-spatial conditions outweighing others, and thus resulting in a balanced representativity in the corpus (see e.g. Atkins, Clear & Ostler, 1992). All the hotel websites were fully exploited, that is, the entire text which they contained was subjected to analysis in each case. From the 224 websites considered, a total of 964,649 word tokens were compiled.

The *AntConc* 3.4.2. (Anthony, 2014) concordancing tool was used to trace systematic choices of clause construction patterns with either of the forms *the hotel/our hotel/(name of the hotel)/we* in subject position, followed by either of the verb phrases *offer(s)/do(es) offer/provide(s) (you with)* or *give(s)* plus predicate. This yielded a total of 359 clause samples representing material processes with the hotel standing in agentive role as "doer", the social actor offering a series of services. These clauses conformed to one or more of the thirteen categories, set out in Tables 1 and 2 below, in terms of what service category is being provided, with 12.5% of the examples corresponding to the process of the hotel offering an explicit place reference, either to the hotel itself or to the host location.

Food & drink	Abstract/vague concepts	Place	Rooms/ accommodation	Events (social & professional)	General & specific services
32 8.9%	49 13.6%	45 12.5%	47 13.1%	51 14.3%	41 11.5%

Affiliation/ Information privacy	Transportation	Price benefits & packages	Internet	Amenities & gifts	Fitness & beauty	Recreation/sport
13 3.6%	8 2.2%	49 13.6%	6 1.7%	4 1.1%	8 2.2%	6 1.7%

Table 1 and 2. Distribution of categories.

Since my interest here lies in the discursive representation of place, it is these forty-five samples relating to the category of place that have been analysed.

5. Results and analysis

The samples were distributed into groups, each corresponding to specific socio-semantic representations of place. For the sake of brevity, uses of *the*

hotel/our hotel/(name of the hotel)/we in subject position, when followed by any of the verb phrases *offer(s)/do(es) offer/provide(s) (you with)* or *give(s)*, were excluded from the listed clause samples.

Group 1: The hotel represented as a retreat from city's activities

1) a romantic, relaxing, and rejuvenating **retreat in downtown San Francisco**.
2) a tranquil **retreat from the vibrant energy of Waikiki Beach**.
3) the ultimate escape just **moments away from** the thrill and excitement of the **Walt Disney World's Resort**.
4) the added perk of free access to **private garden facilities** that can instantly transport you from the hustle and bustle of it all.

In these four examples the hotel is portrayed as a place that functions as a retreat for the traveller. This is understood as providing a haven of calm and relaxation away from the city. Example (3) adds the meaning of escape, where the hotel somehow "rescues" the tourist from the activity offered by the city. Example (4) is worth highlighting in that the hotel is said to offer a place within its own place, somewhere that contrasts with what the city offers: as if by magic, the hotel's garden transports the guest to a green space, which somehow helps to cancel out the effects of the city. In this sense, the hotel is also depicted in the image of "rescuer". In example (1) the hotel is not limited to this "repairing" role, but has its own perks, offering the guest romanticism and even a sense of rejuvenation.

Group 2: the hotel as a starting point/headquarter for trips/activities

5) a number of familiarisation **trips** throughout the year **where you can experience the hotel**, its changes and take advantage of the great activities that are planned for you.
6) a range of experiences for guests looking to try our national drink including private **distillery tours** with a qualified whisky connoisseur.
7) Dinner, Bed & Breakfast, Self-Catering Cottages and **a base** for Outdoor Activities.
8) **tours** with hotel pick-ups **from the Hollywood area, from the Los Angeles and LAX (Los Angeles International Airport) area, and from the Anaheim area**.

Tours which commence at the hotel are a common service provided by a hotel. Companies offering trips or visits to city attractions often advertise their services within the hotel, with flyers and other advertising material being displayed at the reception. This is mutually beneficial, since these businesses gain customers while the hotel adds value to its clients' stay through facilitating access to such activities. In example (7) the hotel explicitly labels itself as a sort of headquarters for tourist activities. In both (6) and (8) we are led to see the hotel as giving its guests something extra if they choose to make these trips via the hotel. This is especially salient in (6), where the visitor is invited to experience not just a normal distillery tour but a "private" one with "specialists", marking it out as special and thus especially attractive. It is worth noting that this perk of exclusive treatment is offered specifically to guests who use the hotel as the base for their excursions and trips. Interestingly enough, in (5) the tour is conceived of as taking place inside the hotel, projecting the hotel itself as a tourist highlight in the city.

Group 3: the hotel as an ideal location due to proximity to city's highlights

9) **ideal proximity to** an exciting array of **Manhattan things** to do in Chelsea.

10) 2 great Pensacola Hotels, both provide lodging accommodations **near Naval Air Station Pensacola and NTTC Corry Station**.

11) premier accommodation in the heart of Cardiff city centre, **just a few minutes' walk from the Millennium Stadium** and **five minutes from Cardiff's central train and bus station**.

12) hours of excitement on our four lighted tennis courts, **conveniently located across from Walt Disney World Swan**.

13) a marvellous London location **close to the Tower Bridge and Tower of London**.

The characteristic of the hotel highlighted here is related to its proximity to the city's features and attractions. By turning the factor of distance into a distinct value, the hotel is projected as both comfortable and convenient, and makes experiencing the city easy and immediate for the guest. Through such uses of language the hotel does not present itself as a destination *per se*, a place to be enjoyed, but simply as a hassle-free means of enjoying the city.

Group 4: the hotel represented as a facilitator of access to city's attractions and transportation facilities

14) easy **access to the subway**, and **Midtown Manhattan** is just minutes away.

15) effortless **access to** vibrant nightlife, **cutting-edge art galleries, and chic boutiques and restaurants**.

16) bed and breakfast accommodation **within a short walking distance of Edinburgh's major tourist destinations**.

17) unlimited **access to all Manx Heritage sites**, giving you the flexibility and freedom to create your own Story of Mann.

18) shuttle service **to and from Logan International Airport**, **JFK Subway Station**, as well as various **local medical and convention centers**.

Here, the hotel advertises convenient access to places that guests may want to visit, thereby projecting itself as a facilitator of easy ways to participate in the tourist activities that the city has to offer. In doing so the hotel portrays itself as co-promoter of the city as a tourist destination.

<u>Group 5: the hotel represented as a facilitator of the guest's enjoyment of the city</u>

19) a free left luggage service whereby you can leave your luggage in reception on the day of departure and enjoy a hassle free day **in London**.

20) a host of discounted breaks and packages so you can get the best out of your stay **in Edinburgh**.

21) secure, comfortable accommodation and all the information you'll need to make the most of your time **in Edinburgh**.

The idea of facilitator acquires new meaning here, where luggage storage, along with discount packages, comfort and availability of information, are highlighted as services aimed at the further enhancement of the guest's enjoyment of the city. The hotel projects itself as a place that will take from the tourist any burden or handicap that may interfere with the full tourist experience available in the city.

<u>Group 6: the hotel represented as a destination in itself</u>

22) a **fabulous location**, superb service and great prices.

23) a **sleek, ultra modern destination** for savvy vacationers and business travellers.

24) an **inspiring destination** for celebration.

25) an **inspired and sophisticated setting** for all your meetings and events **in exciting San Francisco**.

26) the **perfect place** for both business and pleasure. The **ideal Waikiki Beach location** for your Hawaii meetings, celebrations or special events.

27) the **historic Kuumba Library**, adjoining mezzanine lobby **and elegant balcony**.

28) two double rooms with en-suite bathrooms and views of **the garden and beyond**.

29) the **relaxed elegance** of an **Edwardian Country House** with **stunning architecture** and mature gardens guaranteed to create **an exquisite backdrop**.

30) traditionally furnished en-suite bedrooms, a restaurant, **oak beamed courtyard** and bar with a fine reputation and **attractive courtyard**.

31) at the **Burnham Hotel**: the warm setting - with **dark wood and pops of gold and red** - does its part to lure your mind to **a laidback place**.

32) *also let us know if you would like to arrange a show round and view **our facilities** we offer.

In examples (22) and (33) we find the simplest portrayal of place, devoid of symbolic value, where the hotel is presented merely as a location (22), a place that offers a series of facilities (33). Examples (23-26), on the other hand, add significant meaning when representing the hotel as a destination, addressing guests who seek to use the hotel as a functional space for the celebration of social and business events. Other uses (27 and 28) highlight specific locations within the hotel as enjoyable features. Also of interest are examples (29-31) which note specific architectural characteristics, ornamental features and even notable construction materials, all of which contribute to the creation of a specific atmosphere and ambience.

<u>Group 7: the hotel represented as offering some blend between the location of the city and the hotel itself</u>

33) a **stylish place** to **enjoy the quintessential all-American city**. (Orlando)

34) first class accommodation, **Glasgow hospitality** and traditional **Scottish Fayre**.

35) the luxurious living standards of **elegant New Orleans** combined with personal attention and an unwavering commitment to your happiness.

36) a blend of treatments as inspiring as **the city itself**. (New York)

37) **a landmark Boston setting**.

38) * most hotels give you a room; we give you **an entire city**.

The above examples illustrate an interesting blending of two places: the hotel itself and the city. This gives rise to interesting collocations such as "Glasgow hospitality" (35) and "landmark Boston setting" (38), in which websites attempt to linguistically encode the fact that hotel offers a blend of the two locations, both of which can be enjoyed by the tourist.

Group 8: the hotel represented as displaying centrality, location in a central position

39) an exclusive address **in the heart of fashionable Back Bay**.

40) signature Kimpton Hotel hospitality and acclaimed style **in the heart of downtown Boston**.

41) everything you need to create the perfect wedding right here **in the heart of the Windy City**.

42) some of the best corporate meeting rooms in Edinburgh and the opportunity to enjoy private dining **in Edinburgh's city centre**.

The physical position of the hotel in the city centre is not highlighted because it favours easy access and proximity to the city's tourist attractions, but rather the idea is conveyed that it belongs to the very essence of the city. This centrality confers on the hotel the added status of a city landmark.

Group 9: the hotel represented as offering a sense of home

43) a relaxed **home-from-home** for locals and visitors alike: you can be assured of all the comforts and luxuries.

44) a clean, comfortable and quiet **home** away from home, in the center of Boston's Back Bay.

These two examples are interesting in that they exploit the spatial notion of "home" and the symbolic meanings attached to it. Instead of projecting itself as a place with a significance that operates in combination with its host city, the hotel represents itself as a place that is located at a distance from home yet offers home-related features, such as comfort, cleanliness and relaxation.

Group 10: the hotel represented as offering easy access to functional services in neighbourhood

45) Civil or Humanist Service, and we are very lucky to have **the church right beside us** if you would like a church service then join us.

Functional services that the hotel's neighbourhood offers are rarely mentioned. In fact, our corpus contains just one example, in which the hotel's proximity to a church is noted.

6. Discussion

Our analysis illustrates how the hotel and its host location are projected through the hotel webpage as a tourist destination, with examples referring to the material process of offering (in its form of encoding: "giving", "offering", "providing"), with the hotel (in its forms "the/our hotel", "we", "name of the hotel") in agentive position as explicit "doer" of the action. Of the forty-five examples, only eleven were found in which the hotel was represented as a place destination in itself [group 6]. In these cases, a series of adjectives ("inspiring", "perfect", "sophisticated", "fabulous", "ultra-modern", "sleek") were used as a means of recreating a specific hotel atmosphere; reference to high-quality construction materials and specific architectural features also contributed to this. However, it is worth noting how many of these representations of the hotel's atmosphere and ambience are addressed solely to tourists planning social or professional events.

The six examples listed in group 7 show an interesting form of place representation, with the hotel projected as a kind of blend with the city, where the tourist accesses through the hotel both the city's and hotel's highlights.

In most examples [groups 2, 3, 4 and 5] the hotel is portrayed as a facilitator for the tourist's full enjoyment of the city, offering comfort, convenience, information and other benefits, revealing itself essentially as a place for another place. While it is true that the hotel is seen here as a sort of entrance to the city, it also takes on the function of an exit, the space of retreat from the city's activities. The four examples in group 1 express this idea, where such a retreat is associated with calm, relaxation and even a form of escape from the bustle and stress of the city.

This strong attachment of the hotel to the representation of a larger place takes a different shape in group 8, whose four examples portray the hotel as a city highlight, with its very central position making it a city landmark. It can be said that the hotel here takes on the symbolic place values of the city.

The two examples in group 9 are interesting, in that the hotel is projected as a home away from home. The experience of "otherness" typically associated with tourist experiences (see Urry, 1990, 1995; Favero, 2007) thus seems to be cancelled, as the hotel displays home-related features rather than projecting an idea of "otherness" and difference.

Summarizing, we can think of two place representations holding for the hotel. In the first of these, in most examples [groups 1-5] the hotel can be said to portray itself as a place that is subordinated to its location, inasmuch as it stands as a space reference to make the full enjoyment of the larger space possible, lifting any burden, handicap or difficulty from the tourist in this regard. These twenty-one examples rely, then, on a socio-cultural construction of place, where the city is the space for action, for getting tired, for excitement and hassle, and the hotel is a place that both prepares the tourist for this experience and provides the consequent relief and rest. This in turn contributes to an identity construction of the tourist in terms of how they are expected to interact with the place "hotel" and the broader place location. The hotel as a "doer" in the analyzed samples of material processes, in explicitly offering things to the tourist, projects a tourist who is a social actor, one who is active, gets involved and tired in the city, and one to whom the hotel offers a gateway and a place of recovery and relief, "mothering" the tourist into and out of the city. The hotel is portrayed as a facilitator, as a base for or retreat from the city and contributes to the promotion of the city, yet does so at the expense of offering a specific frame for what both the city and the hotel have to offer.

On the other hand, the eleven examples in groups 7, 8 and 10 represent the hotel as a place that benefits from the symbolic values attached to the location to which it belongs. The hotel is discursively constructed as being part of the city or as borrowing its perks, and the tourist is portrayed as experiencing the city while experiencing the hotel, rather than using the hotel as a gateway to the larger location. This in turn recreates the identity of a tourist who seeks to find the symbolic values and characteristic features of the city to be embodied in the hotel itself: a tourist who does

not want to detach the place experience of the hotel from that of the larger location.

Apart from these two ways of hotel representation, always in combination with the city, the eleven examples in group 6 project the hotel as a destination in itself, and thus as totally detached from the larger place in which it is located. However, in doing so, the hotel is projected as recreating a sensorial experience, creating a specific ambience, which conjures up a specific, one could say "restricted", touristic hotel experience. These examples were also found to explicitly address a specific profile of a tourist who uses the hotel for business or social events. The "voice" behind the website, then, seems to differentiate between a type of tourist identity that pursues access to and enjoyment of the larger location that hosts the hotel, and one whose activity revolves around the hotel itself, the latter being clearly identified with guests that celebrate social or professional events on its premises.

The least represented examples are the two samples of group 9, where the hotel is portrayed as a home away from home. This confirms, through contrast, Urry's (1990, 1995) characterization of "otherness", the tourist seeking to visit places that are different from home.

7. Conclusions

This study has shown how the two place categories are discursively constructed in a corpus of hotel websites, and has shed light on the resulting projection of specifically framed tourist identities. The critical awareness that the current analysis has promoted makes clear that further research in this area would be useful, challenging thus far uncontested discourse practices. As Thurlow and Jaworski (2011: 3) observe, "tourism plays a powerful role in reshaping cultural practices". It is interesting to challenge the discursive characterization of the tourist found in these texts, which hinges on prevailing socio-cultural constructions, where discourse shapes the tourist experience and the tourist identity, framing and hence restricting it in a significant manner. This study has been one possible starting point towards an emancipatory discourse for hotel webpages, where hotel promoters have the chance to offer a new, culturally updated and revised characterization of a "place" identity, both for the hotel itself and for its larger host location, and consequently for the tourist as a social actor and for tourism as a cultural activity.

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Rosana Dolón es profesora titular de la Universitat de València, en la que ejerce como docente e investigadora desde 1990. En sus inicios se centra sobre todo en estudios de géneros discursivos en el ámbito empresarial. Consolidada en la actualidad su investigación en el campo del Análisis del Discurso, concretamente el Análisis Crítico del Discurso y los estudios de corpus, sus trabajos más recientes se centran en géneros discursivos propios del ámbito turístico. En la actualidad participa en el Proyecto de

investigación concedido por el Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (anterior, Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación), Referencia FFI2011-2472, Análisis léxico y discursivo de corpus paralelos y comparables (español, inglés y francés) de páginas electrónicas de promoción turística. 2011-2014.