

Panel: «Interpersonality in digital communication types: academic, professional and disciplinary variations»

## The role of customer online reviews in the discourse–dialogic construction of hotel websites

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focusing this research...



. the internet as a tool for travel and tourism has triggered or reshaped new cybergenres, also known as digital modes or phenomena (Thurlow and Mroczek 2011, Herring 2013) that have revolutionised the way discourse is modelled

. here, we'll be dealing with an emergent cybergenre, *online review*, and a reconfigured one, *hotel website*, and their possible discursive connection

an insightful quotation...



“the voice of the customer must be embraced since it entails a transformational power towards improving quality, building loyalty and gaining market”

(Austin 2009)

# the research reported here...



- . hypothesis: customer online reviews might be used in the dialogic construction of hotel websites
  
- . two research questions...
  1. whether customer negative evaluations can be traced and identified in online reviews
  
  2. whether hotel websites present the negative topics of online reviews as positive values that enhance their services

more specifically...



. I have analysed

. positive and negative *online reviews* (2010–2013) of 4 hotels from the US and the UK, attempting to trace the specific **content aspects** that are criticized

. the current *websites* of the same 4 hotels (2015), looking for **interpersonal strategies** and **markers** that show the traced negative aspects of online reviews as positive values

# my corpus



- . pilot corpus of online reviews collected from TripAdvisor (2010–2013) in order to guarantee more impartiality
  - . number of reviews: 40 positive/40 negative
  - . informants: 50% male/female
  - . varied nationalities
  - . purpose of trip: business/holidays – randomly
- 
- . pilot corpus of hotel websites of same hotels (2015)
  - . pages: home, rooms, spa (if available), meals, events

# background...



. COMETVAL research project (Corpus Multilingüe en Turismo, Universitat de Valencia, 2011–2014, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness)

- . webgenres analysed: **hotel websites / touristic webguides / traveller forums** (Suau–Jiménez 2012a, 2012b, 2014)
- . methodological proposal: interpersonal discourse pattern for tourism webgenres (Suau–Jiménez 2014)

- . with implications for the tourism and travel industry
- . *MANUAL DE BUENAS PRÁCTICAS EN EL DISCURSO DEL TURISMO*. Revista Normas, Anejos, 2016

## methodological framework...



- . *interpersonal metadiscourse pattern* for tourism webgenres (Suau–Jiménez 2012, based on Hyland 2005)
- . defined or understood as: *discursive elements (markers and strategies) that an author uses to express authority and to engage readers throughout a text in order to achieve its generic aim*
- . constrained by genre, language–culture and discipline

*attitudinals* in online reviews: verbal, adjectival and adverbial markers containing some subjectively negative aspect


*boosters* in hotel websites: verbal, adjectival and adverbial markers containing some enhancing aspect



# electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)



- it refers to interpersonal communications among consumers concerning their personal experiences and evaluations of a firm or a product (Richins, 1983)
- the greatest amount of eWOM is represented by customer-generated **online reviews** (Gretzel and Yoo 2008; Sandvik, Arnett, & Sandvik 2011)
- eWOM is a central source of information for the tourism and hospitality industry (Berger 2014)



. online reviews are of great value to tourism and to hoteliers as....

- they offer a solution to the “problem” of the intangibility of their products (Zhang, Yea, Law and Li 2010)
- they facilitate that hotel websites are updated, refining their offers to match customer demands (Suau-Jiménez 2016)

# customer-generated online reviews



- . can be found in **hotel websites**, as a “genre chain” (Zhang & Vásquez 2014) and in **social network platforms**

- . those located in social network platforms like TripAdvisor are felt by travelers as less “filtered” , therefore being more popular and reliable

- . they deploy a strong *interpersonal stance* discourse:

- . making judgements through **attitude markers** as well as **boosters**, for negative and positive evaluations

- . based on **self-mentions** that provide experiential reliability

this stance discourse can ideally be incorporated into the hotel website’s text and turned into interpersonal strategies meant to repair negative online evaluations and to match customer demands

# hotel websites

- are *interactional* digital genres with a hidden dialogue where the author (hotel) engages the reader (customer) through a persuasive interpersonal discourse
- periodically updated, being subject to adjustments and improvements based, in part, on the data coming from customer offline and online evaluations/reviews
- their dialogic interaction is made of
  - a strong author's stance, claiming reliability and credibility
  - a varying degree of reader engagement

results: quantitative analysis of *positive* online reviews

Interpersonal markers							
hedges	<b>attitudinals</b>	boosters	self-mentions	reader pronouns	directives	quest	TOTAL
30	75	314	272	26	15	3	731
4'10%	<b>10'25%</b>	42'95%	37'20%	3'55%	2'05%	0'41%	100%

# results: quantitative analysis of *negative* online reviews

## interpersonal markers

hedges	attitudinals	boosters	self-m	reader pron	directives	questions	TOTAL
12	364	37	331	42	36	1	823
1'45%	44'22%	4'49%	40'21%	5'10%	4'37%	0'12%	100%

# results: qualitative analysis: negative topics in positive online reviews

. through *attitudinals* . Hotel Broadway, NYC (high standard):

1. noise
2. not so good location, far from Times Square; slightly dated bathroom
3. not so good location, far from Times Square; small breakfast room
4. tiny lobby
5. small bathroom facilities
6. high prices; no non-smoking room available
8. small dining room for breakfast; no free wifi service
9. small lobby and entrance
10. poor entrance

# results: qualitative analysis: negative topics in negative online reviews

. through *attitudinals*. Hotel Broadway, NYC (high standard)

1. bad customer service, web pictures do not represent actual rooms
2. staff disrespectful, bad customer service
3. poor room facilities, poor bathroom equipment and no amenities, pics do not represent actual rooms
4. disrespectful staff
5. poor and misleading payment method
6. noise at night and poor customer service
7. dirtiness in rooms and in facilities
8. dirtiness in rooms and carpets, noise, bad customer service
9. misleading payment method, noise at night
10. poor hotel facilities and bathroom dirtiness



Broadway Hotel (2015) website: positive values shown through boosters

**recently renovated** rooms and suites/ **comforting** amenities/ **plush** bedding/ **high-speed** WIFI/ **complimentary** continental breakfast/ **expert** concierge/ **recently renovated** hotel/ **high-resolution** images in our gallery/ **69 oversized** accommodations/ **free** Starbucks coffee/ **spacious** rooms and suites/ **connectivity at a reasonable cost**/ our concierge **streamlines** your transportation/ **largest, best-appointed** rooms and suites/ the city's **most knowledgeable** concierge/ **newly renovated** rooms/ **elegant** entryway/ **modern** lobby space/ **unique** décor/ **modern** comforts/ **Renovated** in March 2013/ outfitted with a **variety of plush amenities**/ **premium** accommodations

# examples of topic matching: online reviews vs current Broadway Hotel's website

online reviews negative evaluations: attitudinal	hotel website strategies: boosters
tiny lobby, small lobby and entrance	elegant entryway/ modern lobby space/ unique décor
bad customer service, staff disrespectful	the city's most knowledgeable concierge/ expert concierge
web pictures do not represent actual rooms	high-resolution images in our gallery
small breakfast room	complimentary continental breakfast
poor hotel facilities	69 oversized accommodations

negative topics identified as positive values in hotel websites



### **Hotel Broadway, NYC**

- Excellent staff
- Renovated hotel facilities and rooms
- Modern comforts

### **Grand Rochester Hotel, London, UK**

- Customer service (24 hour rooms service; same-day laundry and cleaning)
- Charm
- Modern amenities

### **MacDonald Hotel and Spa, Manchester, UK**

- Customer service
- Hotel staff

### **Paramount Hotel, NYC**

- High-speed internet access
- Hotel amazingly quiet
- Lounge-like ambiance lobby

# conclusions 1



## research question 1

- negative evaluations of online reviews have proved to be traceable and identifiable through interpersonal **attitudinals**

## research question 2

- the four hotels seem to have incorporated some negative evaluations from customer online reviews as **boosters**
- *one of them (Broadway Hotel) has incorporated them largely and shows evidence of a manifest website adjustment*

. negative topics from online reviews acknowledged and shown as positive values in hotel websites (in order of importance)

1. **customer service**
2. **hotel decoration or refurbishment**
3. **amenities**
4. **comfort**

\* None of the aspects dealing with **price/expensiveness/bad paying methods** was acknowledged by hotel websites

# limitations and further research...



although interpersonality applied to these genres has proved a useful framework.....

1. it is a reduced corpus of online reviews and hotel websites that needs further compilation

2. results meant to answer research question 2 only have a discursive support

3. discursive results need to be contrasted with sociolinguistic data, such as

- . proof of recent hotel website adjustments

and/or

- . proof of hotel management active acknowledgement of customer online reviews

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thanks for your attention!!!



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