

# English Discourse of Tourism: An Example of Oman

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## ■ ABSTRACT ■

Acknowledging the importance of English as the language of tourism discourse, this paper explores its current standing in the landscape of tourism in Oman. It also investigates its features and functions aimed at promoting the country as a wonderful tourist destination to people around the globe and framing tourism as a customer-oriented industry that meets tourists' interests and needs. To convey these messages the authors examine English tourism discourse in Oman from linguistic, pragmatic and socio-cultural perspectives.

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### Key Words

English discourse of tourism, Oman, socio-cultural perspectives, linguistic and pragmatic features

## Introduction

Beautiful and peaceful Sultanate of Oman with its rich history, cultural accomplishments, natural wealth and fine trading position at the southern extremity of the Arabian Peninsula has been welcoming people from overseas for centuries. Today, with its open, booming economy, government's initiatives to broaden the appeal of its tourist sites, Oman has become an attractive destination for travelers from many countries of the world and there are expectations of strong growth in the near future (Turner, 2009). The country's most important assets that could attract tourists include historic heritage, natural beauty, perfect environment, folklore and traditional industries, stability and the Omani people's spirit of tolerance. Such advantages can be used to market the country to interested tourists who are looking for a wonderful experience in an exotic land that has embraced modernity while maintaining its national and original character.

Globalization, improvement of economic collaboration and international understanding caused a transformation in the perspectives of the development of global and local tourism. Particularly, in recent years there have been amazing shifts to using English as an important tool for the effective communication in global tourism environment and promotion of local tourist destinations. English has also become essential for mirroring various tourism practices and experiences, documenting reflections and self-reflections of tourism discourse participants, and, therefore, adding value to tourism, in general, and specific tourist destinations, in particular (Gotti 2007). These properties of the English language have been investigated from many fruitful angles and in many international tourism discourses (Knowles, 1989, Gotti 2007, Capelli, 2009).

Effective interaction and communication are indispensable to successful tourism in Oman, since visitors come from different places around the world and not all of them speak Arabic. The great majority of tourists, who come to the country, speak English, the current international language of communication and globalization. English is widely used in Oman's tourist environments (e.g. road signs, shop signs, museum signs, labels and writings) and in informative materials (e.g. guidebooks, tourism websites, reviews, blogs, trip reports, newspaper articles) for promoting it as a distinct cultural and historic place. Therefore, it is worthwhile examining tourism discourse of Oman to see how English works in it.

## The landscape of tourism in Oman: A closer look

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said in his speech delivered on the occasion of the 29<sup>th</sup> National day said:

“I reaffirm the necessity to give tourism a priority in the future development programme. This sector has great potential for growth and for making an effective contribution to economic diversification, since our dear country possesses such splendid tourist assets such as its historic heritage, natural beauty, perfect environment, folklore and traditional industries. In addition, there is the security, stability and the spirit of tolerance of the Omani citizens, thanks to God.”(Excerpted from the speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said on the occasion of the 29th National Day. Retrieved from <http://www.destinationoman.com/>)

Tourism is now taking center stage in the world. Like elsewhere in Oman it is a sector with massive potential for development that can contribute greatly to the national economy. The country's most important assets that could attract tourists include historic heritage, natural beauty, perfect environment, folklore and traditional industries, stability and the Omani people's spirit of tolerance. Such advantages can be used to market the country to interested tourists who are looking for a wonderful experience in an exotic land that has embraced modernity while maintaining its national and original character.

The recent boom in traveling fuelled by many economic and socio-political forces has recently made tourism a complex socio-cultural and marketing phenomenon (Giordana 2004, cited in Maci, 2007). Literature on tourism highlights this complexity when it shows the contradictory positions of people who view tourism as an extension of colonization and imperialism that is set to invade people of different lands and focus on the negative effects of tourism in polluting national cultures and natural environments and those people who view it in more a positive light as a tool for promoting intercultural understanding and cultural exchange. Although the two views exist in Oman, the positive view is the one that predominates due to government support and the steps it has taken to preserve and guard Oman's distinct cultural character.

Oman offers its history, traditions, culture, natural beauty, and socio-cultural entities, and it highlights tourism as one of its most important businesses (Turner 2009). Tourism in Oman is both “a practice of travelling for pleasure” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/tourism>) and “a business of providing tours and services for tourists” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/tourism>). It includes many different sub sectors that range from suppliers and tour operators to accommodation, experiences, national, regional and local events and attractions, heritage and culture, technology, communications and information (See a detailed list of tourism sub-sectors in Oman on <http://www.omran.om/tourismInfo/>)

MoTEnglish270909.pdf). All these sub-sectors are represented by various “socio-rhetorical networks” or discourse communities (Swales 1990: 9) that have specific goals and purposes, and use communication to achieve these purposes. Therefore, in the accounts of its practitioners and clients, as well as in its textual, tactical, professional and social spaces (Bhatia 2004), tourism has a “discourse of its own”. (Dann 1996: 2)

Due to its multi-perspective character, Omani tourism discourse produces a myriad functions and communicative situations. However, its constitution and successful functioning requires some important social, communicative and linguistic parameters. These, as Swales (1990: 24 - 27) notes, include public goals, specific communicative mechanisms, perspectives of acquiring new membership, a developed specific vocabulary and a communication mechanism via one or more genres.

Tourism discourse and the language of tourism are often viewed as similar concepts. This understanding originates from the notion of *discourse* that usually refers to a “form of language use, or more generally, to spoken language or ways of speaking”. (van Dijk 1997: 1) It also proceeds from understanding that discourse is the result of an active communicative process, involving speakers/writers who have topics and presuppositions and who assign information structures and make references. It is hearers/speakers “who interpret and who draw inferences” (Brown/Yule 1983/2000: ix). Such an understanding of discourse requires such analytical strategies that do not limit themselves to texts as static objects, but as “dynamic means of expressing intended meaning.” (Brown/Yule 1983/2000: 24)

The importance of the linguistic requirements of tourism discourse for the purposes of linguistic, socio-cultural mediation and translation has recently made the systematic observation of the language of tourism an object of detailed research from various perspectives, namely contrastive (Capelli 2009; Calvi 2005) and sociolinguistic (Buhler 1990; Dann 1996). The linguistic dimensions of tourism discourse have been examined from the point of view of its principal properties, namely, functions, structure, tense, and magic (Buhler 1990), lack of sender identification, monologue, euphoria, and tautology (Dann 2006). In doing so, many linguists have focused on tourism discourse as written communication, where writing is understood - as stated by Bizell (1982) - not only as an individual cognitive process but as an “acquired response to the discourse conventions which rise from preferred ways of creating and communicating knowledge within particular communities.” (Swales 1990: 4)

These preferred ways include the need for adequate and convincing linguistic ways of presenting and promoting tourism. This need presupposes overcoming the natural heterogeneity of tourism discourse and its language, which is viewed as clusters of correlated micro-languages (hotel and restaurant sector, commercial transactions, transport, leisure time, history of art, etc.). (Balboni 1989) Furthermore, it encompasses the ability to overcome “communicative events created by the specialists” (Bhatia 2004, Swales 1990) or genres of tourist texts that are differentiated in accordance with their target readership, structure, style and contents.

Among these genres or types of texts are tourist guides, brochures, leaflets, catalogues, advertising, travel documents, programmes, signs, labels and other materials of a promotional nature. These genres have recently been quite extensively analyzed by European scholars within a general framework of tourism discourse and within its microlanguages. The most recent and meaningful works on the topic from linguistic and cultural perspectives are papers by Vestito (2005) and Gotti (2007) who have highlighted the importance of the socio-linguistic perspectives (Dann 2006). However, the image of tourism in Oman still leaves the English language in the shadows.

## Roles of English in Oman

The official language in Oman is Arabic; however, English has been adopted as a second language in the country. It is the “global language” (Crystal 1997) and the “language of international and intercultural communication” (Hardin 1979).

The English language is widely used worldwide in different types of specialized discourse, namely business, technology, commerce, diplomacy, education and tourism. Blue and Harun (2003) assert that “there is little doubt that English is the most commonly used language of hospitality and the lingua franca of tourists and travelers worldwide.” (77) English is; therefore, prominent in almost all countries, and Oman is no exception.

Although the relationship between education and tourism is not a direct one, the connection is intimate. Education has been preparing a skilled workforce capable of serving and interacting with tourists. Effective interaction and communication are indispensable to successful tourism, since visitors come from different places around the world and not all of them speak Arabic. However, the great majority of travelers and tourists speak English, the current international language of communication and globalization. Because English has been the global language for many decades now, the Omani government has recognized how essential it is for modernizing the country and for promoting it as a distinct cultural and historic place. Therefore, English has been part of the school curriculum since 1970. When higher education institutions started to grace the Omani landscape, almost all of them instated English as a medium of instruction for their science-based specializations. This has created a workforce that can speak English, albeit with varying degrees of proficiency.

Since Oman had to rely on the skilled help of foreign individuals during the first stages of establishing a modern state, English was used among people of different nationalities to communicate, and it has therefore been present in the country in different forms and places since the 1970s. This is a tourist attraction in itself as many visitors choose destinations where they can communicate and be understood. The internet with its ability to reach almost everyone in the world can be used to promote the country, and the language most used on the worldwide web is English. Brochures, leaflets, books, encyclopedias - in print or electronic forms - that are written in English can also be great promoters of the country as a tourist destination.

Regarding some new roles that the English language now plays in Oman, Alison Gardner, in her story “Oman: The Middle East to Visit now” posted on <http://www.travelwithachallenge.com/Oman.html> very interestingly remarks:

“Throughout the country, road signage and business signs (from laundries, gas stations and grocery stores to local restaurants and accommodations) are equally prominent in English and Arabic. If you get lost, it is your own lookout! With a younger population already being educated in English from the earliest school grades, professional tourism training of Omani citizens is the last piece of the hospitality strategy.”

In Oman's tourism industry, English is not only an absolute necessity for catering to international tourists; it is also essential for the functioning of a multi-channel tourism communication network (Dann 2006). This network forms a complex dynamic system of English tourism discourse that emerges from the pressures of linguistic, socio-cultural and contextual factors. (Capelli 2009) This system does not only allow cross-cultural representation of Oman as a tourist destination (Fodde and Denti 2005, Vestito

2005). It also facilitates in guiding and focusing tourist glances (Urry 2001, Urry 2002, Capelli 2009) at various stages of the tourist experience. Thus, English is not only the second language on almost all signs, labels and writings; it is the language of tourist brochures, guidebooks, web pages and websites aimed at promoting Oman in other parts of the world.

A Google search for “Oman tourism” gives 454,000 sites in the English language (accessed August 14, 2010). A Google Trends search for “Oman holidays” (accessed August 14, 2010) provides data trends that highlight the role of the English language in promoting the country as a tourist destination. Clients from countries such as United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Kingdom, Ireland, India, Australia, the Netherlands, United States, and even Oman itself did multiple searches for information “in English” about Oman as a tourist destination. Information written in English about Oman can now be accessed by people around the world.

The importance of English for Omani tourism promotion and marketing is then, the reason for investigating the underlying mechanisms and peculiar use of English which can produce positive effects. To unveil these mechanisms and features the authors share their views on how English works in the Omani tourist environment (e.g. road signs, shop signs, museum signs/labels/writings) and in informative materials (e.g. guidebooks, tourism websites, reviews, blogs, trip reports, and newspaper articles).

## Universal linguistic techniques and devices of tourism discourse: How they function in Oman

According to Graham Dann, the language of tourism is a great deal more than a metaphor. He says, that “via static and moving pictures, written texts and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings and, in doing so, converts them from potential into actual clients.” (Dann 1996: 2)

The language of tourism corresponds to different communication factors, among which, as identified by Graham Dann (1996), are 1) the communicative situation (time, place, setting) including its purpose; 2) the communicative partners, their (overlapping) background knowledge profiles (everyday knowledge and domain knowledge) seen from a neutral analyzing observer’s perspective, including their interest in the communication; 3) the communicative process structured in terms of the topic of the communication (if there is one) and the turns within the communicative exchange, and 4) the message referring to an understood topic and its intended meaning to fit the communicative purpose of the exchange. These communicative factors define the parameters of a rich panorama of tourism genres existing in Oman, including promotional material (advertisements, brochures and leaflets, Web pages, etc.) and linguistic tools.

In different tourism genres the language of tourism in Oman first and foremost utilizes diversified lexis carefully selected from general language. This lexis is characterized by a broad spectrum of topics on Oman’ culture, history, geography, traditions, shopping, etc. For example:

“The capital of the Sultanate of Oman is a *cosmopolitan city* with a *distinct flavor* of its own – a *perfect blend* of tradition and modernity. For the adventurous, it offers everything from dune bashing to deep sea diving and calm and pristine beaches for those who want to *unwind at leisure*. In addition to the authentic Arabian spread, a *varied international cuisine* is also available to *indulge* every palate. Combined with *bustling shopping malls* and plenty of activities for children, Muscat is great for families.

The *ideal destination for a perfect holiday* with lots of things to do and places to visit, or simply relax. Choose the hotel of your dream.” [Retrieved from [www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC\\_campaign/Beauty\\_Has%20An\\_Address.pdf](http://www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC_campaign/Beauty_Has%20An_Address.pdf)].

The vocabulary of the tourism texts also features evaluative forms that are used to to enhance communicative situations and promotional effects as in “Oman is a *wonderfully friendly* Arabian country easily accessed from nearby Gulf States like Dubai, Bahrain or Qatar”. [Retrieved from [www.timeless.com.au/?q=oman/oman-tourist](http://www.timeless.com.au/?q=oman/oman-tourist)].

Transliterated and/or translated into English Arabic words, Omani cultural terms and specifically-devised elements referring to the most specialised concepts of Omani culture are often employed, e.g. *Bedouin*, *souks* (markets), *Ahlan Wa Sahlan* (Welcome to Oman), *Omani dhow*, *wadi*, etc. These are used to promote Oman differently from other tourist destinations, creating the uniqueness of impressions and experiences as in “Pretend you *are Sindbad the Sailor* and experience a time past when traders sailed the oceans of the world on wooden dhows when you board our traditional Omani dhow.” [Retrieved from <http://www.holiday-in-oman.com/>]

The impression of authenticity (MacCannel (qtd. in Dann 1996: 14)) is also created by abundant explicit expressions that function as key modifiers of the English tourism discourse in Oman, recreating a relationship of authenticity between the tourist and what he/she will see (MacCannel 1989: 14). This technique can be exemplified by a wonderful description retrieved by the authors from Oman Air website: “The Sultanate of Oman is steeped in history and the magic of *timeless beauty*. Indeed it is a vibrant destination built on *timeless traditions*, rich culture and diverse landscapes. This is where the sun's rays first touch Arabia. It is a place where mountains reach into the clouds and nature abounds. Some say Beauty has an address – Oman” [[www.omanair.com/wy/oman\\_air\\_holidays/special\\_offers/free\\_night\\_in\\_oman.htm](http://www.omanair.com/wy/oman_air_holidays/special_offers/free_night_in_oman.htm)]

Cohen (1972) contends that the language of tourism often tries to convey to potential clients a sense of being different from what is familiar. (165) That is why tourism discourse often attempts to create an additional appeal for the senses and appreciation of the tourist destination: things, sights and cultures. To achieve this purpose lexis that implies different values characterizing tourist destinations and encompasses acceptance and respect. The emphasis is given to uniqueness and diversity, responsibility and preservation, and uninterrupted connection and succession of global and local customs, traditions and values. Therefore, such words as *diversity*, *diverse*, *unique*, *untouched*, *unspoilt*, *natural*, *responsible*, *local*, *tradition*, *timeless*, *traditional*, *modern*, *unsophisticated*, *old* are often used. For example: “the *splendid diversity* – that is Oman” [<http://www.omran.om/tourismInfo/MoTEnglish270909.pdf>] “With a history dating right back to 3000 BC, Oman's *unspoilt* land could tell a thousand tales.” [[www.zaharatours.com/oman\\_excursions.htm](http://www.zaharatours.com/oman_excursions.htm)]. “*Oman's natural* history is one of our greatest assets in promoting Oman as a unique tourism destination.” [[gulfnews.com/.../oman/natural-history-museum-of-oman-opens-1.649563](http://gulfnews.com/.../oman/natural-history-museum-of-oman-opens-1.649563)].

Quite interestingly the meaning of uninterrupted connection and succession in tourism texts, especially those posted on the internet, is quite often used for differentiation purposes as, for example, in the title of the article posted on Oman Tourism website “Away from the Gulf Glamour” or in some postings on the Instead of the sleek, glass-walled hotels of Dubai, Oman's tourism will showcase its nature and history. [[www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om)]. Oman is the Middle East's best-kept secret *where the ancient is still surviving and the new is rapidly growing*. [[www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om)]. Oman is known for its wadis, mountains, beaches and deserts. This place makes Oman *different* from its neighboring countries.

[[www.traveleguides.com/oman.php](http://www.traveleguides.com/oman.php)].

Among other values and messages that are conveyed are those of novelty and innovation, distance in time and space, incompatibility and exclusiveness, attractiveness and beauty. They are situated in tourism texts that utilize such words as *different, exotic, diversity, diverse, adventurous, remote, distant, far away, far off, exclusive, unique, unrivalled, new, colorful, picturesque, fascinating, spectacular, stunning, etc.* For example: “Rich in history and culture, Oman has beautiful mosques, *colorful* souqs and traditional festivals.” [[www.happytellus.com](http://www.happytellus.com)]. “Scenically *stunning* and culturally *fascinating* Oman is a brilliant family introduction to the Arabian Peninsula and Islamic world”. [[www.familiesworldwide.co.uk/.../oman.html](http://www.familiesworldwide.co.uk/.../oman.html)]. To attract future tourists’ gaze they focus on geographical diversity of the country and rich and pristine nature. For example: “Oman is a country of *diverse* geography with sandy and rocky deserts, fresh water oases and beautiful white sandy beaches.” [[gulf.destinations.starwoodhotels.com/oman.htm](http://gulf.destinations.starwoodhotels.com/oman.htm)]. “Oman's coral *diversity* — a paradise beneath the sea...” [[www.nizwa.net/.../omancoral/omancoral.html](http://www.nizwa.net/.../omancoral/omancoral.html)]. “Hiking along Oman's grand canyon, going wadi-bashing and a lake full of blind fish are all part of Oman's *exotic* charm”. [[www.talktalk.co.uk/travel/](http://www.talktalk.co.uk/travel/)]. “Oman with its stunning contrasts and picture-book enchantment has over the centuries been attracting *adventure* seekers from every nook”. [[www.nizwa.net/oman/.../cyclists.html](http://www.nizwa.net/oman/.../cyclists.html)]. “Diverse landscapes: Oman has fjords, deserts, pristine reefs and rugged mountains which attract the well-heeled, *adventurous* eco-tourist” [[www.asiaone.com/.../A1Story\\_20080411-59249.html](http://www.asiaone.com/.../A1Story_20080411-59249.html)]

The language of tourism, with its diverse but terminologically and stylistically accurate linguistic tools, not only promotes Oman’s cultural and natural attributes, but also connects countries, cultures and people, enhancing intercultural communication and linking modern processes of globalization and regionalization. This statement can be exemplified by a greeting “*The friendly Omanis warmly welcome a visitor*” on one of the famous Middle East websites [[www.happytellus.com](http://www.happytellus.com) > Middle East].

In addition to this role English as the language of tourism discourse in Oman is also used to acquaint the potential clients from all over the world with tourist destinations and services that are offered (Dann 1996) in the country. This can be exemplified by “Destination Oman” website classification [<http://www.destinationoman.com/discoverOman.html>]. It includes, for example, such practical rubrics as “Getting here (visas)”, “Airlines and Customs”, “Moving about”, “Hotels”, “Restaurants”, “Tour Operators”, “Car Rentals”, “Tours and Cruises”, “Shopping Malls”, “Traditional Markets”, “Handicrafts”, “Activities”, “Theaters”, “Movies”, “Health and Fitness”, “Discover Oman”.

The English language encourages clients to travel (Dann 1996). It appeals to tourists’ interests, hobbies and senses, “virtually” guides the future tourists and shapes their gaze. (Cappelli 2009) For example: Take a mysterious and charming vacation either on the budget or in luxury. [[travel.theholidayplace.co.uk/z%20oman%20package%20holidays.xhtml](http://travel.theholidayplace.co.uk/z%20oman%20package%20holidays.xhtml)]. Landscape: Oman's scenic beauty is spectacular – from stark desert outcrops and pristine beaches to green valleys and newly discovered underground caves all [[www.hotel-club-net.com/destination/oman.php](http://www.hotel-club-net.com/destination/oman.php)].

Via texts the English language advertises and communicates the unique and impeccable tourism landscape of Oman to the global tourism community. The resorts in Oman, for example, are called “exclusive” and “first class”. [[travel.theholidayplace.co.uk/z%20oman%20package%20holidays.xhtml](http://travel.theholidayplace.co.uk/z%20oman%20package%20holidays.xhtml)] Here the authors can refer to V. Karra, who in his article “Oman Tourism on Growth Trajectory” published in “Ohmy News”, writes:

“In order to promote Oman's tourism potential in other parts of the world, the Ministry of Tourism has adopted different marketing strategies to direct efforts toward strengthening its presence in the source markets and potential markets at the same time. The means followed by this strategy to promote effectively

the diverse attractions on offer in Oman include the dissemination of information through market-based representative offices in Dubai, London, Paris and Berlin. The media are also used extensively, especially in countries that represent good source markets, including newspapers, television channels, and specialized magazines and through the internet.” [Retrieved from [http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article\\_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=380636&rel\\_no=1](http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=380636&rel_no=1)].

To effectively perform these functions and to target a wide clientele metaphors are quite extensively exploited in the English tourism discourse. Oman is depicted as “hidden gem of Arabia”, “pearl of the Mystic Arabia”, “paradise”, etc. The following picturesque descriptions were retrieved by the authors from official and commercial websites on the internet.

“Described as *"Arabia's jewel"*, this city is a blend of the old and the new.” [<http://www.destinationoman.com/destinations.html>] “The Sultanate of Oman: *A Desert Banquet/ Arabian Wonder – Oman/ Fun and Sun along the Strait of Hormuz/the Sultanate of Oman, the Land of Frankincense.*” [<http://omanpocketguide.com/>] “Known as *the hidden gem of Arabia*, Oman is culturally rich and diverse.” [<http://www.holiday-in-oman.com/>] “Oman: *Land of traditions.*” [[www.muscatoverseas.com/.../packages1.ht](http://www.muscatoverseas.com/.../packages1.ht)]. “This *'Pearl of the Mystic Arabia'* is one of the oldest civilizations of the Arabian Peninsula and renowned for its friendly, smiling and polite people with a great legacy of hospitality.” [<http://www.unitedoman.com/index.php?page=thisisoman>]. “A true nature lovers’ paradise.” [[http://www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC\\_campaign/Beauty\\_Has%20An\\_Address.pdf](http://www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC_campaign/Beauty_Has%20An_Address.pdf)]

Moreover, metaphorical use of the linguistic tools can be also traced when the English language is used to visualize (Dann 2006) tourism discourse and personalize it. For example: “Hike through Oman's desert wadis (valleys) and mountains. Or take a 4WD trip across the huge dunes of the Wahiba Sands and explore Oman's fascinating desert.” [[www.britishairways.com/...oman/.../en\\_gb](http://www.britishairways.com/...oman/.../en_gb)] “And if you enjoy kite surfing this is an internationally acclaimed area with regular winds, warm water and safe waters.” [[www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC\\_campaign/Beauty\\_Has%20An\\_Address.pdf](http://www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC_campaign/Beauty_Has%20An_Address.pdf)]

Reflecting major sociological perspectives on modern tourism, i.e. the perspectives of authenticity, stranger hood, play and conflict that were described in detail by Dann (1996: 6-32), English in Oman contributes to the image of the country as a unique destination (qtd. in Dann 1996: 16). It showcases the country's values and attributes, highlighting it as a distinctive tourist destination that provides new travelling experiences (Dann 1996: 12-17) and introduces beautiful and stunning places.

## Promoting Oman: typical linguistic and pragmatic features

Indeed, any distinction based on lexis can reflect “at the same time the epistemological, semantic and functional features of a given variety of specialized discourse” (Gotti 2007: 20). For instance, tourism discourse is highly persuasive because as Maci (2007, p.3) states, the ultimate purpose of tourism discourse is “to sell a product by describing a reality which has to be perceived by the potential buyer – the tourist – as authentically and genuinely *off the beaten track* and which can therefore give the targeted people the illusion of *feeling* the holiday experience before actually living it, in line with their most optimistic expectations. Furthermore, the idea of something *off the beaten track* makes the product sound exclusive, thus providing added value.” Therefore, in order to better cater to the needs and wants of today's tourists, diverse interrelated linguistic means should be extensively exploited in

order to create such a language.

Example: A rich and fertile Land, Dhofar is the only region in the Gulf which receives the Khareef monsoon showers which fall from July to September. Salalah is perfect for a languid, relaxed holiday interspersed with many interesting places to see and lots of outdoor adventures. [http://www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC\_campaign/Beauty\_Has%20An\_Address.pdf]

Tourism discourse has also specific world-views to present in which, as clearly described by Knowles (1989: 59-61), evaluation can be expressed with modification, nominal selection and verbal strategies, namely with abundant use of adjectives (e.g. high-rise, world-class, upscale, ideal, attractive, etc.), phrases like “it is no wonder”, “small wonder”, “hardly surprising”, etc.

Example: Greater Muscat boasts *high-rise business properties* (but not too high), *world-class highways*, *upscale suburbs* rooted in traditional Islamic architecture, elegant mosques, large green parks, archaeological sites, museums and world-class hotels. *It is no wonder* that Muscat is increasingly becoming an *attractive tourist destination* among the world's travel going public.

[http://www.destinationoman.com/destinations.html]

As for lexis selection, probably the choice of adjectival items is the most prominent feature of tourism texts.

Example: Oman's *veritable* treasures, diversified geography and *brehtaking* scenery, *diverse* tourist attractions, *shining* pages of Omani history and civilization. The Sultanate of Oman is a country with an *enormous wealth* of natural attractions, *fascinating* culture, *stunning* landscape and *warm* welcoming people. [http://omanpocketguide.com/]

Another linguistic feature in tourism texts is the repeated use of imperatives conveyed by the so-called experiential verbs reflecting different kinds of experience and advice.

Example: What to see in Muscat? Sightseeing: *Visit* the Impressive Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, a religious landmark of Muscat showcasing the splendor of unique Islamic architecture. Outdoor Adventures: *Snorkel* or *dive* in the pristine waters of Bandar Khairan. *Go* Dolphin watching or relax on a dhow cruise off Muscat's rugged coast. [http://www.omanair.com/wy/media/GCC\_campaign/Beauty\_Has%20An\_Address.pdf]

Modal verbs that convey the ideas of possibility and certainty in the texts on tourism are also common.

Example: Under a clear blue sky, the narrow dirt road climbs straight up the barren rock of Jebel Harim, the highest peak in Oman's northern Hajar mountain range. *Look down and you can see* the sparkling turquoise waters of the Arabian Sea.

[http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/tourism/].

When possibility and certainty are conveyed, the reference to the “client” or “target consumer” (“you”) is often explicit.

Example: Oman's vibrant yet traditional capital city of Muscat where *you may visit* many excellent museums, the country's most spectacular mosque, participate in a calendar of traditional festivals day

and night, and enjoy the lifestyle of an Arab oil millionaire in some fabulous accommodations if you wish to afford them. If not, do walk through the public areas and grounds of a few luxury hotels, and you will sample how it feels without paying the bill.

[<http://www.travelwithachallenge.com/Oman.html>]

In terms of sociological perspectives (Dann 1996: 17 - 23) the evaluative component of tourism discourse can be linked with the descriptive component aimed at portraying Oman as a destination that provides tourists with special experiences.

Example: Muscat is green as green can be, and defies being classified as part of a desert country. The roads are lined with well-manicured green lawns and trees. During winter this is interspersed with a profusion of multicoloured flowers. The city has steadfastly retained its old-world character. Old Muscat has a quaint charm about it with many forts, castles, mosques and towers dotting the landscape. Of particular note are Jalali and Mirani forts flanking Al Alam Palace. The Corniche, with its promenade and souqs (markets) is one of the highlights of the city. The old souq of Muttrah is an *ideal spot* for tourists to buy keepsakes and treasures.

[<http://www.destinationoman.com/destinations.html>]

These detailed descriptions can be found in a variety of tourist genres, namely on websites, in tourist guides and museum information.

Example: Oman can boast of a number of museums, which provide information both in Arabic and in English, namely Bait Adam museum, the Currency Museum in the Central Bank of Oman, the Muscat Gate Museum, the Bait Al Baranda Museum, Bait Al Na'aman, Nakhal Fort Museum, the Salalah Museum, Sohar Fort, the Natural History Museum and many others.

[<http://www.destinationoman.com/destinations.html>]

Interestingly, tourism in Oman not only attempts to provide people with a chance to break away from everyday life and have exciting experiences (Dann 1996: 25-26) that can be traced in the language of promotional material, but it also provides them with some practical information, as in tourist guides.

Example: Oman is a Muslim country so it is important to observe a conservative dress code out of respect for the cultural norms. In public places, women should wear clothes that cover their upper arms and legs to the knee. It is necessary to cover hair when entering a mosque or other holy place, so carry an attractive scarf and you will fit right in. Men should wear long trousers and shirts. Of course, shorts, sun tops and swimwear are fine at the beach or by the hotel pool.

[<http://www.travelwithachallenge.com/Oman.html>]

One other linguistic tool evident in the discourse is the use of unique local and traditional items, to convey the exclusive quality of the described destinations. Such use is both evaluative and promotional. On websites, for instance, there are abundant beautiful descriptions as well as examples that speak of Oman's self-representation as a country of extreme beauty and of "*extraordinary environmental credentials*." (<http://www.omran.om/tourismInfo/MoTEnglish270909.pdf>).

Example: "God has favoured Oman with stunning natural resources worth visiting, and the Omani people want to share them with visitors to our country. We are proud of our extensive seas, clean and attractive beaches, *Aflajes* (traditional Omani water conduits for irrigation purposes) and *Wadis* (dried valleys),

and flowing water springs. There are towering mountains, full of lush green trees, flowers and plants, and a rich variety of animal life. You can visit vast stretches of sand and mountain caves and grottos, and last but not least the Salalah autumn." [Retrieved from the web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs <http://www.mofa.gov.om/mofanew/index.asp?id=20>]

*Mountain villages* clutched against canyon walls, clusters of dates weighing heavy in the plantation *oases*, a ribbon of sand blown across the *dunes*, a lone camel padding across the limitless interior - these are the kinds of images afforded by the beautiful and enigmatic country of Oman. [[http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/213/country\\_guide/Middle-East/Oman.html#ixzz0wZo5pKBs](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/213/country_guide/Middle-East/Oman.html#ixzz0wZo5pKBs)]

Another pragmatic feature gaining importance for all the participants of the local tourism community, including tourist service providers, current and future travelers, is the language of tourists' verbal accounts posted on internet sites. As a rule the language of such virtual reports is characterized by abundance of noun groups and adjectival phrases that mainly emphasize things, which tourists are presumed to desire, e.g. "aqua colored water", "pristine beaches", as in the following posting, "The humidity and heat slapped me in my face as soon as I got of the plane. I arrived in Muscat in the middle of the night, so I did not get to see any of the city until the next morning. I opened my blinds and almost fell off my feet. The unforgettable blinding view in front of me will always be burnt into my memory. Sun pouring over acres of lush gardens, aqua colored water of the Gulf of Oman, a deserted pristine beach down under the cliff and typical white oriental buildings in the background left me speechless." [<http://www.roadandtravel.com/travel%20directory/ravereviews/muscat-oman.htm>] These post-vacation reflections can be read by tourists considering Oman as a holiday destination and can therefore be seen as promotional. They are aimed at colorfully depicting Oman as a unique place and a must to visit. For example,

## Conclusion

Tourism discourse in Oman is currently formulated, written and structured mostly in English because of the global trends, market forces and prominence of English as the language of mass communication and internet.

As the language of tourism in Oman, English plays a primary role in the development of tourism industry and country's promotion. This role is not limited to acts of historical communication, namely communication about the Omani cultural heritage and socio-cultural artifacts. Stretching the boundaries of traditional tourism discourse, it presents a multifaceted burgeoning industry in Oman that focuses on promoting the country and mirroring its history and modernity, nature and wildlife.

By spreading the word, describing experiences and sharing information, English tourism discourse in Oman aims to raise awareness among visitors as well as receiving community about the cultural heritage and traditions, and natural beauty of the country. It acknowledges "mutual engagement" (Wenger 1998:78) of all discourse participants, well-being of the local people, and importance of promoting the country as an attractive tourist destination. Therefore, the overall framing of English tourism discourse in Oman is positive and mostly resorts to culture-inclusive topics. However, sometimes, it can be characterized by hyperbole. Such situation might raise the expectations of the visitors and work counter to the objectives of the promotional rhetoric. More balanced and critically evaluated language is perhaps needed to maintain objectivity, and provide a true image of the country.

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