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Accessible Tourism Discourse and the Pandemic

Linguistic Resilience and Communicative Strategies in the Promotion of *Tourism for All*

Abstract

Since its outbreak in Asia in 2019, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has represented an unprecedented challenge for the tourism sector. In addition to the income losses due to travel restrictions and constantly-changing public health protocols, the uncertainty related to the rapid and increasing evolution of the pandemic has inevitably forced tourism operators to rethink how their work is organised and develop new approaches and procedures for planning and promoting their activities. In this scenario, tourists with disabilities have been hit even harder by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, since they have generally been excluded from the main communication channels during the pandemic (UNWTO 2020c). However, more inclusive and accessible approaches by tourism operators could become a profitable opportunity to reboot their activities and overcome the critical effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in a contemporary and future perspective.

This study will focus on how tourism discourse is tackling the challenges of the pandemic in the promotion of accessible holidays and Covid-19 related information. By means of discourse analysis and corpus-based methodologies, we will take into consideration the main linguistic and pragmatic features characterising a corpus of promotional web resources employed by public and private operators working in the field of accessible tourism. The research aims to identify and highlight the most effective communicative strategies employed in this sector during the pandemic, in order to understand how language may potentially contribute to a more resilient response to the current tourism crisis. Results will show that verbal and non-verbal resources are the main tools strategically co-employed by accessible tourism operators to instil new trust in the sector, to comply with constantly-changing national and international public health advice and government rules and, at the same time, to ensure safety and social inclusion to visitors and travellers with disabilities.

Keywords: *accessible tourism discourse, Covid-19 recovery, inclusion*

1. Accessible tourism and the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic

Accessible tourism is a branch of tourism that enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing, and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery and the use of universally-designed tourism products, services, and environments. Accessible tourism aims to allow people to independently overcome—or avoid—any sort of barrier or impediment which could hinder a holiday experience or any other leisure activity, such as visiting a museum, going to a restaurant, using public transport and so on (Darcy and Dickson 2009; Lovelock and Lovelock 2013). Accessible tourism encompasses a very wide range of beneficiaries, including both people with temporary or permanent disabilities and other population groups that may experience accessibility issues at some point in their lives, such as people with pushchairs or prams, caregivers, the elderly, people with allergies and/or food intolerances, people with mobility difficulties (for example injured or obese people) or cognitive issues (e.g. transient aphasia) and so on (UNWTO 2016a). The demand for accessible tourism services is constantly escalating, considering the current and ever-increasing rate at which the population is ageing, particularly in western, developed countries, and the corresponding growth in the number of people with age-related disabilities (WHO 2011). As also recalled by recent guidelines issued by the World Tourism Organization, “by 2050, 1 out of 6 people will be aged more than 65. 1 in 4 persons living in Europe and North America could be aged 65 or over. In Asia and the Pacific, the market size is of 690 million people and in Latin America and the Caribbean this figure reaches 85 million people” (UNWTO 2020c, 6). More than 250 million persons over sixty already have a moderate to severe disability and, in general, it is estimated that 15% of the global population currently lives with some form of disability (UNWTO 2016a; 2020c). Accessible tourism represents therefore an important and profitable sector for the tourism industry, capable of generating incomes of over 58 billion US dollars in the United States, 10 billion Australian dollars in Australia (UNWTO 2020b), and over 400 million euros in Europe, corresponding to 3% of the European GDP, and supporting approximately nine million jobs (EC 2015). More specifically, the European Accessible Tourism market comprises more than 80 million people (130 million if we add senior citizens and accompanying persons). Around 70% of people with disabilities in the European Union are financially and physically able to travel and their average holiday expenditure is higher than those tourists without any disability (Bowtell 2015; European Commission 2015; Fundación ONCE 2017; UNWTO 2020c).

However, since March 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak has strongly affected the tourism industry and its accessibility sector. The UNWTO has estimated between 910 US\$ billion to 1.2 US\$

trillion lost in exports and 850 million to 1.1 billion fewer international tourists (UNWTO 2020b, 2). Furthermore, data relating to 2021 international tourist arrivals are expected to be even worse, as can be elicited from the percentages reported in Figure 1 below.

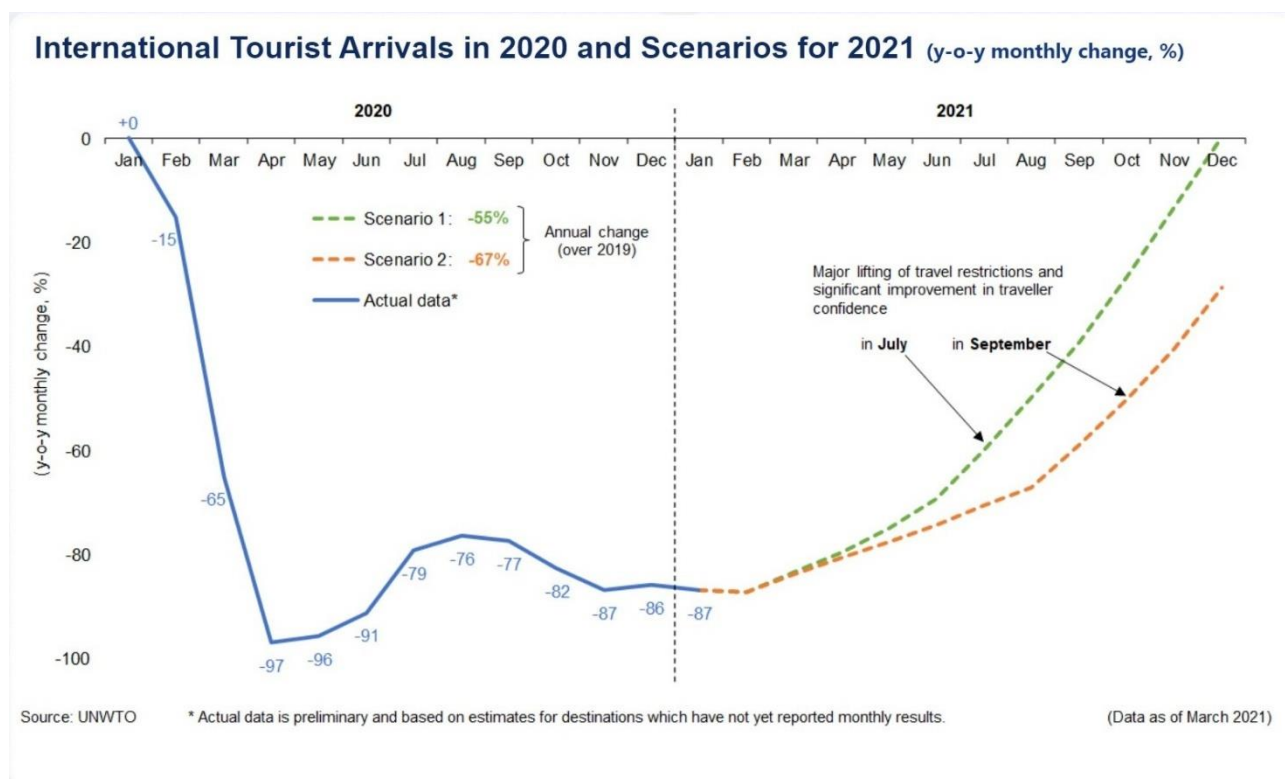


Fig. 1: UNWTO provisional data relating to International Tourist arrivals in 2020 and 2021. (UNWTO 2021)

The European Travel Commission (ETC 2020, 19) pointed out that the main concerns following the impact of Covid-19 on the tourism industry relate to “the financial health of companies, [...] the effect this unprecedented crisis could have on jobs [and] the decline in tourist visits,” and the consequent loss of revenue. Thus, to ensure tourism recovery and prevent any further damage to businesses, it is important to restore “confidence to travel” (ETC 2020, 20) among domestic and international visitors, by taking all possible measures allowing tourism operators to swiftly adapt and react to sudden changes in public health protocols or possible successive waves of the coronavirus.

Inevitably, the accessible tourism sector has also been affected by the impact of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, and tourists with disabilities have been hit even harder, since they have generally been “excluded from communications on public health and travel updates, decision-making and information on accessibility of basic tourism services” (UNWTO 2020c, 3). However, as pointed out by the main international organizations involved in the creation of measures to contain the

spread of the virus and mitigate its tragic economic effects, inclusive and accessible approaches in tourism could become a profitable opportunity to reboot their activities and overcome the critical effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, in a contemporary and future perspective. In particular, the UNWTO has recently issued a series of recommendations and guidelines (2020a, 2020b, 2020c) that encourage tourism operators to “see travellers with disabilities, seniors and families with young children as important source markets for their businesses to thrive again,” and to consider accessibility “not as a favour to visitors with access requirements, but rather a game-changer for businesses, helping them to combat the effects of COVID-19” (UNWTO 2020c, 3). The UNWTO suggests that travel destinations and companies “treat accessibility as a competitive advantage” in their business planning, by “designing inclusive experiences and personalised services” in order to “accommodate the widest range of potential visitors,” thus “embracing a greater diversity of clients” and, consequently, safeguarding and reinforcing “economic sustainability” (UNWTO 2020c, 4-5). Great attention is also given to communicative accuracy for the improvement of travel accessibility, suggesting the use of “large print, easy reading, simple language, subtitles, audio descriptions and Braille [...], translations into widely spoken languages and sign languages,” in order to update information and reach a larger number of tourists. The crucial role of information provision is also recognised in the management of the tourism response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular within the accessible tourism sector, for which the UNWTO specifically urges operators to:

- Update information, instructions and alerts in accessible, easy-to-read, and clear language formats so that any client with specific access requirements knows how to proceed;
- Extend the use of Braille signage and disinfect regularly as it is frequently touched. Provide alternatives for new aural announcements (subtitled videos, images, pictograms, QR codes, voice announcement systems in lifts) [...];
- Make all webpages and Apps accessible and include all accessibility-related information at these platforms, especially those related to Covid-19 travel advice and warnings [...];
- Maintain effective communication between tour-operators & travel agencies and other service providers, so that clients with specific requirements can be advised on their travel decisions. (UNWTO 2020a, 3-4).

In addition, the UNWTO (2020b) underlines the importance of specialised marketing campaigns, reliable and easy-to-access information on health and travel protocols, sustainable tourism experiences and the use of innovative digital technologies, and new communicative approaches in order to restart tourism, suggesting for instance that stakeholders:

- Regularly revise travel restrictions & protocols using the best available information from leading international health authorities to ensure they remain proportionate to the public health threat and local risk assessment;
- Enhance the use of technology for safe, seamless, and touchless travel [...];
- Inform guests about existing protocols in an easy and updated manner [...];
- Develop segmented and sustainable products focused on nature, rural areas, and culture [...];
- Introduce storytelling for creating new tourism experiences;
- Create personalised and small group tours and packages [...];
- Provide reliable, consistent & easy-to-access information on protocols to the private sector and to travellers [...];
- Create programmes and campaigns to incentivise the domestic market in cooperation with the private sector (incentive schemes, possible revision of holiday dates, transport facilities, vouchers, etc.) and to integrate destinations;
- Promote new products & experiences targeted at individual & travellers in small groups, for instance: special interest, nature, rural tourism, gastronomy & wine, sports, etc.;
- Enhance and communicate medical capacity & protocols at the destination. (UNWTO 2020b, 10-26).

Several other important international organisations have also issued specific guidelines and protocols to promote accessibility as one of the key factors for tourism recovery. For instance, the International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO) has outlined some general recommendations to tourism providers for welcoming people with disabilities during a health crisis such as Covid-19, emphasising the importance of professional training and clear communication in order to achieve both the inclusion of people with disabilities and “good conditions of safety for everyone” to ensure the reopening of the tourism sector (ISTO 2020, 2), mentioning the need to:

1. Train all stakeholders within the tourism sector on accommodating and looking after people with a disability, cognitive disorder, or medical/health-related condition [...]
2. Apply the care protocols taking into account people with a disability, cognitive disorder, or medical/ health-related condition including the measures to be taken in cases of suspected Covid-19;
3. Have a clear, simple and adapted communication policy for the various groups of people with a disability, cognitive disorder, or medical/health-related condition;
4. Inform, via all means of communication of the accessibility conditions of tourist services, and include information on the established adapted sanitary measures. [...] (ISTO 2020, 5).

The European Travel Commission (ETC) has also outlined the importance of communication as one of the main strategies for recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, also from a business-to-business perspective, suggesting in particular to:

- Promote destinations and experiences that match with consumer sentiment, and ease of access (leisure market, outdoor tourism and less crowded destinations);
- Provide updated practical advice on ‘How to plan your visit’ in light of social distancing and hygiene measures
- Plan and implement domestic marketing campaigns (ETC 2020, 21).

To sum up, it is evident that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed people’s behaviour in unprecedented ways, particularly in the tourism sector. New trends are emerging in the demand for tourist services, due to both fears about the economy, which lead consumers to increase their “precautionary savings” and reduce “leisure spending,” and to greater concerns around personal health and wellbeing, pushing tourists to prefer short-haul destinations and more sustainable tourist products, such as outdoor attractions, private accommodation, low-density activities, and so on (ETC 2020, 29). As noted by Fernandes (2020, 18) “countries that have a larger tourism sector [...] will be more severely affected than countries that are more industry-focused.”

Therefore, with the current and prospective impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism market must inevitably and rapidly adapt its business approaches to restart its recovery, shifting from the provision of mass-tourism services to “a more environmentally and socially sustainable” model of tourism development (ETC 2020, 29). In this perspective, the accessible tourism sector, which already represents a model of social adaptation and sustainability, has further adapted its business and operational protocols to the challenges imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in the communicative approaches of its promotional materials. Indeed, as affirmed by Castro and Casais (2020, 5) “besides the design of an accessible destination that provides a tourism experience adapted to disabled tourists, it is crucial to efficiently communicate that offer,” particularly by means of digital and online resources, as they represent the main and most accessible source of information for travellers with disabilities (Castro and Casais 2021; UNWTO 2016b).

However, literature on accessible tourism “lacks a critical scholarly debate around its specific language use and nomenclatures” (Gillovic et al. 2018, 1). There are several studies on the varying terminologies adopted by scholars to define disabled people and disabilities (Coopman 2003; Gillovic et al. 2018; Goodwin, Thurmeier and Gustafson 2004; Iwarsson and Ståhl 2003). Nonetheless, literature in the field focuses mainly on issues of physical accessibility or economic feasibility of accessible tourism destinations (Cruces Portales 2015; Darcy, Cameron and Pegg 2010; Shaw and Coles 2004), or on the management of travellers with sensory or physical impairments in specific tourist sites (Buhalis, Darcy and Ambrose 2012; Dann 2001; Naniopoulos et al. 2015; Richards et al. 2010). The gap is even more evident when considering specifically the promotion of accessible tourism during the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, as

the ever-changing spread of the Coronavirus is rapidly and constantly affecting all aspects of tourism promotion and organisation.

The following analysis will try therefore to fill this gap by focusing on how tourism discourse is tackling the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in the promotion of accessible holidays and concurrent provision of Covid-19 related information, in order to understand how language and multimodal communicative approaches may potentially contribute to a more resilient response to the current tourism crisis, capable of instilling new trust in the sector, conforming to constantly-changing national and international public health advice and government rules and, at the same time, ensuring safety and social inclusion to visitors and travellers with disabilities.

2. Accessible tourism discourse and the pandemic

2.1 Methods and research goals

In the following paragraphs, we will analyse the main linguistic and pragmatic features characterising the promotion of accessible holidays and tourist attractions during the Covid-19 pandemic. By means of multi-methodical approaches entailing both critical and multimodal discourse analyses (Fairclough 2012; Kress 2012; Lemke 2001; Wodak and Meyer 2009), we will take into consideration the main communicative strategies employed by a private tour operator and a public tourist attraction in the promotion of an accessible tourism product and the concurrent provision of Covid-19 information on their websites. We will also provide an additional corpus-based study on a selection of collocations and collocates taken from a corpus of accessible tourism promotional texts collected after the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which will be identified and studied by means of the Sketch Engine online text analysis tools. For convenience of analysis, the research will be limited to two specific case studies, chosen casually as representative examples of accessible tourism promotional materials employed by private and public tourism operators, and on a selection of collocations and collocates of three lemmas relating to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, namely: *Coronavirus*, *COVID*, and *COVID-19*. The main research goal will be that of providing a clear and comprehensive analytical perspective, entailing both linguistic and multimodal aspects of accessible tourism promotion, in order to:

- Identify and outline the most common and effective communicative features employed in this sector since the spread of Covid-19;
- Understand to what extent accessible tourism is complying with safety regulations and international protocols for tourism recovery;

- Assess how accessible tourism discourse is resiliently adapting its communicative and promotional approaches to respond to the challenges imposed by the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

2.2 Case study 1: a private tour operator – Enable Holidays website

The first case study taken into consideration will be that of the *Enable Holidays* website. *Enable Holidays* is a British tour-operator, based in Birmingham, which offers a wide selection of national and international accessible holidays addressed, in particular, to the needs of mobility-impaired people, their families and friends. It provides holiday planning services, trained staff and detailed accessibility information concerning accommodation, transport facilities, accessibility of services and attractions around the tourist location, etc.

As can be observed in Figure 2 below, the *Enable Holidays* website is designed with a very clear layout, including: specific accessible reading features (e.g. an interactive text-size tool, to enlarge or reduce character size; intuitive icons relating to specific tourist services, such as adapted taxi transfers, disabled parking, electronically-operated beds, wheel-in showers, etc.); a clear organisation of the main menu contents (i.e. destinations, holiday types, blog, contact info, etc.), presented horizontally in the upper part of the page and in the lower section of the home page. The home page also presents specific interactive sections dedicated to accessible package holidays provided by this tour operator: these are marked with adequate colour contrast, to increase legibility, and can be easily accessed also by clicking on attractive images of tourist sites accompanied by alternative text, thus applying the Universal Design¹ principles

¹ Universal Design (UD), or Design for All refers to “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design,” with “the intent to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by as many people as possible at little or no extra cost.” UD originated in architecture, but was later applied to many other fields of knowledge, including information technology, education, marketing and communication. Its founding seven principles include:

1. equitable use, to make a product useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities;
2. flexibility in use, to accommodate any possible range of individual preferences and abilities;
3. simple and intuitive use, to ensure a product is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or concentration abilities;
4. perceptibility of information, to provide the amount and type of information effectively needed by the user, regardless of ambient conditions or user's sensory abilities;
5. tolerance for error, to minimise hazard and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions;
6. low physical effort, to make sure the product can be used efficiently and comfortably by any user;

of simple and intuitive use, perceptibility of information, flexibility, and the UNWTO recommendations for the creation of accessible web pages.²

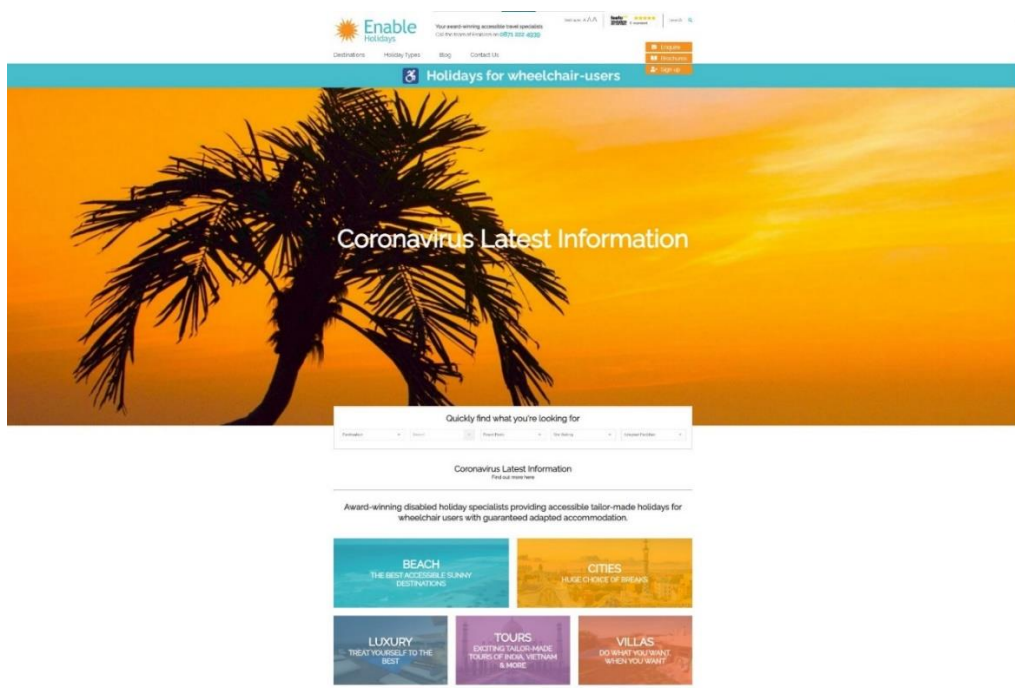


Fig. 2: *Enable Holidays* website home page

Among the interactive images at the top of the home page, there is one picture displaying a captivating landscape with a palm-tree and a sunset in the background (see Figure 2 above), which provides a direct hyperlink to a section dedicated to Coronavirus information. This choice clearly exploits one of the typical visual techniques of tourism promotion, with the strategic

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7. appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility. (Center for Universal Design, 1996)

² In 2016, the UNWTO issued detailed guidelines on how to provide accessible information in tourism through a series of recommendation relating to specific textual typologies, namely: printed materials, digital documents, audio-visual contents, websites, tourism apps, self-service terminals, mobile/smart devices and signage. In particular, for what concerns digital documents and websites, the UNWTO recommends to create digital documents with coherent structuring of headings, titles, lists and textual contents, including written descriptions as alternative text for images, diagrams or charts and hyperlinks (UNWTO 2016b, 11-12), and to design websites by following the principles of perceptibility (to make sure that a website is usable regardless of a customer's ability to see, hear or touch), operability (to provide functional and independent controls and navigation), simple and intuitive use (to ensure all web contents are easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or concentration abilities) and robust compatibility with current and future web devices and tools (UNWTO 2016b, 14-15).

creation of compositional meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). In this specific instance, compositional meaning is represented by a palm tree placed at the centre of the image and the use of colours that call to mind exotic and relaxing destinations, thus triggering the tourists' imagination and his/her desire to travel and enjoy unique holiday experiences. This kind of images performs an interactive representation of meaning between the producers and viewers (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006), by means of a picture that portrays the offer of ideal, intimate destinations; at the same time, this picture manages to perform a useful perlocutionary effect by attracting and directing the potential tourists' attention to the specific website section dedicated to the provision of Covid-19 travel information.

In addition to pursuing these persuasive metafunctions, another highly likely intention behind the tour operator's choice of this image was that of using such a striking and inspiring picture to counterbalance the potential negative effects and degrees of anxiousness associated with providing information on the current Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, once redirected to the section dedicated to the Coronavirus information, a welcoming message invites prospective *Enable Holidays* customers to "Book with Confidence." The use of the imperative mode and the employment of the word *confidence* are not casual in this sentence, as they clearly aim to instil a sense of trust and safety in travelling and booking holidays again, despite the Coronavirus pandemic (see Figure 3 below). This is done by establishing a direct contact with customers, with ego-targeting techniques that include lexical devices typical of a conversational style (i.e. imperatives) and reassuring keywords (i.e. *confidence*).

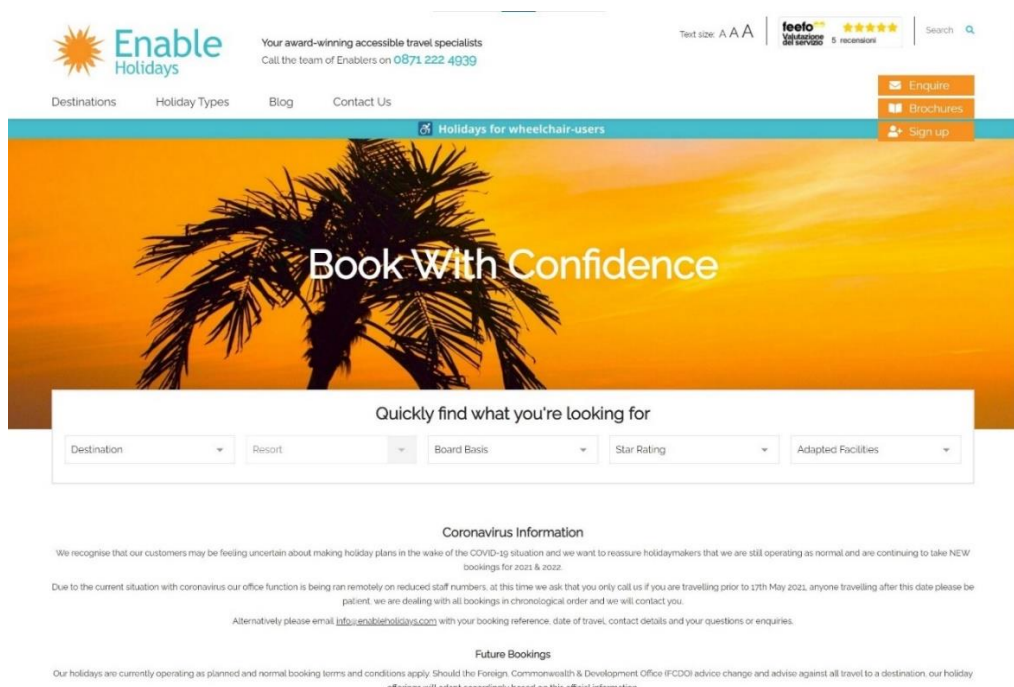


Fig. 3: *Enable Holidays* website—section on Coronavirus latest information—partial screenshot

As pointed out by the main international tourism organisations, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and accessible tourism promotion, tourism operators need to promote experiences that can meet the health and safety needs of travellers, but also, and above all, they need to build and reinforce trust in travelling despite the uncertainty of the pandemic. The *Enable Holiday* website meets these recommendations with a well-judged combination of visual and verbal elements, drawing in particular on phrases and keywords that convey sensations of protection and safety, trust in the future, resistance, and resilience, as reported in the following examples (my emphasis in italics):

- Protection and safety:
 - (1) We want to *reassure* holiday makers
 - (2) You will always be financially *protected*
 - (3) Enable Holidays always has *its* customers best interests at the forefront
 - (4) [specific links to official information provided by reliable institutions, namely: the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO); the Association of British Travel Agencies (ABTA); the Travel Health Pro website, dedicated to the travel health resources of the National Travel Health Network and Centre; the World Health Organisation and the UK Government official website dedicate to the Coronavirus emergency]
- Trust in the future:
 - (5) *Future* bookings
 - (6) You have a holiday to *look forward to in the future*
 - (7) [We] are continuing to take *NEW bookings for 2021 & 2022*
- Resistance and resilience:
 - (8) *In the wake* of the COVID-19 situation
 - (9) We are still operating *as normal* and...
 - (10) Offerings will *adapt* accordingly

To sum up, the simultaneous and strategic “combination of language, visual media and dynamic–interactive effects” (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 25), such as the ones employed by the *Enable Holidays* website, contributes to “inform, attract and persuade the potential tourist at the pre-trip stage” (Manca 2016, 7), complying also, and at the same time, with international protocols for tourism recovery by means of updated information, instructions, and alerts related to Covid-19 travel advice, which are provided in accessible, easy-to-read, and clear language formats (ETC 2020; UNWTO 2020b).

Therefore, in the current context of accessible tourism promotion, the co-deployment of visual, verbal and multimodal items for the promotion of accessible destinations and experiences and the provision of clear and updated Covid-19 travel advice by means of accessible, communicative formats, such as the ones identified in the *Enable Holidays* website, allow an effective communication between accessible tourism operators and prospective clients. In this manner, the resulting multifunctional and multimodal combination of different types of narratives (Fairclough 2012; Kress 2012) facilitates the promotion of accessible tourism products and the concurrent provision of consistent, updated and easy-to-access information on the pandemic.

2.3 Case study 2: a public tourist attraction – the Field Museum website

The *Field Museum of Natural History*, based in Chicago (US), is one of the world's most important natural history museums. It was opened in 1894 and hosts nearly forty million artefacts and specimens, ranging from archaeological and geological findings, to botanic, mycological and zoological materials. The museum’s mission is to “inspire curiosity about life on Earth while exploring how the world came to be and how we can make it a better place.” The *Field Museum* website includes a specific section dedicated to its accessibility services, which will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

The accessibility section of the *Field Museum* website has a very simple layout, with adequate colour contrast between texts, icons and background, designed with white characters and symbols on a blue background in the top bar, and black characters on white background in the central part of the page, to increase legibility and easy identification of its contents. The upper bar of the accessibility section displays the museum logo, intuitive icons related to the most practical services for visiting the museum and its website (i.e. search and language option icons), and other links related to practical museum and website features, such as ticket-purchase service, museum membership, and store or the website main menu, as shown in Figure 4 below.

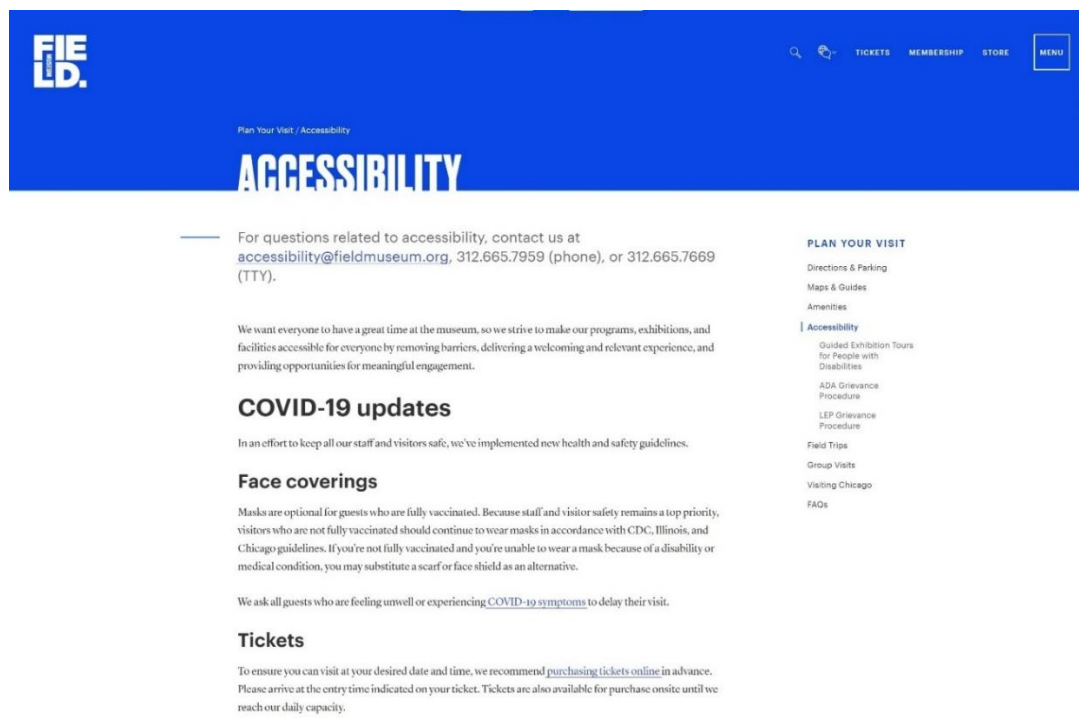


Fig. 4: Accessibility section of the *Field Museum* website—partial screenshot

The central part of the accessibility section describes the various facilities offered by the museum to its visitors with disabilities, employing a very clear language characterised by short sentences, a simple lexicon, and an appropriate amount of relevant accessibility information, in particular relating to: mobility and wheelchair-borrowing services, accessible entrances,³ parking, restrooms, ticketing procedures, transport options to/from the museum, etc. Moreover, on the upper-right corner of this page there is a list of specific accessibility services and information provided by the museum, namely: guided Exhibition Tours for People with Disabilities; ADA Grievance Procedure; LEP Grievance Procedure, whose specific details can be accessed simply by clicking on the corresponding hyperlinks.

All these features make the *Field Museum* website thoroughly functional and accessible to visitors with disabilities, by means of a visual grammar (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) that combines verbal and non-verbal items through a coherent structuring of textual contents, symbols, images, and hyperlinks, thus ensuring simple and intuitive use, efficient operability and adequate perceptibility of information, and applying important UD principles and the main

³ Entrance accessibility is also described by means of a dedicated image (with alternative text) showing the outside the *Field Museum*'s East entrance, thus further increasing perceptibility of information, simple, and intuitive layout.

UNWTO recommendations on the provision of accessible information in tourism (UNWTO 2016b).

Within the *Field Museum* accessibility contents, specific attention is also given to the Covid-19 protocols implemented by the museum, by means of clear, updated information about the museum's health and safety guidelines entailing, in particular: face coverings and safety advice while visiting the museum, ticketing options, wheelchair sanitising processes and safe employment of elevators. The language used to provide this kind of information is characterised by an essential and colloquial style, which emphasises the degree of safety and stress-free experiences for all visitors to the museum. Texts include both references and hyperlinks to official protocols and the websites of public health agencies (see examples 11 to 14 below, my emphasis in italics), and persuasive, conversational features to directly address readers and put them at ease, with the aim of encouraging visits to the museum. These features comprise the use of first and second person (plural and singular), interjections and abbreviations (see examples 11 and 14 to 20 below, my emphasis in italics).

- (11) In an effort to *keep all our staff and visitors safe, we've implemented new health and safety guidelines.*
- (12) *Staff and visitor safety remain a top priority*
- (13) In accordance with *CDC, Illinois, and Chicago guidelines*
- (14) *We ask all guests who are feeling unwell or experiencing COVID-19* symptoms to delay their visit.* [hyperlink redirecting to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, the US public health agency, under the Department of Health and Human Service]*
- (15) *We want everyone to have a great time at the museum*
- (16) *We can't wait to see you at the museum!*
- (17) To ensure *you can visit at your desired date and time*
- (18) *First-come, first-served basis*
- (19) *We've implemented*
- (20) If *you're* not fully vaccinated and *you're* unable to wear a mask

As for the previous case study, the *Field Museum* website and its dedicated *Accessibility section* manage to combine persuasive textual contents and accessible non-verbal elements, such as symbols, images, and hyperlinks, to create a multidimensional discourse able to enhance “the pull of the destination and producing in the receiver the desire to go there and have a unique experience” (Maci 2012, 154), besides informing and reassuring visitors about Covid-19 safety procedures. The language employed in the *Accessibility section* of the *Field Museum* website promotes a safe and entertaining tourist experience, making use of persuasive expressions and exploiting an informal and conversational style, in order to establish a direct contact with the texts’ addressees, while providing clear and relevant information on the measures implemented by the museum to reduce the risks related to the pandemic. These features ensure a pleasant, safe, and accessible experience and maintain the typical referential and persuasive functions of promotional tourist texts (Manca 2009), in compliance with the recommendations for tourism recovery suggested by the main international tourism organisations (ETC 2020; UNWTO 2020a; 2020c).

2.4 Additional corpus-based data

To further complete the results attained from the two specific case studies analysed in the previous paragraphs, the following section will present some preliminary data emerging from a corpus of accessible tourism promotional texts collected after the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, namely the *Accessible Tourism Corpus – COVID-19 data* (henceforth: ATC-C19).⁴ The ATC-C19 is a relatively small-scale corpus, due to its high specificity and its open status: texts have been collected since December 2020, by downloading contents from the websites of accessible tourism operators, destinations or organisations providing Covid-19 related information for disabled travellers, to investigate the potential variations of the linguistic features characterising the promotion of accessible tourism during the pandemic. At the moment of writing, the ATC-C19 includes over 43,400 tokens and over 6,300 unique words, including unique types and non-words (i.e. tokens which do not start with a letter of the alphabet, such as numbers, punctuation, etc.). All texts in the ATC-C19 are written in English

⁴ The ATC-C19 is an open sub-corpus included in larger corpus data collected within an ongoing research project dedicated to the language of accessible tourism, namely “The Language of Accessible Tourism–socio-cultural, linguistic and translational perspectives in the promotion of Tourism for All”. The project aims to identify and assess the features of accessible tourism promotional discourse through multiple socio-cultural and linguistic approaches. <https://dissuf.uniss.it/it/ricerca/aree-di-ricerca/language-accessible-tourism-socio-cultural-linguistic-andtranslational-perspectives-promotion-tourism-all>. All websites last visited on 25/06/2021.

and have been analysed by means of Sketch Engine online tools. For this specific research, we focused on a preliminary concordance and collocational analysis of lemmas relating to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, namely: *Coronavirus*, *COVID* and *COVID-19*. Concordance lines and collocates have been selected by means of the relevant Sketch Engine tools and are reported in Table 1 below.

Lemma: <i>CORONAVIRUS</i>	
1.	<i>CORONAVIRUS TIER 1 MEDIUM ALERT gov.uk/coronavirus</i>
2.	<i>CORONAVIRUS TIER 2 HIGH ALERT gov.uk/coronavirus</i>
3.	<i>CORONAVIRUS TIER 3 VERY HIGH ALERT gov.uk/coronavirus</i>
4.	<i>CORONAVIRUS TIER 4 STAY AT HOME gov.uk/coronavirus</i>
5.	<i>CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION-Good To Go</i>
6.	<i>CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION - We are Open - Good To Go</i>
7.	<i>Coronavirus Updates - We are happy to confirm that all of our holiday dates from June 2021 onwards are still scheduled to go ahead</i>
8.	If you are feeling unwell or experiencing symptoms associated with Coronavirus (Covid-19) <i>you will not be permitted entry to Hyde Hall.</i>
Lemma: <i>COVID</i>	
9.	and our COVID terms will apply regarding tour transfer options
10.	Covid Vaccine Guidance: We recommend that all guests have had at least their first COVID vaccine before coming onto our tours
11.	COVID - Ensuring Your Safety - In response to the ever-changing government advice, we have a team dedicated to ensuring we are following all the latest government requirements
12.	If you have not received a vaccine prior to joining one of our tours, we will require you to provide a negative COVID test result within 48 hours of departure
13.	Please find our updated guidance and what this means for bookings with us below: Covid Vaccine & Testing Guidance
14.	<i>Should you test positive for COVID prior to your tour, you must advise us by email immediately at</i>
15.	whether you have had the vaccine or not, <i>please ensure that you also get a COVID test prior to departure for the safety of all guests on the tour</i>
Lemma: <i>COVID-19</i>	
16.	Alongside our updated guidance above, we will of course continue to <i>follow the COVID-19 procedures currently in place</i> on all of our tours to ensure your safety throughout, including: - Hand sanitiser

-
17. Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms so will be spreading the virus without realising. We must all take action to protect each other and
-
18. *As soon as the government loosens the COVID-19 measures, you will be able to enjoy our guided tours again*
-
19. *COVID-19 IMPORTANT NOTICE* - Some tours are not yet available and there is yet no certainty about when it will be safe to travel again to a specific country.
-
20. COVID-19 Mask Policy - *Masks are required* for all guests and Team Members while they are in the park
-
21. Covid-19 Safety Measures and Visitors with Disabilities - *Face coverings are required* for all visitors over the age of 2
-
22. COVID-19 INFORMATION In recognition that this business has confirmed that they have *followed government and industry COVID-19 guidelines*, ensuring processes are in place to maintain cleanliness and aid social/physical distancing
-
23. *COVID-19 measures Take a stroll, get some fresh air, go around the block... at the museum. We are so glad to see you again*
-
24. Covid-19 update - The situation for travelers who wish to visit Valencia from abroad is this: the country has been open to foreign visitors
-
25. *Due to current COVID-19 restrictions*, all guided tours are currently suspended
-
26. *Due to COVID-19 restrictions* this program is not available at this time
-
27. *Due to COVID-19 restrictions*, there will be no competitions held at other resorts.
-
28. Exposure to COVID-19 is an inherent risk in any public location where people are present; we cannot guarantee you will not be exposed during
-
29. *Find more advice* on exploring Scotland during Covid-19 on *our dedicated page*.
-
30. For more information about *the COVID-19 virus and prevention measures*, go to www.infocoronavirus.be
-
31. In response to the continued roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine across the UK, *we have been closely reviewing our procedures to ensure that you can still enjoy your holiday*
-
32. *Making the magic of winter mountain experiences truly inclusive and accessible* and while COVID-19 has impacted on all our lives
-
33. People who show no symptoms can spread COVID-19 if they are infected, and any interaction with the general public poses an elevated risk of being exposed to COVID-19.
-
34. *Please note that due to health and safety measures following the Covid-19 outbreak*, some of our facilities and services may be limited at this time
-
35. Please note that during this time of reopening following the Covid-19 outbreak, there is extra signage to encourage physical distancing and also to identify one-way systems or areas which
-
36. Please note that some of the activities and the way we operate have changed, so that they are *in line with COVID-19 related guidance*
-

-
37. Please note that the activities we are offering have changed, so that they are in line with COVID-19 related guidance.
-
38. West Village Guide General Accessibility and *Covid-19 Precautions* - Some of the roads are uneven in places
-

Most frequent collocates

notice; measures; safety; vaccine; guidance; alert; mask; response; restrictions; symptoms

Tab. 1: List of concordances and most frequent collocates for the lemmas *Coronavirus*, *COVID* and *COVID-19* in the ATC-C19

The ACT-C19 concordances and collocates show a greater concern on safety measures and travel restrictions with respect to the previously analysed case studies, most likely due to the fact that many texts of the ATC-C19 corpus were collected during the early months of the current year, when the worldwide evolution of the pandemic was still at its peak. For example, in the concordance lines 1 to 4, 8, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 29, and 30 (my emphasis in italics), which were collected between December 2020 and February 2021, we can observe a predominant use of modals and verbs of obligation, imperatives, nominal phrases and impersonal syntactical patterns. These linguistic features manage to convey an official style to communication, which is functional to the provision of urgent information about the Coronavirus emergency in clear and authoritative ways.

Such a greater concern on emergency and on the need to ensure and comply with Covid-19 safety protocols is also confirmed by the list of the most frequent collocates retrieved in the concordances of the lemmas *Coronavirus*, *COVID* and *COVID-19*, reported at the end of Table 1: this includes terms relating to security procedures (i.e. *notice, measures, safety, guidance, alert, response*), health advice and protection tools (i.e. *vaccine, mask, restrictions, symptoms*).

By further analysing the ATC-C19 concordance lines, we can also notice references to official protocols for the prevention of Covid-19 (see lines 16, 25, 26, 27, 34, 36, and 38, my emphasis in italics) and links to websites of public health organisations and official tourism boards (see lines 1 to 4, 29, and 30, my emphasis in italics). These references and hyperlinks create a “dialectical relationship” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258) between the promotional dimension of accessible tourism discourse and the official narratives relating to the “the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s)” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258) currently dealing with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Furthermore, in the context of accessible tourism promotion, such a multileveled narration has the double-fold effect of supporting the correctness of information provided by tourism operators and creating new trust in the tourism sector, despite the uncertainty brought about by the

pandemic. Indeed, there are also some concordances (i.e. lines 5, 6, 7, 18, 23, 31, and 32, my emphasis in italics) which, consistent with the previously analysed case studies, report a more positive attitude towards the reopening of tourism and leisure activities. This is expressed by means of lexical and grammatical items typical of a colloquial style, including for instance the use of persuasive terms (e.g. *enjoy, magic*) and informal expressions (e.g. *Good To Go, Take a stroll, get some fresh air, go around the block, We are so glad to see you again*), which establish a direct interaction with the reader and do not overload travellers with further anxiety and unnecessary obstacles related to the Covid-19 emergency, as recommended by the UNWTO (2020a). These latter data seem to reflect the diachronic evolution of the pandemic also from a linguistic point of view, since the texts displaying such a more confident approach in tourism reopening were collected between April and May 2021, hence during the months in which national and international vaccine campaigns had finally started and the spread of the Coronavirus was gradually decreasing.

Therefore, the ATC-C19 preliminary linguistic data appear to reflect the unpredictability of the pandemic and of its related, constantly-changing safety measures, which are still influencing the restart and provision of tourism services and products. This confirms that “language use is a form of social practice” and that any discursive event is “socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258), suggesting the need for supplementary corpus data to better investigate, also from a diachronic perspective, the linguistic evolution that will accompany the forthcoming developments of accessible tourism discourse.

3. Conclusions

The analyses carried out in this study identified specific linguistic and multimodal features employed by institutional and commercial accessible tourism operators, drawing on critical discourse analysis and corpus-based methodologies, with the aim to highlight the most common and effective communicative strategies employed in this sector during the pandemic.

Results have shown that the accessible tourism sector is striving to respond to the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on global tourism, by means of discourse patterns aimed at conveying both correct information about safety and travel procedures and a functional promotion of accessible tourist services, with an overall resilient attitude in continuing to ensure safe and inclusive holidays to travellers with disabilities, despite the unpredictable evolution of the pandemic. Since the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the promotion of *Tourism for All* has been constantly adapting its resources, mainly adopting strategic combinations of visual, verbal and hypertextual elements, to trigger positive feelings and emotions in their target

readers and increase tourism recovery, and to provide updated and reliable information on the pandemic without burdening prospective tourists with unnecessary obstacles and anxiety, in compliance with Covid-19 safety regulations and international tourism protocols. The co-deployment of verbal and non-verbal items characterising the data analysed in this research, therefore confirms the importance of recognising all the aspects of communicative contexts to understand and create functional text meaning, particularly for multimodal genres such as tourism promotional websites.

As affirmed by the UNWTO and other important international tourism organisations, the tourism industry needs to place inclusivity at the centre of its future business plans, not only for ethical reasons, but also, and above all, because accessibility can represent a real business opportunity for tourist destinations and tourism operators (UNWTO 2020c, 3). For these reasons, and as this study has aimed to outline, accessible tourism discourse can represent an important and effective tool to ensure tourism recovery and contribute to helping tourism operators to recover from the pandemic crisis, by gaining new sources of revenue and new clients with the provision of innovative and accessible tourism services for all.

Future directions of this research will require larger analytical scenarios and further corpus-based data, also in interlingual and diachronic perspectives, to monitor the linguistic evolution that will accompany the forthcoming development of the accessible tourism sector, in the hope that the current and ever-increasing challenges imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic will soon come to an end.

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