

A corpus-based critical discourse analysis of the perception of 'nature' in travel promotion texts.



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Introduction

Environmental issues have received increasing attention during the past decades. This 'greening' process has particularly affected all businesses and industries, including tourism, that intend to respond to any increase in consumer demand for more 'natural' or 'environmentally friendly' products or services. Indeed, studies on advertising suggest a considerable surge in the inclusion of references to the global environmental crisis and its effects, and this concern is related to our idea of nature.

This study seeks to investigate the meaning of the terms *nature* and *natural* in travel promotion texts, in order to understand whether their usage in tourism advertising is deceptive. A first analysis regards the corpus of British promotion texts, the same methodology will be used to analyse the American corpus. Further research will investigate if and how the meaning of nature has changed throughout the years in these promotion texts.

Methodology

Two corpora of travel promotion texts have been compiled. The periodicals used are:

	TRAVEL WEEKLY [TW]	TRAVEL AGENT [TA]
Place of Publication	London, England	New York, U.S.A.
Publication frequency	weekly	weekly
Readership	tourists	travel agents

Table 1. Information regarding the publications

Through an automatic search, all references to *nature/natural* in the headline or the body of the text of each article were identified. All references to nature as 'the essential quality and character of something' were excluded.

Full articles were downloaded and manually transformed into text files; the files were run through the concordancing software Wordsmith Tools 5 (Scott, 2007).

A list of collocates of the two search terms *nature* and *natural* was obtained. Function words have been excluded, while the most frequent lexical words (adjectives and nouns) were taken into account for the research.

An analysis of the concordance lines was not sufficient to reveal the construction of nature, therefore the analysis of the terms was carried out by focusing on collocation. The collocates of the two node words were calculated with a 3:3 span.

The concordances of the collocates were obtained and analysed along with the surrounding co-text. The collocates were placed into the different nature types identified for the research.

Corpora Data

	# of tokens	# of corpus files	# of concordance hits for search term <i>nature</i>	# of concordance hits for search term <i>natural</i>
TW(2002-2010)	161,613	270	209	373
TA(2000-2010)	229,194	289	301	477

Table 2. Detailed data of the two corpora

Research Question 1

How is *nature* described in travel promotion texts?

	COLLOCATES OF NATURE		COLLOCATES OF NATURAL	
	Rank by frequency		Rank by frequency	
	all words	lexical words	all words	lexical words
1	AND (68)	RESERVE (43)	THE (106)	BEAUTY (32)
2	THE (63)	LOVERS (15)	AND (73)	DISASTERS (30)
3	TO (50)	PARK (10)	A (70)	ATTRACTIONS (22)
4	RESERVE (43)	RESERVES (8)	OF (67)	ENVIRONMENT (12)
5	IN (31)	WALKS (8)	IN (43)	SEARCH (12)
6	A (28)	CLOSE (7)	BEAUTY (32)	WONDERS (9)
7	OF (26)	TRAILS (7)	DISASTERS (30)	TERRORISM (9)
8	IS (16)	CULTURE (6)	ITS (28)	DISASTER (6)
9	LOVERS (15)	BEST (5)	IS (27)	HABITAT (6)
10	WITH (14)	MOTHER (5)	TO (27)	WILDLIFE (5)
10=		NATIONAL (5)		INGREDIENTS (5)
10=		TOURISM (5)		RICH (5)
10=		TOURS (5)		SPRINGS (5)
10=				POOLS (5)

Table 3. Collocates of *nature/natural* ranked by frequency in the TW corpus

Collocates of nature obtained using T-score			
	Word	Relation (T-score)	# of occurrences (total=123)
1.	RESERVE	6,543196678	43
2.	LOVERS	3,861396313	15
3.	PARK	3,063323498	10
4.	RESERVES	2,821994781	8
5.	WALKS	2,812989712	8
6.	TRAILS	2,626955986	7
7.	CLOSE	2,620537996	7
8.	MOTHER	2,230643749	5
9.	TOURS	2,157418251	5
10.	TOURISM	2,146027565	5
11.	NATIONAL	2,133009672	5
12.	BEST	2,082565308	5

Table 4. T-score results for collocates of 'nature' (lexical words) in the TW corpus

Collocates of natural obtained using T-score			
	Word	Relation (T-score)	# of occurrences (total=108)
1.	BEAUTY	5,635994	27
2.	ATTRACTIONS	4,651499	19
3.	ENVIRONMENT	3,438021	12
4.	WONDERS	2,991396	7
5.	HABITAT	2,444221	6
6.	PHENOMENON	2,231121	4
7.	SPRINGS	2,211331	5
8.	RICH	2,20226	5
9.	POOLS	2,194015	5
10.	HERITAGE	2,179172	4
11.	HISTORY	2,172575	4
12.	WILDLIFE	2,148663	5
13.	WORLD	2,04724	5

Table 5. T-score results for collocates of 'natural' (lexical words) in the TW corpus

Research Question 2

How is *nature* and what is regarded as *natural* employed in travel promotion texts? What is the real meaning of *nature*?

Table 6. Distribution of the collocates of 'nature' in the different types of nature

	DISTRIBUTION OF THE COLLOCATES OF NATURE IN THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF NATURE			
	Artificial Nature	Tamed Nature	Untamed Nature	Accessible Wild Nature
RESERVE	2	13	20	8
LOVERS	2	6	4	3
PARK	2	7	1	-
RESERVES	-	2	3	3
WALKS	2	6	-	-
TRAILS	1	6	-	-
CLOSE*	-	3	1	2
MOTHER	-	3	1	1
TOURS	-	3	1	1
TOURISM	1	3	-	1
NATIONAL	-	3	2	-
BEST	-	2	1	2
TOTAL	10	57	34	21

* The concordance contained in text TW33_06 is not relevant, therefore it has been discounted.

Example of Artificial Nature (TW36_06)

The administrative capital of South Africa, Pretoria is a city of government buildings and embassies. The huge student population gives it a lively edge. [...]

City highlights

National Botanical Gardens: a mass of subtropical and temperate plants with paved nature trails and a tea garden.

Example of Tamed Nature (TW86_04)

With surfing, scuba diving, golfing and riding among activities on offer, there is no time to get bored in Hawaii.

Hawaii is mother nature's playground, with endless activities on land and sea to suit all ages and levels of experience. [...] Events take place throughout the year...

	DISTRIBUTION OF THE COLLOCATES OF NATURAL IN THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF NATURE			
	Artificial Nature	Tamed Nature	Untamed Nature	Accessible Wild Nature
BEAUTY*	3	16	3	3
ATTRACTIONS	1	9	6	6
ENVIRONMENT	3	2	1	6
WONDERS	-	3	2	4
HABITAT	-	1	3	2
PHENOMENON	-	-	-	5
SPRINGS	1	1	2	1
RICH**	1	1	2	-
POOLS	-	3	-	2
HERITAGE	-	1	2	2
HISTORY	-	4	1	-
WILDLIFE	-	2	2	1
WORLD	-	1	2	2
TOTAL	9	44	26	34

Table 7. Distribution of the collocates of 'natural' in the different types of nature

*The concordance contained in text TW83_03 is not relevant, therefore it has been discounted, while the text TW133_06 does not contain enough information to be analysed.
** The concordance contained in text TW235_04 is not relevant, therefore it has been discounted.

Example of Untamed Nature (TW61_04)

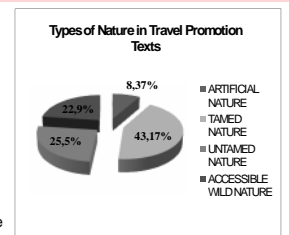
Spending some time in Iceland's outdoors is a perfect way to recharge the batteries while feasting the eye on some of the world's natural wonders. Here are a few of the country's natural highs: Bird watching [...], Whale watching [...]

Example of Accessible Wild Nature (TW85_03)

If you go to the Boiling Lake, you cross spectacular volcanic landscape. [...] Belize offers [...] a completely untouched natural environment. It [...] has the most pristine section of the Barrier Reef.

Preliminary results

As illustrated in the pie chart, the nature depicted in these British travel promotion texts is a type that is influenced by human beings, that is *tamed nature*. Nature is considered as a recreational resource, the perfect setting for various activities and/or sports. Moreover, the nature presented is always benevolent and caring, while the disadvantages of 'raw nature' are omitted in travel promotion, as one can easily understand why.



Graph 1. Nature types in the British corpus

Further Research

My further research will involve the analysis of the American periodical *Travel Agent* to examine whether the meanings of *nature* employed in this journal differ or not from the British journal.

Moreover, the study includes a third research question: 'Has there been a change in meaning and/or usage throughout the years?'. The adoption of the Kyoto Protocol (11 December 1997) will be used as a reference event, the reason why such a choice was made is because this international agreement aimed at raising awareness in the problems of climate change in the general public.