Eyeing Puglia: comparing the tourist gaze in English, Italian and German travel articles[1]

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to compare the contemporary English, Italian and German tourist gaze upon Puglia. To this purpose, three different corpora of travel articles have been assembled and analysed linguistically. The analysis of the variety of tourist gazes (Urry 2002) on Puglia has been useful to classify the English, Italian and German writers in terms of tourist type. The linguistic analysis has also highlighted the cultural differences which pattern native writer perception and interpretation of Puglia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is both an important component of modern life and an assessed object of study and research. Among others John Urry (2002) also examined the concept of tourism from a sociological perspective analysing *the tourist gaze* in terms of perception, exploring the ideological and cultural dynamics that lead to a different approach to reality.

In *The Tourist Gaze* (2002) Urry offers a systemic discourse on tourism in terms of social practice since he acknowledges its prominent balancing social func-

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1 This article is drawn from Angela D'Egidio's thesis (University of Salento), entitled "Eyeing Puglia: comparing the tourist gaze in English, Italian and German travel articles" (academic year 2008/2009, supervisor: Prof. David Katan; assistant supervisor: Prof. Elena Manca).

tion. He formulates a new concept of tourism, privileging sight or vision practices as the most important of the human senses. He also suggests that tourists observe the environment with "interest and curiosity...in other words, we gaze at what we encounter" (Urry 2002: 1). Viewed as "the model of perception tourists adopt while performing the practice of sightseeing" (Francesconi 2007: 47), the tourist gaze becomes one way of understanding the experiential elements of tourism and also helps to understand why people visit certain environments and attach meanings to tourist settings. Notably, the work of Urry on the notion of the tourist gaze has gained wide recognition for various reasons. Firstly, he redefines the tourism industry so that "the fundamental characteristic of tourist activity is to look upon particular objects or landscapes which are different from the tourist's everyday/ordinary experiences" (Gaffey 2004: 4). According to Urry, objects suitable for the tourist gaze include a unique object, a particular sign, an unfamiliar aspect of what was previously considered ordinary or a sign which indicate that a certain object is extraordinary. Secondly, he states that the gaze is constructed through *signs*. But it is useful to underline that "there is no single tourist gaze. It varies by society, by social group and by historical period" (Urry 2002: 1).

This notion will now be useful to compare the English, Italian and German tourist gaze upon Puglia in online travel articles.

2. Methodology and data
2.1 The corpus

In order to investigate the language used in travel articles and to understand the way tourists perceive through their senses, interpret according to known types, evaluate according to their own world and experience Puglia, three comparable corpora constituted by English, Italian and German travel articles were assembled in the period ranging from January 2000 to April 2009, downloaded from the Internet and stored on the computer in electronic format. Both the British and the German corpus have 70,000 running words, while the Italian corpus has 100,000 words. This means that all the data have to be "normalized", i.e. brought to a common scale – 100,000 – to make the data more comparable. The texts contained in these corpora have been used for linguistic analysis by means of a free software called *TextSTAT-2*.

First of all, we compiled frequency lists of each corpus to identify the most frequently occurring words used to speak about Puglia. The first fifteen words occurring in the frequency lists of each corpus were then analysed and discussed. Once the data were collected, a contrastive analysis was conducted. In particular, concordance lines for the words chosen in each corpus were generated and their lexico-grammatical profile was investigated. Here are the normalised data:

TOP 16	INGLESE		ITALIANO		TEDESCO	
1	Puglia	237	Mare	369	Apulien	254
2	Trullo/i	142	Salento	204	Meer	93
3	Olive	100	Spiaggia	197	Salento	90
4	Wine	78	Puglia	148	Lecce	88
5	Beach	74	Lecce	143	Trullo/i	83
6	Lecce	73	Costa	137	Otranto	61
7	Sea	67	Otranto	123	Stein	61
8	Coast	58	Chiesa	120	Öl	60
9	Baroque	57	Leuca	110	Strand	58
10	Masseria	56	Gallipoli	91	Oliven	57
11	Stone	51	Grotte	77	Barock	54
12	Restaurant	48	Ristorante	69	Gallipoli	48
13	Oil	48	Gargano	66	Wein	46
14	Church	43	Barocco	62	Alberobello	39
15	Food+cuisine	56	Masseria	61	Küste	37
16	Alberobello	40	Cattedrale	54	Kirche	35

Table 1. English, Italian and German frequency lists

In the following paragraph we report only the most significant results, i.e. those showing the main differences between the Italian, English and German tourist gaze.

3. Data analysis: results

From the table above we can notice that the part of Puglia most visited by Italian and German tourists is the Salento. This word is at the top of the Italian and German lists but we understand that also English tourists go on holiday there since there are other words such as *Lecce*, *baroque* and *stone* that refer to that area.

As can be noticed in the following examples, the Salento is referred to as "the tip of the heel of Italy":

> The area which extends along the southern side of Puglia from Lecce to the southern-most tip of the 'heel' is called the Salento

> La punta estrema della Puglia, la punta del…"tacco"

> Das Salento im äußersten Endzipfel des italienischen Stiefelabsatzes ist eine wirkliche Entdeckung.

The word *heel* was then investigated in the three corpora in order to clarify its meaning through its collocational profile:

> Puglia – the region that forms the heel of Italy – is relatively unknown beyond its own shores

> Apulien, die Region im Absatz des Stiefels, war...

It is clear that Puglia is said to be "the heel of Italy's boot". This fixed form used to refer to Puglia is a linguistic stereotypical feature that Margarito termed as "cliché d'appellation", that is to say "well codified synthetic etiquettes, a sort of proper names, labels with a high degree of generalization whose formula-like conciseness helps the memorisation and identification of known or less-known cities, monuments and places" (Margarito 2000: 126). By means of these socially codified and widespread formulae, Puglia and the Salento can effectively enter and uniquely occupy the semiotic space of the tourist gaze. They become worth visiting thanks to these catchy and memorable language patterns.

In order to understand how English, Italian and German tourists describe the Salento peninsula, we investigated this word in our corpora.

Italian travel writers define the Salento using specific devices. Here are some examples:

> **terra** di passaggio adagiata tra due mari, penisola nella penisola, **balcone** sul Mediterraneo, **meraviglia** dal cielo e da terra

> un **angolo** suggestivo e magico, un piccolo **pezzo di paradiso**

> **terra** ricca di sorprese

The use of abstract nouns is here evident. Italian writers tend to make use of abstraction and hence nominalization to transmit their feelings and emotions about the Salento.

When describing the Salento, German travel writers, instead, use more adjectives and give more precise information about its position. Here are some examples:

> der unentdeckte tiefe Süden von Italien

> das fast vergessene Salento

The adjectives found in the German corpus are opinions expressed as facts through which we understand German tourists' perspective. For them, if a place is undiscovered, tourist-free and forgotten, it is worth visiting. Therefore, this sort of environmental purity may be interpreted as an enticing feature.

Now it is useful to understand what English, Italian and German tourists see when they are in this area of Puglia; more specifically, what the landmark sights and the elements of attraction are. Investigating the word *Salento* again in our corpora, in the Italian corpus we find:

> spiagge, baie, cale, colori incredibili, paesi deliziosi: **Ionio ed Adriatico** fanno a gara per regalare le emozioni più intense

> Il Salento è pieno di splendidi **centri storici**, di **case bianche**, **palazzi e chiese barocche**, caratteristiche sono **le stradine di campagna**, spesso delimitate da **muretti in pietra a secco**

> lo scenario della **costa** con le sue **grotte** leggendarie rendono unico, quasi sovrannaturale il paesaggio.

> Molte sono poi le **sagre** in cui oltre a buona **musica popolare** è possibile degustare **specialità tipiche del Salento**

> il suo **clima** tipicamente **mediterraneo**, con inverni miti, estati calde e lunghe

The examples show that the attention of Italian tourists tend to focus on the landscape. More specifically, on the sea, namely the Adriatic and the Ionian sea, the beaches, the bays, the coast and the grottoes and the countryside full of dry stone walls. Furthermore, Italian tourists are attracted by the Baroque architecture and buildings, the popular festivals called *sagre*, the local products and finally the Mediterranean climate.

Concordance lines of *Salento* in the English and German corpus demonstrate that this site also fascinates the English and German tourists for its landscape, for the Baroque style, for the popular music and the food. Here below some examples:

> The **architectural landscape** of Puglia, but especially of Salento, recalls the Greek cities of the **white houses** "a calce", without roof, especially in the **countryside** and on the **coast**, while the **historical centres** are characterized by the **leccese baroque style**

> It has great **food**, **music** and **wine**

> im Salento die **Gastronomie** ist sehr beeinflusst von den alten Rezepten und Traditionen mit orientalischer Herkunft, von den Griechen und Spaniern.

> Das **Meer** im Salento hat das sauberste **Wasser** in ganz Italien und atemberaubend schöne **Strände**.

> das Salento mit seiner **Barockstadt** Lecce.

In all three corpora it is evident that tourists tend to focus on the "3S formula", that is *sea, sand, sun*.

In order to understand why they are attracted by these 3S's, the analysis of the words *sea, coast* and *beach* is necessary since they also are among the first sixteen words of the frequency lists, though in different positions. Among the most important results of the word *sea*, we notice that English and German tourists are more interested than the Italian ones in what they can do when they go to the sea. Examples include:

> the sun was shining and we were able to enjoy a beach **walk**

> man kann auf der anderen Seite des Stiefelabsatzes gleich weiter **gebadet**, **getaucht**, **gesurft** und **relaxt** werden

The examples indicate that they give emphasis on the "activities" that one can do when on the beach. This data seems to suggest that Italian tourists tend to focus on "Be" while English and German tourists focus also on "Do/Action" (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck 1961: 10-20).

The second word analysed was *beach*. Its collocational profile suggests that it is evaluated in a positive way by all travel writers. Beaches are seen as the best in the South of Italy. Let us consider some examples:

it does have some of the **best** beaches on the South

le spiagge **migliori** che abbiamo mai frequentato

zu den **schönsten** Stränden Italiens

Common collocates in the English and German corpora can be identified. These include verbs, adjectives or expressions showing only negative aspect of beaches. They are "overcrowded" in July and August, when Italian people especially from the North go on holiday in the Salento. German and English travel writers then advise readers to visit during the months of September and October when beaches are empty and pleasant. Let us see some examples:

These can be **overcrowded** in the Italian holidays, but are pleasant out of season

September und Oktober, wenn die Strände wieder leer, aber das Meer noch warm ist. Im August liegt ganz Italien am Strand, dann ist auch Apulien unerträglich **überfüllt**

Avoiding overcrowded beaches can be interpreted as a sign of denigration of the massified dimension of tourism.

The word *coast* is then analysed. Collocates referring to descriptions are found in all three corpora. In the English corpus we can underline:

The **gorgeous** rocky coast beyond remains **unexploited** all the way to the southernmost tip of the peninsula

Here the coast is **undeveloped**, though it is a popular spot packed with **visitors** in July

the coastline is **rugged** and **unrefined**

it offers an **inordinately large** amount of coastline, just waiting **to be developed**

In the German corpus we find similar collocates:

die Küstenregion... Der **internationale Tourismus** hat hier noch **nicht** Einzug gehalten

Reisende entdecken neuerdings die Provinzen im Süden Italiens, erleben **unberührte** Küsten

Adjectives such as "undeveloped", "untouched" and "unexploited" may underline the need of English and German tourists for authenticity and for places "off the beaten tracks", where mass tourism does not exist yet. Their readers are then named "traveller" and not "tourists". These nouns refer to specific groups of people that may have common interests and passions.

In order to make readers clear that this *coast* is *unique* for its beauty but not "touristy", English and German writers compare it to the Amalfi coast which is presumably known by all their readers. Here are some examples:

> While tourists have been trailing around Tuscany, the northern lakes and the **Amalfi coast**, this coast has been quietly enjoyed by its natives

> Die Küstenstraße von Otranto nach Santa Maria di Leuca ist mindestens so ergreifend wie die **Amalfitana**

In the Italian corpus adjectives referring to the "purity" of the coast are totally absent. We can only find adjectives referring to its size, shape and beauty.

Now let us analyse the concordance lines of the word *Lecce* which appears in the three frequency lists among the first five words in each corpus. From the following examples it is evident that Lecce is known as the "Florence of the Baroque" or the "Florence of the South" by all tourists:

> its exquisite city of Lecce dubbed 'the **Florence of the South**'

> Lecce ... oggi è conosciuta come la "**Firenze del Barocco**"

> ...die Hauptstadt des Salento zu besuchen – Lecce auch das "**südliche Florenz**" genannt

As Puglia is called "the heel of Italy's boot", a further *cliché d'appellation* is used for Lecce in order to help memorisation and the identification of the capital of the Salento.

In order to understand how Lecce is perceived by tourists, we need to take into account the expressions referring to the description of this sight. In the Italian corpus we notice:

> Lecce è un **autentico gioiello barocco**, la sola Piazza del duomo vale la visita

> i paesini sono un incanto e Lecce è un vero **splendore**

> Lecce è una **sorpresa**, sotto tutti i punti di vista

> Lecce è pura e suggestiva **espressione** dell'arte **barocca**

The use of abstract nouns with strong positive connotations such as *gioiello, effetto scenografico, splendore, sorpresa* and *espressione* reveal the powerful emotive effect that Lecce has on Italian tourists and again their frequent use of nominalisation when transmitting emotions and feelings. Reference to Lecce's architectural style is also evident.

In the English and German corpus other expressions are worth considering:

> Lecce, **one of the most important** Baroque cities in Italy

> The city offers a fanciful **escape** into an Italy more or less free of the worst effects of **mass tourism**

> a handful of **appealing** towns worth **exploring**, such as Lecce

> Lecce, eine **schöne** Barockstadt...

As can been noticed, Lecce is described by means of adjectives through which English and German travel writers evaluate this sight positively. References to art and architecture are also made. Interestingly, the authors do not define Lecce as a "tourist" city but as a "quiet" sight to be explored.

Scrolling down the list of the collocates of the word *Lecce* in the three corpora, some elements of attraction can be identified. First of all, Lecce attracts visitors to its Baroque architecture. The word *Baroque* is indeed in all the three frequency lists, though in different positions. The following collocates of the word *Baroque* in the Italian corpus seem to suggest that the attention of Italian tourists is focussed on churches and *palazzi*:

> Lungo le principali e più centrali vie, s'affacciano numerose **chiese** e **palazzi**, tutti rigorosamente **barocchi**

> i numerosi bei **palazzi** che si affacciano sulle stradine sono quasi tutti **barocchi**, come le **chiese**

Concordance lines of the word *Baroque* in the other two corpora instead suggest that English and German tourists look not only at churches and *palazzi* but also at more specific "items" such as façades, columns, carvings and balconies. Examples are:

> its **Baroque façade** rejoices in intricately-designed **balconies**, **arches**, **columns** and **friezes** which are alive with **carved figures**, **flowers** and **animals**

> Die prächtigen **barocken Fassaden** der **Kirchen**, **Klöster** und **Paläste** bilden...

It is evident that Italian tourists are interested in the Baroque architecture because they look at churches and *palazzi* but they are not so attracted by Baroque details as the English and German tourists. If we take into account the Italian frequency list, indeed, we notice that the word *Baroque* is only thirteenth. This could mean that their interest in Baroque style is lower than English and German one and that their gaze is upon something else when they are on holiday in Puglia and, more specifically, in the Salento.

The analysis of the word *church* confirms the English and German interest in details related to art and architecture. Some examples are listed below:

> the finest building is the Basilica di Santa Croce, with its **decorative stucco** and superbly **preserved figures**

> Its confectionery of **decorative stonework** – incorporating 13 **caryatids** and numerous other **fabulous figures**

> die ausladende **Fassade** der Basilika Santa Croce... ist das Prachtstück des Lecceser Barock. **Blumen** und **Girlanden**, **Fabelwesen** und **Engel** haben Steinmetze im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert in den honiggelben **Sandstein** gemeißelt

We have so far noticed that Lecce is the most visited city in Puglia by English, Italian and German tourists and discovered on which landmark sights and elements of attraction their focus is.

Now great attention is paid to Alberobello. This town is associated with the *trulli*. It is indeed considered the "trulli capital of the world" (*cliché d'appellation*). Both words, *Alberobello* and *trulli* are clearly evident in the English and German frequency lists, but are absent in the Italian. However, some expressions found in the Italian corpus show how Alberobello and *trulli* are perceived and evaluated by Italian tourists. Examples are:

> si raggiunge l'apoteosi ad Alberobello, sembra di essere in una **fiaba**, la zona museale dei trulli è **piena di turisti** che visitano ogni trullo **trasformato in negozio di souvenir**

> il paese dei trulli. Che **spettacolo**! Sembra tutto finto e invece ci sono **negozietti** dappertutto, i **titolari** ti invitano ad entrare per **visitare** il loro trullo e alcuni ti fanno anche salire in cima, facendoti ammirare **un panorama fuori dal comune**

It is evident that Italian travel writers admire this "fairytale" town and, to be more precise, they highlight the "out-of-ordinariness" and "unfamiliarity" of *trulli* but they also underline the "touristy" aspect of Alberobello in a positive way. The souvenir shops are not perceived as a negative aspect but as something that encourages their visit to Alberobello. English and German tourists, instead, perceive Alberobello and its *trulli* in a different way, as can been noticed in the examples below:

> in **Alberobello** itself, the **most touristy town** in Puglia.

> The **tacky tourist shops** in **Alberobello**

> It is **ruined** by its proliferation of **trinket shops**

> Die **Souvenirläden** und kleinen Kneipen sind schon geöffnet

> Trulli sind eine berühmte Touristenattraktion Apuliens

The examples above well explain the English and German travel writers' perception of Alberobello and *trulli*. They are negatively perceived since Alberobello is considered the most "touristy" town in Puglia and *trulli* are used above all as souvenir shops. English and German tourists, clearly, complain about the loss of the traditional identity of Alberobello to become a tourist playground. This is what Ed Vulliamy (1988: 25) calls "disneyfication". However, this negative perception may reinforce the hypothesis previously made in the case of overcrowded beaches: English and German tourists tend to denigrate the massified dimension of tourism.

Despite this negative evaluation, they recognize the cultural and historical value of *trulli* showing their extensive knowledge about this type of dwellings. Examples include:

> **White stone houses with conical roofs**, they are thought to have been built for their **inner coolness** and as a way of using all the stones the contadini cleared from the fields. Some have **strange** signs in white paint on their roofs, but no one seems to remember their significance

> **Alberobello** is so **strange** that it has become a **Unesco World Heritage Site**

das **Trulli**-Dorf **Alberobello** gehört zum **Unesco-Weltkulturerbe**

diese typischen Rundbauten werden häufig als Getreidespeicher verwendet

While English and German travel writers describe *trulli* with technical terms and know that they became a Unesco World Heritage site, Italian tourists seem to be less informed about *trulli* than them. No description of *trulli* and no reference to cultural and historical value has been found in the Italian corpus.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to compare contemporary English, Italian and German tourist gazing upon Puglia in travel articles. The analysis of the descriptions of some landmark sights and elements of attraction of Puglia confirmed that there is no single tourist gaze but "it varies by society, by social group and by historical period" (Urry 2002: 1). The Italian tourist gaze is different from the English and German tourist gaze upon Puglia since they all do not focus on the same objects or landscapes. Even when English, Italian and German tourists gaze at the same signs, their perception and representation is often different. More specifically, even though they all go to the Salento and gaze at its beaches and coasts, they evaluate them differently. For English and German travel writers, they are worth visiting since they are "undiscovered", "unspoilt", "untouched", "forgotten", "tourist-free", "wild", "unexploited". These adjectives convey their need for places "off the beaten track", which can confer authenticity on travel and where tourism does not exist. At this point, we can define English and German tourists as "anti-tourists" (Dann 1999: 165) since they try to detach themselves from popular, codified and over-used tourist routes and stress alternative viewpoints on travel. For instance, they consider Alberobello as the most "touristy" town in Puglia denigrating the massified dimension of tourism. Since they denigrate tourist superficiality and passivity, they can be considered, according to Dann (1999) and Urry (2002) "travellers" and not "tourists". Furthermore, their search for authenticity and uniqueness is evident if we take into account their extensive interest in specific "items" of Baroque architecture and in the cultural and historical value of *trulli*. Finally, to use Cohen's classification of tourists (1972), English and German travellers can be defined as "explorers" since they try to get off the beaten track as much as possible, avoid any contact with "tourists", seek novelty and not familiarity and are wholly immersed in the host culture. On the other hand, Italian tourists could be considered as "mass tourists" or, to be more precise, "independent mass tourists" since their travel experience – at least as reflected in our corpus – is "superficial, commodified, inauthentic" (Cohen 1972). They seem to be attracted above all by the 3S formula, that is sea, sand, sun and do not complain about overcrowded beaches, as English and German travellers do. Moreover, apparently Italian travel writers like to gaze at the souvenir shops in the "touristy" Alberobello.

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