

# POST-TRIP NARRATIVES. A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF UK AND ITALIAN TOURISTS' ONLINE ACCOUNTS

Paolo Donadio

*(University of Naples 'Federico II', Italy)*

## **Abstract**

Tourism discourse is a discourse of identity construction, promotion, recognition and acceptance, which is built through the manipulation of linguistic and visual texts (Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger 2010: 5). It is unquestionable, however, that the spread of the worldwide web has dramatically transformed tourism communication: from the 'monologue' of the past, when travel agencies had a dominant role and established a top-down communication, to today's online dialogues, in which individual tourists take part in the promotion of any destination and interact with other travellers by giving their feedback (Dann 1996).

Nowadays, tourists' comments and opinions, being witnesses for other tourists and testimonials to the quality of a destination, are invaluable resources for the tourism industry.

In this context, the present work intends to investigate the online feedback posted by UK travellers in Italy and Italian travellers in the UK, in order to explore to what extent the linguistic features of post-trip discourse reflect a different cultural *gaze* (Urry and Larsen 2011), that is, an ideological attitude towards tourist destinations and tourism at large.

The corpus is made up of about 36,000 words, downloaded from Tripadvisor, in which the feedback of Italian tourists visiting the British Museum is compared to British tourists' feedback visiting the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples.

Tourists' accounts of their own travel experience are influenced by their cultural background and, at the same time, they construct or reinforce socio-cultural identities. I will try to show that the category of tourist feedback, shaped in the web genre of the *review*, is conceived and achieved differently by British tourists with respect to Italian tourists, especially in terms of the implementation of different cultural frames (Baker and Fillmore 2009) and construction of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985: 2011).

## **Introduction**

Every traveller sees the Other as a 'motivation for learning', that is, an opportunity to meet something or someone that is irreducibly different from 'me'. Tourists, either looking for fun and pleasure or driven by the search for authentic experiences (Dann 1999; Cappelli 2006), decide to knock on the door of someone else's home and ask to come in. Taken for granted is the willingness to meet other people's cultures and the

expectation to be welcome as guests, a *désir de voyager* which can be used to paraphrase Ricoeur's (2004) *désir de traduire*. Tourists get back home after being involved in an intercultural relationship with their hosts, if we share the idea that tourism is a discourse practice (Dann 1996) as well as being a distinctive social practice (Giacomarra 2005).

Therefore, tourism becomes a form of semiotization in which "tourists are the agents of semiotics [...] all over the world they are engaged in reading cities, landscapes and cultures as sign systems" (Culler 1990: 2). Objects, nature, and cultures are turned into messages to the tourist who, working as a language interpreter, starts a process of sign comprehension that affects his/her own behaviour. Things, of course, are not so simple, because tourists do not come into contact with a generic destination, but with culture-mediated representations:

Sightseers do not, in any empirical sense, *see San Francisco*. They see Fisherman's Wharf, a cable car, the Golden Gate Bridge, Union Square, Coif Tower, the Presidio, City Lights Bookstore, Chinatown, and, perhaps, Haight Ashbury. As elements in a set called "San Francisco," each of these items is a symbolic marker. Individually, each item is a sight requiring a marker of its own (MacCannell 1999: 111-112).

Tourism is based on symbolic values that are subsumed under tourists' cultural frames and these are much wider than the mere consumption of places. Representations, sometimes produced by tourists themselves, "are not neutral but are involved in a circuit of culture, where tourists themselves are a product of particular socio-economic and cultural systems and share knowledge and attitudes, which are in turn ideologically framed" (Vestito 2006: 31).

Therefore, a visit to a museum falls within a shared cultural macro-frame (Baker and Fillmore 2009) that is nonetheless interpreted in different ways by tourists coming from different countries. Zavala (1990, in Bicknell and Farmelo 1998: 83) introduces the question of representing the frame "visiting a museum" in narrative terms as "inevitable":

After a visit to a museum, visitors reconstruct the experience narratively. This phenomenon is inevitable, because museum visitors always arrive with specific expectations and have specific experiences (whether museum-related or not). Visitors show specific reactions to the title of the exhibition, to the physical site, to the entrance and to the architecture of the museum building. They decide how to conduct the visit (alone or with others, making stops in order to look at specific objects) and use or ignore the parallel elements offered (guided visits, audio-visual projections). Finally, there comes a time when visitors reconstruct for themselves the museum experience.

The point, which seems to be confused by Zavala, is the distinction between the inherent narrative nature of the museum experience and the way to represent it. When it is time to "reconstruct the museum experience", the narrative way is not the only available strategy. As we can see, a comparison between British and Italian travellers, involved in the same experiences, shows that cultural frames and scenarios follow different interpreting paths and, accordingly, trigger different representations.

## 1. *Commenti* and reviews in Tripadvisor

The web has had a strong impact on the tourist industry and the way in which tourists plan their holidays. The innovation brought forth by Web 2.0, according to Urry and Larsen (2011), is the possibility for the single tourist to play the role of content producer and content consumer at the same time, playing what is now called a *prosumer* role. A wide range of websites, from reservation (*booking.com*, *expedia.com*, *airbnb.com* etc.) to travel websites (*tripadvisor.com*, *smartertravel.com*, etc.) give the opportunity to publish reviews and pictures on behalf of other tourists who have not planned their travels yet.

In the past, the word-of-mouth that triggered travels to particular destinations was restricted to small circles or communities – friends, colleagues, family members. Tripadvisor, being today’s “electronic word of mouth” (*ibid.*: 59), has acquired a global influence that can determine the success of specific destinations, places, even cities. Unlike other studies on the genre of Tripadvisor reviews (see Mandarano 2014), mainly dealing with the impact of feedback on business and its implications in terms of marketing strategies, this paper proposes to combine a cultural and sociological approach (Dann 1996; Urry and Larsen 2011) with the notion of cognitive frames (Baker and Fillmore 2009) and mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985: 2011).

Often, tourists are not aware of the cultural frames and scenarios they use to think. The goal is to describe tourists’ reviews in Tripadvisor in terms of text-types and see if they stand for different cultural conceptualizations of travelling. This is possible, since Tripadvisor gives the possibility to include textual/visual information about the reviewer, such as picture(s), country, name/surname, or nickname. All the reviews in English from 2015 to 2016, in which reviewers explicitly state they are British citizens, have been downloaded and included in the corpus. The same has been done for Italian reviews: if the reviewer does not explicitly state his/her nationality (British or Italian), the review has been excluded from the corpus.

	Language/source	Visited place	Time	no. of reviews/ commenti	no. of words	Average length
<b>Corpus_IT (Italian tourists visiting British Museum)</b>	ITA www.tripadvisor.it	British Museum (London)	June 2015-September 2015	400	18,624	46 wds
<b>Corpus_EN (British tourists visiting Naples Museum)</b>	ENG www.tripadvisor.co.uk	National Archaeological Museum (Naples)	June 2015-June 2016	196	18,593	94 wds

*Table 1.* Corpus collection

Bearing this goal in mind, it was decided to compare the feedback provided by British and Italian tourists coping with the task of representing in a verbal form their museum experiences. These representations were collected from Tripadvisor in the form of online reviews, to which any tourist can have access through his/her smartphone or PC. To ensure comparability between a) the Italian tourists’ feedback visiting a museum in

the UK and b) British tourists' feedback visiting a museum in Italy, two small equivalent corpora of about 18,000 words each (one in English and the other in Italian) were collected in the period June 2015-June 2016 from the same online source.

As the table shows, in the case of the Italian corpus, the collection of texts over four months was sufficient to obtain a large number of reviews (400). In the case of the less visited National Archaeological Museum of Naples, instead, the reviews in English were collected over a timespan of one year, from June 2015 to June 2016, in order to reach a number of words comparable to the Italian corpus<sup>1</sup>.

What is striking is that the number of Italian *commenti* (400) is double the number of English reviews (194); in other words, if we take two small but comparable Tripadvisor subcorpora of about 18,000 words (British "reviews" and Italian *commenti*), we get a number of "user actions" (or however we wish to define them) that is drastically different. As shown in Table 1, the smaller number of reviews in English implies that their average length is twice the average length of the Italian *commenti* (94 words against 46 words).

The similarity between these two small corpora in terms of a) data source (Tripadvisor), b) cultural frame ("visiting a museum"), c) purpose (product rating) and d) word count (about 18,000 words each) allows us to reduce the weight of other variables that may also have an impact on verbal representations.

As a result, we can rely on two small but quite consistent and comparable corpora and carry out a qualitative analysis. The fact that the Tripadvisor Italian interface provides tourists with the opportunity to post feedback in the form of *commenti* and not "reviews", as in English, does not imply a genre change. Although the etymology of the two labels emphasizes the usage of visual perception in English (from Latin and then Middle French RE + voir, see again<sup>2</sup>) and that of mental recollection in Italian (past participle of *comminisci*, to contrive, devise; from *com-* + base of *meminisse*, to remember, related to 'mind'<sup>3</sup>), both are presented as rating tasks linking a verbal description to a score from 1 to 5 (1 is the lowest mark, 5 the highest).

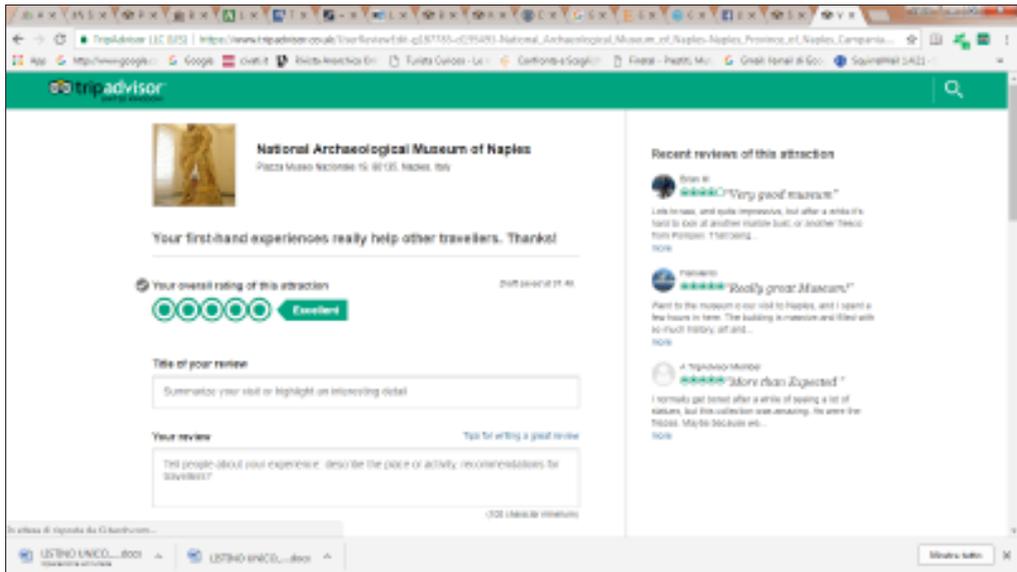
The similarity in communicative purpose creates a certain genre overlap between English 'reviews' and Italian *commenti*, as shown by Bhatia (1997) in the academic domain:

From the above description of these closely related genres I have called academic introductions, it is clear that all of them, *whatever names they are given, have at least one main communicative purpose in common*, and that is to introduce the book. This rather surprising amount of overlap in the function and identification of academic introductions is not simply a typical characteristic of modern dictionaries, it is evident in modern practice too.

<sup>1</sup> These two museums were selected as they are comparable in terms of types of exhibits and collections displayed (mainly archaeological) and target/number of visitors. The British Museum has an average of 6 million visitors every year ([www.statista.com/statistics/422343/british-museum-visitor-numbers-uk](http://www.statista.com/statistics/422343/british-museum-visitor-numbers-uk)), while the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, often visited by tourists after a trip to Pompei excavations, has about 3.5 million visitors every year ([www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/feed/pdf/Tabella-imported-64702.pdf](http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/feed/pdf/Tabella-imported-64702.pdf)). Rome was excluded because the Colosseum and the Forum are not museums, and the Vatican Museum displays a different type of artwork.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>3</sup> *Dizionario Etimologico online di Ottorino Pianegiani*, [www.etimo.it](http://www.etimo.it).



**Figure 1.** The Tripadvisor screen in English displayed after clicking on “Write a review”. It is striking that, in English, TA travellers are invited to “write a review”, which is then displayed as such under the heading “Reviews”. In Italian, TA travellers are invited to write a *recensione* (“Scrivi una recensione”), that is later labelled as a *commento*.

One may find instances of introductions, prefaces, and forewords largely indistinguishable from each other (Bhatia 1997: 185; my emphasis).

They are called *Avis* (opinions, suggestions) in French and *Resumen* (summaries) in Spanish, for example, but the first action that the user is asked to carry out after clicking on the screen button “Write a review” is to rate (from 1 to 5 points) the chosen destination. After rating, the user may opt to write a text and add pictures, but she/he is not allowed to write a review without including the 1-to-5 rating.

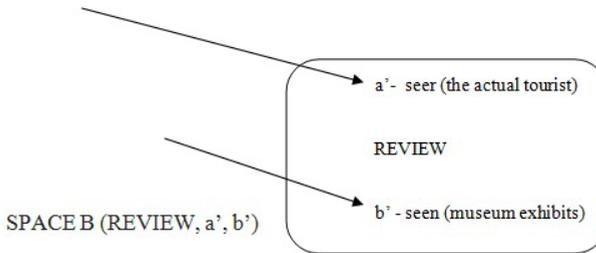
The nominal variation – *commenti* vs. reviews – that distinguishes the Italian interface from the English one, does not undermine the relevance of the *gaze* that characterizes Western culture:

Focusing on the gaze brings out how the organising sense in tourism is visual. And this mirrors the general privileging of the eye within the history of western societies. Sight was long viewed as the noblest of the senses, the most discriminating and reliable of the sensuous mediators between humans and their physical environment. This emphasis on sight is present within western epistemology, within religious and other symbolisms and within notions of how society should be visible, made transparent, to government (Urry and Larsen 2011: 4).

As a specific object of this study, we claim the existence of a plurality of *gazes* underlying cultural diversity and revealing a substantial difference in terms of relationship between the self and the Other, that is to say between the *seer* and the *seen* engaged in the cultural frame of “visiting a museum” and the corresponding Tripadvisor secondary frame “reviewing a museum”.

In terms of mental spaces (Fauconnier 2011), the base space (SPACE A) “visiting a museum” features a subject (a= seer /tourist) and an object (b= seen / museum exhibits) linked by the operator VISIT.

SPACE A (VISIT, a, b)



The base space (SPACE A) triggers a new space B (SPACE B) which features an actual tourist (a', British or Italian) that describes his/her experience in a real museum (b', British Museum or Museo Archologico Nazionale in Naples) by using a verbal form. In this second space, the operator that connects the subject and the object is REVIEW, by which we have the function: REVIEW, a', b'. We will see that this new space B is not a universal one, but it differs according to the travellers' cultural background. As a result, the new space B, by displaying different configurations, will show to what extent British tourists' and Italian tourists' reviews illustrate different gazes and different conceptualizations of travel.

## 2. Narrative scenarios vs. appraisal scenario

Although this paper focuses mainly on the qualitative nature of the analysis, which is feasible thanks to the small size of the corpora, there is a quantitative feature that seems quite striking and concerns the average length of the reviews. In the case of British tourists visiting the Italian Museum, the average length is 92 words, while the average length of reviews in Italian is much shorter, about 46 words. This does not mean, in absolute terms, that a museum is more interesting or less interesting than the other, but that the representation of the frame “visiting a museum” by British tourist provides details that, on the contrary, are not explicit in the Italian reviews.

The average length of the feedback in English, then, is the first clue to describe representation strategies that are definitely narrative and seem to be highly dynamic and relational:

(1) “Self Guided Audio Tour of Naples Archaeological Museum”

**We visited in early May 2015** and with our excellent value Campania ARTE cards **we got** reduced price audio guides and half price admission (**We had already used** our cards for “free” entry to Pompeii and Herculaneum). **We visited the museum** in the afternoon, after a morning visit to Herculaneum, and **we toured** the Pompeii exhibits with Murals, Pillars, Mosaics and Statues etc. and the “secret” room. Whilst **the museum was** quite nicely laid out and **everything was** interesting the whole tour of the museum **took only**

**about two hours** and I would therefore only plan for half a day here. I would NOT opt for the audio guide again as it was disappointing and not very informative, **there were** only a few of the numerous exhibits **that had** an audio description, and generally **only applied** to one exhibit in any one area. I would recommend this museum for a half day trip to be coupled with a half day trip to Herculaneum or Vesuvius (June 16<sup>th</sup> 2015).

The dynamism of this review is mainly due its narrative plan, starting from the phases that precede the visit to the museum (*we got reduced price audio guides and half price admission ... We had already used our cards ... after a morning visit to Herculaneum*) until its conclusion. As the story unfolds, it includes an account of the visit and the relevant time references, as if the task were that of writing a private journal (*We visited in early May 2015 ... We visited the museum in the afternoon ... we toured the Pompeii exhibits... the museum was quite nicely laid out and everything was interesting...*), that finds its conclusion with the end of the experience (*the whole tour of the museum took only about two hours*). The experience itself, turned into a narrative, seems to point to a dialogue between the *seer* and the object of the sight. The reason for the review is based on the narrative and subjective account of one's own visiting experience.

Past tenses, especially the simple past, are the main tenses in these reviews; the past tense and the narrative circle create the background for the piece of advice addressed to prospective tourists, in which we can notice the shift from past to present tense (in bold in the examples). This narrative attitude is frequent in most reviews written by British tourists, even if the rating is low and potential tourists are warned against the drawbacks of such an experience.

(2) "OK for an hour!"

**Visited** recently as part of a tour. The journey through the city to get there **took ages** and **once we arrived the tour commenced**. **We did have** a guide **who tried** her hardest to make the tour as interesting **as she could**. **She struggled** with me. There's only so much you can say about a statue or mosaic!

The museum is in desperate need of some maintenance to say the least. **Worth a visit if your not visiting** the sites at Herculaneum or Pompeii but certainly not a full day visit. **Our guide did warn** us about the area around the museum and **suggested we didn't decide** to explore Naples as the area is not tourist friendly! (July 29<sup>th</sup> 2015).

Even in this case, a low rating mirrors a narrative representation of the experience that starts with a general micro-introduction (*Visited recently as part of a tour...*), continues with the narration of the preliminary phases before the actual visit (*the journey took ages... once we arrived the tour commenced...*), during the visit (*We did have a guide who tried her hardest to make the tour as interesting as she could*) and the follow up (*Our guide did warn us about the area around the museum and suggested we didn't decide..*). The switch from past to present marks the transition from storytelling to recommendations (*Worth a visit if your [sic!] not visiting the sites ...*). As we can see, the narrative is so subjectively interpreted that it neglects to mention the quality of the exhibits, which are supposed to be the real purpose of any "visiting a museum" experience.

As far as the reviews in Italian are concerned, the frame remains the same but the viewpoint is radically different. The whole experience is summarized in a few words

and these are not filtered by a narrating ego. The past tense gives way to an all-encompassing present in which the visit and the review seem to take place at the same time. The transition from past to present, which marks the switch from storytelling to recommendations in English, is here flattened by using an unspecified present:

(3) “tappa obbligata”

Una meta da non farsi mancare in un viaggio a Londra! bello e imponente l'esterno **che ricorda** un tempio greco, molto interessanti le collezioni, attraverso le quali **si riesce** a fare un salto nel tempo e un giro del mondo semplicemente passando da una sala all'altra (June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015)<sup>4</sup>.

(4) “Meraviglioso”

Al suo interno **vi è conservata** la stele di Rosetta ed un pezzo del frontone del partenone, oltre ad innumerevoli reperti greci, romani, egizi, etruschi... Ingresso gratuito (July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015)<sup>5</sup>.

(5) “sempre unico”

**Puoi tornare** venti volte e **rimani** ogni volta stupito ed ammaliato. bellissima la sala - che non avevo mai visto - con il nucleo costitutivo della collezione (July 16<sup>th</sup> 2015)<sup>6</sup>.

The English narrative is replaced with an appraisal attitude: the tourist does not reconstruct his/her experience narratively, but as a passive witness. The exhibits (*l'esterno... le collezioni ... la stele di Rosetta ... il frontone del Partenone ... reperti ... il nucleo costitutivo*) are foregrounded and rated by using modifiers (*bello e imponente... molto interessanti ... bellissima*). The tourist never talks about his/her being there as a sequence of events and actions (there is only one flashback in 5) *...che non avevo mai visto...*, since the tourists' gaze is construed in a timeless universal present tense (*che ricorda... si riesce ... è conservata... puoi tornare...*). Alternatively, the construction DET + NOUN + BE + MODIFIER is turned into a MODIFIER + DET + NOUN that sees the deletion of the linking BE and the focus on the modifier, placed in initial position: *bello e imponente l'esterno* (3)... *molto interessanti le collezioni* (3)... *bellissima la sala* (5).

It is a reconstruction placed in a generic and static present, being based on a sequence of modifiers (adjectives) rather than processes (verbs). The rhetoric of appraisal focuses the readers' attention on the left of the sentence, where modifiers are positioned. The tourists' final rating is based on the type of adjectives used in the review, not the tourists' perception of the whole experience. The British tourist attempts to transform the whole experience into *a story to tell*; the Italian tourist, on the other hand, *selects and isolates* the objects of his/her gaze and provides an evaluation. Italian reviews, being also shorter than British ones, are more easily connected to Tripadvisor scores

<sup>4</sup> “a necessary stop” / A place not to be missed on a trip to London! Beautiful and impressive building front that recalls a Greek temple; very interesting collections, which let you jump through time and travel around the world simply by going from one room to another.

<sup>5</sup> “Wonderful” / Inside, the Rosetta stone and a part of the Parthenon pediment are preserved, as well as countless Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Etruscan exhibits ... Free entry.

<sup>6</sup> “unique, every time” / You can come back twenty times and, each time, be surprised and charmed. The room – which I had never seen – containing the main exhibits of the collection is amazing.

from 1 to 5 (1 terrible; 2 poor; 3 average; 4 very good; 5 excellent), whereas the narrative reconstruction of British travellers is less clearly connected to a score. Even in the few cases of a poor rating, the attitude of Italian tourists and the way they reconstruct their experience do not change:

(6) “Caotico”

Metto quattro pallini solo per rispetto agli oggetti **che contiene** (uno su tutti: la tomba di Nebamun), ma è **caotico, confuso e male organizzato**. **Fai** dei chilometri avanti indietro per passare da una zona all'altra, perché le piantine, ma il museo stesso, **sono molto confuse**. **Ci si deve andare**, è tappa obbligata, ma **fai una faticaccia**, e **ve lo dice una che insegna storia dell'arte!** (August 8th 2015)<sup>7</sup>.

(7) “Tanto spazio..sprecato!”

Per fortuna che **l'ingresso era gratis** perché forse **i britannici non hanno idea** di cosa siano rovine etrusche e romane! **Questo museo non ha nulla** di particolare a parte gli ampi spazi occupati da vetrine con dentro reperti che per noi italiani **sono all'ordine del giorno!** **Unica cosa interessante** la zona egizia e la stele di Rosetta (August 18th 2015)<sup>8</sup>.

The range of modifiers such as *caotico*, *confuse*, *male organizzato*, *sprecato* are foregrounded and play a major role in the review. Even the reference to an actual, individual experience that may justify a low rating (*fai dei chilometri...fai una faticaccia...i britannici non hanno idea ... questo museo non ha nulla di particolare*) is not exploited to construct a narrative approach. The only reference to a past – the *imperfetto* in *Per fortuna che l'ingresso era gratis* – just marks the beginning of the visit. What seems a narrative incipit, however, is immediately followed by a modifier (*gratis*) and an unproven statement that has a universal reach. Even in this case, the subject of the sentence is an object (*il biglietto*) and not the tourist in person.

### 3. Personalization

Another feature, linked to the roles played by tourists involved in the frame “visiting a museum” and the different text-types exploited to represent the experience, is the weight of subjectivity. The English narratives personalize the visit and make tourists' identities more visible, by singling out a specific experience. In Italian, on the contrary, the absence of any narrating attitude, structured around a time sequence, makes it quite difficult to distinguish one review from the other. The writer's identity can only be retrieved by using the partial information displayed on the left of the screen:

<sup>7</sup> “Chaotic” / I give a mark of four points just because of the objects it contains (above all: the Nebamun tomb), but it is chaotic, confused, and badly organized. You can walk around for kilometers just to move from one area to another, since the maps, but the museum itself, are really confusing. You cannot miss it, it is an essential stop, but it is so tiring - and I teach the history of art, believe me!

<sup>8</sup> “So much space...wasted” / Luckily, the entry was free of charge because British people, probably, don't know what Etruscan and Roman remains are! This museum has nothing special apart from large spaces filled with showcases containing exhibits that, for Italians, are not so extraordinary! The only interesting things are the Egyptian area and the Rosetta stone.



**Figure 2.** A Tripadvisor review to British Museum written by an Italian tourist (Aug. 2015). “Wow!” / A jump back to the past, absolutely essential. Free of charge, like every museum in London. The Egyptian area is fascinating, with its mummies and sarcophagi. Everything is perfectly organized and arranged.

Personal and individual reconstructions in English switch from *I/my* to *we* because what really seems to matter in these reviews is to deliver the individual perception of a cultural experience:

(8) *“History at its finest....”*

A great place to start before your visit to Pompeii or Herculaneum.. it gives an insight into daily life and the mosaics, paintings and sculptures are truly amazing but could be presented in a different way. **I think it would be nice** to have large story boards for tourists to read and stop and take time to bring the whole experience to life instead of just moving from room to room with a headset. **I much prefer to read** at my own pace and this was a disappointment (July 16<sup>th</sup> 2015).

(9) *Very thought provoking!”*

Pompeii display is excellent and puts most of what you may have seen at the sight into perspective. Some lovely exhibits **which blew my mind**. **My advice would be to do the site trip** first as we did. The big down side is no air conditioning; I was wearing a Tee shirt and was soaked with sweat even though we timed for an early arrival. Take something to fan yourself! Allow around 2-3 hours for your visit. €13 entry fee was a bit steep I thought but should not prevent you visiting (August 13<sup>th</sup> 2015).

The British tourist personalizes the museum experience by introducing an epistemic stance that is usually addressed to the reader (*I think it would be nice ... I much prefer to read ... My advice would be to do the site trip*) and exploits modal verbs (*would* is particularly frequent). Emotional involvement and descriptions of such involvement are quite frequent and personalized, as in 9) *Some lovely exhibits which blew my mind....* Likewise, first-person-related elements, such as *I/me/my* often introduce suggestions or recommendations to other tourists:

(10)

[...] **I would** suggest going to this museum after going to Ercolano [...] (August 27<sup>th</sup> 2015; my emphasis)

[...] **I did think** it was worth the cost [...] (June 17<sup>th</sup> 2015; my emphasis)

[...] Then **I suggest** you visit the Museo Archeologico Nazionale [...] (June 25<sup>th</sup> 2015; my emphasis)

[...] **I challenge** the head Curator to go to Rome/Paris/London [...] (June 24<sup>th</sup> 2015; my emphasis)

[...] **I would recommend** going but maybe buy a book explaining everything if these are available [...] (July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015)

Instead, the usage of first person plural elements, such as adjectives (our) or pronouns (we/us) seems to be aimed at personalizing the narration by involving other members of the tourist group (in the following examples we have a family and a couple) in an experience that goes beyond the rating of the exhibits:

(11) *“excellent collection of mosaics”*

**We** visited the Museum before Herculaneum and Pompeii and found it extremely interesting. **We** are a family with two children under 14. **Our** favourite area was the mosaics (**we** skipped the secret room). There is not much written explanation about exhibits but the audio-guides were helpful and **we** could look around at **our** leisure (August 29<sup>th</sup> 2015).

(12) *“Go here for the delights of Pompeii”*

**We** went here solely to see the mosaics of Pompeii and were not disappointed! **We** paid our admission fee but you could quite easily have slipped in FOC by going to the bookshop at the back of the pay booth and then slipping into the museum from there! Security is not very tight! **We** found a quiet garden inside the grounds of the museum to eat **our** lunch in and get away from the hoards [sic] of screaming school kids laughing at the erotica that is to found amongst the Pompeii exhibits! **We** said that it's a pity they don't have replicas of the mosaics at Pompeii so that you can see them in situ - although maybe you would then have no need to visit the museum! (April 26<sup>th</sup> 2016).

In Italian, on the contrary, the appraisal approach is based on the opposite principle, the depersonalization of the review. In Italian reviews, the most frequent verbal structures exploit impersonal forms, passivizing or using the impersonal *si*, sentences not featuring any verbs and with a modifier placed on the left in focus position (as seen before):

(13) *“un viaggio nella storia”*

Durante il mio breve soggiorno a Londra, non poteva mancare la visita a questo museo. La visita merita davvero qualche ora del nostro tempo, ma **si è ripagati** dall'enorme patrimonio che ne è conservato all'interno! Visitatelo!! (June 9<sup>th</sup> 2015)<sup>9</sup>

(14) *“La parte degli Egizi”*

<sup>9</sup> “a journey into history” / During my short stay in London, I could not go without visiting this museum. The visit really deserves some hours of our time, but you are paid back by looking at the great amount of exhibits that are kept there! Go and visit it !!

La parte degli egizi è notevole sia al piano terra sia al primo piano. **Molto valida anche la parte riguardante gli etruschi. E' enorme** e forse consigliabile di farlo in più tappe altrimenti dopo un po' **sembra tutto uguale**. Tanto **non è a pagamento** e nonostante tanta gente all'interno **si riesce a girare** bene perché molto grande (August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015)<sup>10</sup>.

As we can see, the syntactic subject of the sentences is never the tourist as a *persona*, but a non-animated object or concept (*la visita ... l'enorme patrimonio... la parte degli egizi ... la parte riguardante gli etruschi*). In some cases, this subject is not specified (*è enorme... sembra tutto uguale... non è pagamento...*) and corresponds to the museum itself. In particular, we can see the frequent use of the deontic construction “*da + (non) + infinitive*”, which is exploited to make up appealing headings or in the body of the review. Its function is basically to address future tourists and provide them with a compelling suggestion, quite often introduced in the headings:

(15) “**Da visitare** almeno una volta nella vita”  
(June 16th 2015)<sup>11</sup>

(16) “**Da non perdere**”  
(July 22nd 2015)<sup>12</sup>

(17) “**Da visitare** assolutamente!”  
(August 16th 2015)<sup>13</sup>

(18) “**da visitare** anche perché ingresso ad offerta”  
(August 21st 2015)<sup>14</sup>

(19) “Un classico **da non perdere**”  
(August 23rd 2015)<sup>15</sup>

In the main text of the review, the expression “*da + (non) + infinitive*” is usually associated to a positive rating, whose deontic strength is reinforced through adverbial boosters such as *assolutamente* or *sicuramente*:

(20) “La Storia”  
In questo museo è possibile fare un giro tra la Storia dei popoli che hanno abitato la Terra. Molto bello, affascinante. Sicuramente consigliato a tutti, dai bambini agli adulti. Ero in viaggio con mio figlio di 15 anni ed è il museo che ha apprezzato di più a Londra. **Da vedere sicuramente** (June 14<sup>th</sup> 2015)<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> “The Egyptian area” / The Egyptian area is remarkable, both on the ground floor and the first floor. The Etruscan area is outstanding too. It is so big, and maybe it is advisable to visit it at different times, otherwise everything seems the same after a while. After all, entry is free of charge and you can walk around easily because it is very big.

<sup>11</sup> “To be visited at least once in a lifetime”.

<sup>12</sup> “Not to be missed”.

<sup>13</sup> “To be visited, absolutely”.

<sup>14</sup> “To be visited, since entry is based on voluntary contributions”.

<sup>15</sup> “A classic not to be missed”.

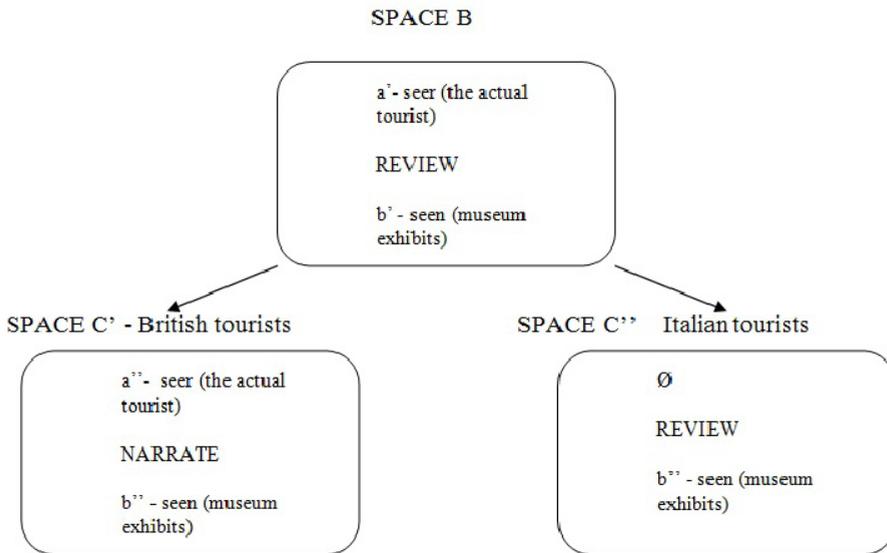
<sup>16</sup> “History” / In this museum you can walk around the History of the populations who lived on the Earth. Very beautiful, charming. Definitely recommended to everybody, from children to adults. I was

(21) “Museo **da non perdere**”

Che dire... uno dei musei più grandi e ricchi del mondo in una location splendida. **da non perdere assolutamente** (July 1<sup>st</sup> 2015)<sup>17</sup>.

## Conclusion

If we retrieve space B, stemming from the base space A (VISIT a, b), we can see that it changes according to the type of reviews produced by British tourists visiting a museum in Italy or Italian tourists visiting a museum in London. The different but connected mental spaces actually help us make a clear distinction between the nature of the experience itself and its representation, which can sometimes be confused. In our case, the secondary derivations from space B can be configured in the following way:



According to the analysis here, the dominant narrative and subjective mode in English brings about a functional change and a replacement of the primary operator REVIEW with the operator NARRATE. The resulting space C' that summarizes the British tourists' approach to reconstructing the museum experience, and probably travelling experience as a whole, is:

NARRATE, a'', b''.

This conclusion suggests that the narrative mode seems to be widespread and prevalent in reviews written by British tourists. Verbal processes and personal views create

travelling with my 15-year-old son and it is the museum he liked most in London. Definitely not to be missed.

<sup>17</sup> “A museum not to be missed” / What can I say ... one of the biggest and richest museums in the world set in a wonderful location. Not to be missed, absolutely.

a dynamic account which is not, however, easily connected to Tripadvisor scores and the general purposes of a reviewing task.

On the other hand, the attitude of Italian tourists privileges a stance that almost completely ignores the *seeing* subject, but keeps the reviewing function alive. The result is a space C” where the “seer” is deleted:

**REVIEW, Ø, b”.**

In this case, the missing seeing subject (missing in the verbal representations, not in practice) triggers timeless descriptions that are quite difficult to distinguish, but are clearly connected to the communicative purposes of the Tripadvisor scoring system.

What mental spaces reveal, in terms of intercultural comparison, is a different conceptualization of the travelling experience and its verbal representation. Italian *commenti* show that the cultural frame of reference is one in which the narrating subject fades into the background and often disappears. The perceived role of the Italian tourist involved in the representation of his/her own travel experiences seems to be the role of an “objective reporter”, who is willing to share his/her appraisal of the “Other”. On the contrary, British tourists seem more than willing to share “a vision” of their travelling experiences, which is implicit in storytelling.

In terms of genre analysis, we can see that the sharing of an identical communicative purpose – writing a review – does not trigger the same result as soon as a verbal account in different languages is involved. Different cultures provide different interpretations of the same pragmatic input and show how the theoretical notion of genre is often shaped by culture-bound cognitive frames. Further research could probably point to text-type differences by restricting the investigation to reviews written in English by non-native speakers; or, if one decides to focus on English-speaking countries, native speakers of English coming from different countries of the “inner circle” (Kachru 1992) may possibly display significant variations.

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