

# METAPHORS IN TOURISM PROMOTIONAL DISCOURSE: A CORPUS-ASSISTED STUDY OF THE CYRIL AND METHODIUS CULTURAL ROUTE

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## Abstract

*Purpose* – Metaphors have long been recognised as powerful devices of persuasion, and thus there are many instances of metaphorical language in tourism promotional discourse. This paper describes the use of figurative language on the official website of the Cyril and Methodius Route and examines the role of imagery in tourism advertising to enhance the promotion of cultural sites.

*Methodology* – The methodological approach adopted in this paper tends to avoid any subjectivity of the research by using artificial intelligence in determining the figurative index of each text on the Cyril and Methodius Route website, which is our text corpus. By using this corpus linguistics approach, quantitative data is collected and interpreted from a cultural perspective.

*Findings* – A textual analysis reveals some shortcomings in the use of metaphors when addressing potential tourists. In fact, a large number of these devices can be observed, especially in the case of locations with considerable cultural significance in national mythology. As far as such sites are concerned, it is apparently considered desirable to give these attractions a ‘moral claim’ on the tourist, which is an example worthy of emulation for other cultural locations.

*Contribution* – The Cyril and Methodius Route website provides good material for exploring Dann’s hypothesis that the greater the cultural distance, the more metaphors are used in descriptions of tourist places. However, our research on the promotional materials of the Cyril and Methodius Route shows that the issue is more complex and cultural significance or ‘moral claim’ plays a major role in this area.

**Keywords** artificial intelligence, corpus linguistics, moral claim, pragmatics, semantics, tourism

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the use of metaphors or, more broadly, elements of figurative language in tourist promotional discourse on the official website of the European Cultural Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which has been designed and managed by its Headquarters in Zlín, Czech Republic. For the purpose of this paper, promotional discourse is defined as a type of text that depicts a selected location in favourable light with the view to influence audiences for commercial benefits. The website, its English language version, promotes about a hundred tourist destinations in 18 European countries (however, texts are available for only 16 of them, German and Swiss locations do not yet have any textual descriptions). Although these countries are unevenly represented, there is a relatively large number of archaeologically and/or culturally significant European locations described, using many elements of figurative language (e.g. “Aquileia is a *treasure trove* of history and culture... Explore the *vibrant remnants* of early Latin Christianity... and *step back in time*...”). The website thus provides good material for exploring Dann’s hypothesis that “metaphor and simile are employed to minimize the effects of unfamiliarity..., their usage tends to increase in direct relationship to the strangeness of the destination being promoted. In other words, as cultural distance increases so correspondingly does the use of simile and metaphor” (Dann 1996, 173). However, this study seeks to answer the research question of whether the problem of the quantity of figurative language elements is more complex and whether it has other important aspects as well.

As Dann (1996, 171) suggests, the verbal techniques that characterise the language of tourism include: above all, comparison, but also key words and keying, testimony, humour, languaging and ego-targeting. These verbal techniques have been analysed by many tourism scholars (Ernawati 2001; Pierini 2008; Cappelli 2012; Maci 2012; Manca 2012; Mattiello 2012, etc.). The use of comparison through simile and metaphor is fundamental for Dann, but he analyses it mainly qualitatively, so he admits that “a much more extensive and rigorous investigation would be necessary to reach a generalizable conclusion” (Dann 1996, 186). Jaworska (2017) probably came closest to the desired research when she pointed out that “[d]espite the widely disseminated assumption that metaphors are the key persuasive devices in promoting tourist destinations..., there has been to date no systematic research investigating the use of figurative language in tourism promotional discourse” (Jaworska 2017, 161). Following this statement, using a corpus approach to metaphor identification and analysis, she has, among other things, attempted to empirically demonstrate that more metaphors are used in the promotion of culturally and geographically distant destinations than in the marketing of tourist destinations ‘closer’ to home.

Jaworska (2017) in her paper highlighted some methodological problems in identifying metaphors, in which she followed other researchers. Using a relevance-oriented lexical pragmatics framework, Mattiello (2012), for example, had investigated the use of metaphors in tourist texts on the Web. Her research shows that a variety of metaphorical expressions are used in the tourism industry, ranging from conventional to highly poetic metaphors. Metaphors also tend to co-occur with hyperboles and in chains of metaphorical and other figurative expressions, which greatly intensifies the persuasive effect (cf. Jaworska 2017, 167). Therefore, in our view, when researching the metaphoricity of texts in the field of the tourism industry, it is better to investigate their figurativeness rather than mere metaphors, which is important methodologically.

The methodological approach adopted in this paper tends to avoid any subjectivity of the research by using artificial intelligence in determining the index of figurativeness of the language of each text on the Cyril and Methodius Route website<sup>1</sup>, which is our text corpus. The AI tool used here is George Leon's online tool<sup>2</sup>. By using this corpus linguistics approach, we will obtain quantitative data that will be interpreted from a cultural perspective. However, we agree with Semino et al. (2004) that a fully explicit procedure for metaphor identification and analysis does not exist, as well as with Jaworska (2017, 169) that in a linguistic analysis and identification of metaphors in texts most researchers rely on their intuition. Therefore, we also agree that this is still an appropriate methodological approach, but the AI tool lists all the figurative elements of the text and can thus be easily checked by the researcher and corrected if necessary.

This paper examines the role of imagery in tourism advertising and will have important implications for international and intercultural tourism communication, although not quite in the way that Jaworska showed in her study. By unifying semantic with pragmatic approaches, the reader will become aware of the importance of metaphor in persuasive language. Indeed, figurative language, including metaphors, always belongs to the domain of semantics (cf., e.g., Koller et al. 2008), and promotional discourse consists of certain communicative strategies, on the basis of which it must be called pragmatic from a linguistic perspective (cf. Gallo and Miliaev 2024, 102). A textual analysis reveals some shortcomings in the use of metaphors when addressing potential tourists. These devices can influence existing textual meanings in order to promote a positive product image, but this is not always the case, especially when it comes to cultural route tourism. This may be due to, inter alia, the aforementioned Dann's hypothesis, explored by Jaworska (2017). However, a large number of metaphors can be observed for locations with considerable cultural significance. As far as such locations are concerned, it is apparently considered desirable to give these attractions a 'moral claim' on the tourist, an example worthy of emulation for other cultural sites or monuments. As Boyer and Viallon (1994, 9) point out, it is not so much that a place is inherently touristic, there is no scientific criterion that can establish 'touristicity' ('touristicité'). Rather it is language that makes it so, and language which imposes the duty to see (Dann 1996, 85).

## 1. DATA AND ANALYSIS

As mentioned above, the corpus used for analysis consists of the linguistic content of the official Cyril and Methodius Route website. This Cultural Route of the Council of Europe seems to be a good example to achieve the results, as it contains a number of texts about destinations of several cultures or civilizations. One of the reasons why only official website has been taken into account is to be found in Manca (2018, 92): "official tourist websites are the 'official' representation of a place and act as mediators in the relationship between tourists and destinations at a pre-trip stage". As she rightly claims, these websites can be, therefore, considered an official version of the culture and history.

The texts of different cultural locations vary in size (some texts even seem to be unfinished), but the figurative language index generated by the online AI tool takes into account the figurativeness of the text as a measure of figurativeness with respect to the length of the text, so it is objective in this respect. The texts were collected and evaluated by the AI tool between November and December 2024 and form the quantitative basis on which two cultural analyses were carried out. Besides the analysis according to the assumptions of Dann (1996) and Jaworska (2017), we will also offer an alternative analysis from the perspective of cultural significance, which, as we will show, draws equally on Dann's seminal publication, but emphasizes different aspects than those described above.

### 1.1. Data analysis from a cultural distance perspective

The official website of the Cyril and Methodius Route contains a sub-site Living Cultural Heritage, which features texts on 93 cultural locations such as archaeological areas, hillforts, castles, churches, monasteries, museums. These locations come from 16 European countries, but they are distributed disproportionately. In the Czech Republic, where the Headquarters of this Cultural Route of the Council of Europe is located, there are 22 sites. In the geographically and culturally only slightly distant Slovak Republic (the Czech Republic and Slovakia formed a common state in the 20th century), which according to the hypothesis of Dann (1996) should show only a little higher figurative index, there are 28 monuments.

Other countries are represented to a lesser extent. The neighbouring countries of the Czech Republic, which can also be considered relatively culturally close, Poland and Austria, feature a much smaller number of sites in the list, 1 and 3 respectively. A very similar cultural proximity can be attributed to other European countries of Western Christianity, which are not currently neighbours of the Czech Republic, but in the past were part of the same monarchy (at least their regions), namely Italy (5 texts), Slovenia (3 texts), Croatia (4 texts) and Hungary (2 texts). This category, according to Dann's hypothesis, should have a slightly higher figurative index than both the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

Even less culturally close to Czech writers are supposed to be the countries of Eastern Christianity, which have never formed a common state with the Czech Republic, namely Montenegro (2 texts), North Macedonia (3 texts), Moldova (1 text), Bulgaria

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<sup>1</sup> European Cultural Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius n.d., *Official Website*, viewed 21 December 2024, <https://www.cyril-methodius.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> Leon, G. n.d., *Figurative Language Checker, LingoBright*, viewed 21 December 2024, <https://www.lingobright.com/tools/figurative-language-checker/>

(6 texts) and Greece (4 texts). However, we also include Serbia (1 text), Ukraine (3 texts) and Romania (2 texts) here, some parts of which formed a common empire with the Czech Republic in the distant past, but are also historically predominantly Eastern Christian countries. In this fourth category, in terms of cultural (and indeed geographical) distance, we also include predominantly Muslim Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 texts) and Albania (1 text). This category should have the highest figurative language index within our survey according to Dann's hypothesis.

Table 1: **Figurative Language Index Averages – Countries**

Countries	Figurative Language Index Average	Number of Texts
Czech Republic, HQ	3.50	22
Slovak Republic	2.50	28
Poland	6.00	1
Austria	2.33	3
Italy	3.80	5
Slovenia	2.33	3
Croatia	3.00	4
Hungary	4.00	2
Montenegro	3.00	2
North Macedonia	2.33	3
Moldova	2.00	1
Bulgaria	3.50	6
Greece	3.00	4
Serbia	2.00	1
Ukraine	2.67	3
Romania	2.50	2
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2.00	2
Albania	2.00	1

Source: own construction

Table 2: **Figurative Language Index Averages – Categories**

Categories	Figurative Language Index Average	Number of Texts
Czech Republic, HQ	3.50	22
Slovak Republic	2.50	28
Other Western Christian Countries	3.28	18
Non-Western Christian Countries	2.76	25

Source: own construction

The division by country in Table 1 shows no clear pattern, the hypothesis of a higher index of figurative language when cultural (and geographical) distance is greater was not verified, but this may possibly be due to the fact that very few texts come from some countries, which could bias the results. The cultural categorization outlined in Table 2 is based, among other things, on Huntington's (1996) well-known division of the world into civilizations according to people's cultural and religious identities. However, even the results of the data analysis of figurative language when we divide the texts from our corpus into 4 relatively proportional categories in terms of the number of texts, (1) the Czech Republic, where the Headquarters of the Cyril and Methodius Route is located, (2) the Slovak Republic, (3) Other Western Christian Countries, (4) Non-Western Christian Countries, do not at all confirm the assumption of a higher index of figurative language in the case of greater cultural (and geographical) distance.

## 1.2. Data analysis from a cultural significance perspective

The analysis of data from a cultural distance perspective, as presented in Tables 1 and 2, does not seem to be very convincing. Nevertheless, we would get different results if we did not work from the perspective of the aforementioned Dann's hypothesis, but instead looked at texts with a high figurative index. The highest index of 8 among the texts in our corpus scores the Rila Monastery in Bulgaria. It was founded in the 10th century, but destroyed and rebuilt to its present form only in the 19th century. However, medieval Bulgaria (which covered the territory of modern-day Bulgaria, North Macedonia, etc.), together with Great Moravia (which covered the territory of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, etc.), has a highly significant place in terms of Cyril and Methodius' heritage, and the Rila Monastery has an absolutely outstanding place in Bulgaria's cultural history. On the analysed

website it is called “Treasury of Bulgaria”, which is “a magnificent symbol of Bulgarian heritage”, “nestled” in the “majestic” and “breathtaking” Rila Mountains that is a “wellspring” of Bulgarian “rich” history, and “unwavering spirit”, has served for over a millennium “as a beacon of faith and knowledge”, etc.

The only two sites with a figurative index of 7 are Staré Zámky Hillfort and Place of Pilgrimage Velehrad, both in the Czech Republic. Staré Zámky is regarded as the direct predecessor of the capital of the Moravian region (about a third of the Czech Republic), Brno, where “we [i.e. Czechs/Moravians] glimpse the past’s intricate dance with the present - a bridge across ages, connecting us to our [i.e. Czech/Moravian] roots”. The very important Czech place of pilgrimage Velehrad, where more than 200,000 Czecho-Slovak believers gathered in 1985 to commemorate the 1100th anniversary of the death of St. Methodius (cf. Pukanec 2016, 220), despite the ruling dictatorial, anti-Christian regime, was long considered the capital of the Great Moravian Empire, where Cyril and Methodius had come from Thessaloniki.

It is probably not a coincidence that the greatest figurative index was scored by locations in Bulgaria and Moravia, which are perhaps considered - at least nominally - as the direct heirs of medieval Bulgaria and Great Moravia respectively, i.e. the states of the Cyril and Methodius heritage par excellence. The only Polish location of the cultural route that is unique and intrinsically the most important has an index of 6; one of the two Hungarian sites also has an index of 6 (the other one with an index of 2 is the Hungarian National Museum, which has little overall significance for Cyril and Methodius cultural heritage, as Hungarian national history begins only later). Another site with index 6 is the very important Basilica of San Clemente in Italy, where the tomb of St. Cyril is located. The last location with an index of 6 and the only site that has an index of 6 and is not so important in terms of Cyril and Methodius cultural heritage is the Slovak Branč Castle - mainly because of its “stunning panoramic views”.

Index 5, which can still be considered very high, have three locations: Baška Glagolitic Alphabet Trail in Croatia, modern tribute to the Glagolitic script, possibly the most significant cultural contribution of St. Cyril (cf. Pukanec 2020), which was used specifically only in Croatia for almost a millennium, Saint Methodius Height in Uherské Hradiště “where the tomb of St. Methodius is believed to be” (which is in fact a speculation), and Archaeological Area Staré Město “At Špitálky”, the latter two in the Czech Republic. Staré Město is the most probable capital of the Great Moravian Empire from the archaeological point of view. Another archeologically hypothesized capital is Mikulčice Slavic Hillfort with index 4, and the only two historically attested Great Moravian city locations (and thus possible capital or at least important cities) with their castles, Bratislava Castle and Nitra Castle, both in Slovakia, have the same index of 4, which is still quite high above all the averages in Table 2.

It should be added that the significance of locations with a high figurative index lies in national mythology rather than international significance. The exhaustive list of archaeological and cultural locations indexed 5-8, including the above-mentioned sites with index 4, is not a list of internationally important locations. This is true at least if we consider the international significance of the site to be very high, for instance, when it is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Among such locations that have been listed by UNESCO in the past, several are included in the Cyril and Methodius Route, but their indices are mediocre, the only exception being the Rila Monastery. All of these facts show us a somewhat different perspective that requires further discussion.

## 2. DISCUSSION

The results of our data analysis from a cultural distance perspective are not clearly comparable to the results obtained by Jaworska (2017) in her research. She investigated Dann’s hypothesis by analysing three corpora containing descriptions of tourist destinations in Britain (Home-Corpus), Europe (Europe-Corpus) and in faraway tropical countries of Asia and the Pacific (Faraway-Corpus). However, this division implies that tourist destinations were predominantly natural, not cultural, and indeed this is the case. The texts were collected manually from sources aimed mainly at British tourists, which is not at all the case with the sole Czech source of ours aimed at all (European) tourists. From the twelve source domains, she retrieved a total of 711 metaphorical expressions, of which 403 were present in the Faraway-Corpus, 251 in the Europe-Corpus and 57 in the Home-Corpus.

Because of these methodological differences, and because her three corpora are as a whole at least twice as large as our four corpora, if we were to consider our corpus divided into four categories in this way (which is unnecessary, however, because we do not discuss the figurative elements further in this paper), we do not in any way wish to question the validity of the results Jaworska (2017) achieved. In some respects, however, the results of our research are so different that we have to supplement Jaworska’s research, at least in part. How could it be explained from the perspective of the hypothesis of Dann (1996) that unique location texts from Poland and possibly Hungary have a high figurative index of 6, but texts about unique locations in Serbia, Albania and Moldova, one of which was and one of which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List, have figurative indices very low, all of them score 2, although from the Czech perspective they are more culturally and geographically distant than Polish and Hungarian locations? We will therefore examine the results of our data analysis from the perspective of Dann, but from a different perspective than the one that Jaworska (2017) has quantitatively verified.

In his seminal work on the language of tourism, Dann (1996, 82-83, 94) describes that Gritti (1967, 51-64), basing himself on Enzensberger (1962) and a content analysis of several Blue Guides, begins from the theoretical position that sightseeing is a rite, an institutionalized duty to gaze upon what must be seen, a form of social constraint, an historical and aesthetic regulation of the



picturesque which imposes a 'categorical imperative' on tourists ('absolu touristique') which must be obeyed. The guidebook's injunctions to see impose an obligation on the tourist via the imperatives of, inter alia, textual elements to yield 'un code signalétique'. Key words, such as "interesting", "merit", "charming", etc. are used to zone the itinerary into sights which must be seen and those which must be by-passed in a hurry. The guidebook does not merely signal attractions, but declares that action is to be undertaken. Thus the Blue Guide induces precise behaviour in the reader. MacCannell (1989, 42) even speaks of the existence of some mysterious institutional force that separates out attractions from mere sights, and gives these attractions a 'moral claim' on the tourist.

Something similar to a declaration of action can be found on the official Cyril and Methodius Route website as well. The Baška Glagolitic Alphabet Trail is "a must-visit for history enthusiasts, nature lovers, and curious travellers alike", Basilica of San Clemente is "a must-visit destination for anyone looking to delve into the rich tapestry of Rome's history", "Branč Castle is a must-visit spot", etc. For some sites, however, the Cyril and Methodius' "legacy" is additionally included as an argument for the visit. Specifically, this concerns 4 locations, 3 of which have the highest figurative index, which is certainly no mere coincidence (the fourth being the Temple of Cyril and Methodius in Thessaloniki, Greece, with an index of 4): "Intrigued to learn more about how the Rila Monastery served as a custodian of Cyril and Methodius's legacy? Explore further to discover the fascinating story of this iconic landmark!"; "Explore the fascinating history of Staré Zámky Hillfort...! As we explore its weathered stones and contemplate its legacy..."; "Velehrad's significance extends far beyond its scenic locale. The monastery... quickly became a beacon of a much older spiritual legacy. This legacy dates back to the 9th century, when the revered Slavic apostles, Constantine and Methodius, brought their missionary zeal to Moravia... Plan your visit to Velehrad...!"

This "legacy" of a 19th century monastery building with a figurative index of 8, an important pilgrimage site in the 20th century while simultaneously the false capital of Great Moravia, and finally the capital of Moravia in the 21st century (or at least not before the 17th-18th centuries), both with an index of 7, to put it with a bit of hyperbole, is a very intense element of the aforementioned 'moral claim' on the tourist, without necessarily being more legitimate than, for example, in the case of some other important locations that existed in time of Cyril and Methodius, such as Basilica of San Clemente and others.

## CONCLUSION

This corpus-assisted study of the Cyril and Methodius Cultural Route website analyses the role of figurative language elements in tourism promotional discourse. It attempts to answer the research question of whether, as cultural distance increases, the use of similes and metaphors always increases correspondingly, or whether other important aspects, such as cultural significance or 'moral claim', also play a significant role in this area. In this paper, we have supplemented the cultural distance perspective with the cultural significance perspective, or the so-called moral claim, as another important factor with regard to the use of figurative language. Therefore, we would conclude that if regions want to attract more tourists, they should give their regional or national attractions a moral claim on the tourist through figurative language to convince, as Manca (2018, 92) puts it, "readers to become actual tourists". On the other hand, if regions have many cultural sites, they should manage their promotion to a reasonable extent.

The results of our research of linguistic data from a cultural perspective have several limitations. First of all, figurative language elements are a rather broad concept and have different emotional and semantic value, so their persuasive effect is also varied. Secondly, although research on figurative index using AI is more objective than traditional research on metaphoricity using intuition, it is not necessarily qualitatively better. The corpus, which consists of the linguistic content of the official Cyril and Methodius Route website, does contain a number of texts about destinations of a variety of cultures or civilizations, but the texts of the cultural locations vary in size and the sites in different European countries are distributed quite disproportionately. We have focused this research on the 'official' representation of places, but in the future it will be necessary to extend our research to include the unofficial websites of the individual locations in question and possibly further categorize them in order to achieve a bigger and, in particular, more structured dataset.

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