

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Travelling to the green island full of shamrocks and pubs – or not
Representations of Ireland in tourism web sites

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by

Veera Määttä

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KIELTEN LAITOS

Veera Määttä

TRAVELLING TO THE GREEN ISLAND FULL OF SHAMROCKS AND PUBS – OR NOT: REPRESENTATIONS OF IRELAND IN TOURISM WEB SITES

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Matkailu on merkittävä tekijä elinkeinoelämässä, myös Irlannissa: kaikkiaan 5 % irlantilaisista työskenteli vuonna 2007 matkailualalla. Internet on yhä enenevässä määrin matkailun edistämiseen käytetty väylä. Matkailun kieli on oma diskurssinsa, jossa luodaan tietty kuva kohdemaasta ja sen kulttuurista. Matkailua edistävissä esitteissä, oppaissa ja WWW-sivuilla korostetaan tiettyjä asioita kun taas toiset asiat jätetään mainitsematta. Yleinen mainontastrategia on esittää kohdemaan mahdollisimman eksoottisena ja erilaisena kuin potentiaalisen asiakkaan oma kotimaa, jolloin korostetaan kohdemaan erikoisempia piirteitä. Kohteeseen liittyvien stereotyyppien hyödyntäminen on myös yleistä matkailumainonnassa.

Tässä työssä tutkittiin viittä irlantilaista WWW-sivustoa, jotka esittelevät Irlantia potentiaalisille matkailijoille. Niiden käyttämä kieli vastaa hyvin matkailumainonnassa yleisesti käytettyä diskurssia. Analysoitaviksi valituilla verkkosivuilla oli yhteensä 154 062 sanaa, joiden joukosta tutkittiin yleisimmin käytettyjä sanoja ja analysoitiin syitä niiden käyttöön. Tulokset olivat osin odotettavia ja osin yllätyksellisiä. Pääosin kieli oli tavanomaista, kun taas esimerkiksi jotkut Irlantiin kiinteästi liitetyt käsitteet, kuten neliapila, Riverdance ja Guinness, esiintyivät teksteissä vähän tai eivät ollenkaan. Adjektiivien ja verbien käyttö oli teksteissä tavanomaista: kummassakaan sanaluokassa ei juuri noussut esille tavanomaisista sanoista (esim. *great; is, can, has*) poikkeavia sanoja. Tuloksien perusteella Irlannin matkailusivustojen yleisimmin käytetty sana odotettavissa olevien sanojen (esim. *the, and, of, ireland*) jälkeen on *festival* mikä voi selittyä irlantilaisten festivaalien suurella määrällä ja niiden merkityksellä matkailijoiden matkakohteen valinnassa. Tuloksien perusteella Irlantiin suuntautuvaa matkailua edistävillä WWW-sivustoilla käytetty kieli on ennemminkin tavanomaista kuin yllätyksellistä.

Tutkimuksen antamia tuloksia voidaan hyödyntää matkailusivustoja suunnitellessa tai kansallista identiteettiä tutkittaessa. Laajempaa lisätutkimusta kuitenkin tarvittaisiin, jotta tulokset olisivat paremmin yleistettävissä. Vertaileva tutkimus irlantilaisten ja ulkomaalaisten Irlantia matkailukohteenä markkinoivien verkkosivujen välillä antaisi tietoa myös siitä, eroavatko irlantilaisten ja ulkomaalaisten kuvaukset Irlannista toisistaan.

Asiasanat: tourism, Ireland, websites

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1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of tourism is increasing within the Irish economy and culture. As in many parts of the world, tourism is significant to Ireland's economic life. In 2007, for example, 7.7 million overseas tourists visited Ireland and expended worth €4.9 billion. In the same year 322,000 people, who amount to 5.4 % of the Irish population, were employed in the Irish tourism and hospitality industry. 257,000 of them were year-round employees. (Fáilte Ireland: Tourism Facts 2007) However, tourism does not influence only the economic but also social and cultural life. Tourism has been and continues to be a major shaping force in Irish society, affecting also the national identity of the Irish. (Cronin et al 2003: 1)

Tourism discourse is a certain kind of discourse, selectively representing certain features of the Irish culture while dismissing others. Thus it can be seen as a discourse on Ireland and Irish identity. In brochures, guidebooks and websites tourism industry constructs images and representations of countries and national identities in order to attract foreign visitors to holiday destinations. This is often done by portraying the destinations as exotic, mysterious or in other ways different from the every-day lives of potential travellers. (Cronin et al 2003: 141) Stereotypes, symbols and generalizations are also often used to promote a certain area or a country. Stereotypes are a normal way of making the unknown easier to understand but they may have negative effects to the national identity. Stereotypes of the Irish and Ireland will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

The significance of this study lays in the fact that representations matter – they make people see the world in a certain way. The representation of countries as well as different national or ethnical groups will have its effect on the national identity. Representations can never be thought as meaningless but they will always have some effect on how people or nations are seen, also when the representation is intentionally positive which is usually the case within tourism industry. Representations are constructed by the language use, not only by the larger entities but also by word choices, for example. In this study it is thus meaningful to look closer at such small units as the words within the websites.

In this thesis Irish tourism websites are studied in order to see how Ireland is represented there. The language use of five websites which present Ireland for tourists is studied closely. The aim of this study is to see if some nouns, adjectives or verbs appear often on these

websites. As background material for this study was used a previous study concerning one-day bus tours in Ireland and how the Irish identity is constructed there for the tourists (Cronin et al 2003). However, I did not find a study about the language used at Ireland's tourism websites so I assume that this kind of study has not been done before. In this study I consider also briefly if the representation of Ireland affects the Irish national identity. The research questions are thus if there are any commonalities between the language used at different tourist web sites that concern Ireland and more specifically if there are any adjectives, nouns or verbs that are often used. Another research questions are how the findings can be explained and how they are connected to the national identity of the Irish.

The hypothesis was that there would be some common features that could be found within all or almost all materials, and that there would be found more than one word that appears often on these websites describing Ireland. The hypothesis was also that based on the results of the research it would be possible to draw some general conclusions on how Ireland and the Irish are represented on tourism websites.

2. DATA AND METHOD OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The research was carried out by looking closely at different websites representing Ireland for tourist purposes and comparing the words they use. Five Irish websites were chosen for the analysis. These were websites that were clearly using commercial language, e.g. adjectives whose intention is not to give information but to attract the reader. Texts giving plain information about Ireland (e.g. about population or geography) were not chosen because the purpose of this study was to look at the commercial language used in tourism.

Since the tourism websites are often common for the island of Ireland as a whole, both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that is part of the United Kingdom were included in this study. The chosen texts were either depicting the whole Ireland or counties of Ireland. The topic of these texts was most commonly "About Ireland" or "About County so-and-so". Web pages describing the counties or regions of Ireland were included in the study only if there was an equal amount of information about all the counties (there are altogether 32 counties of which 26 are in the Republic of Ireland and 6 are in the Northern Ireland) or areas so that one county or area would not be emphasized in the results.

Discoverireland.com was the largest of the chosen websites, with 80 pages chosen for analysis. It was also the most significant starting point to this study since it is the official website of Tourism Ireland. Tourism Ireland is the agency responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday destination and its website represents thus the official picture of Ireland that wants to be given for potential tourists. Other four websites that were studied were 1) www.myguideireland.com/ireland : Irish online travel service provider servicing the Irish, British, North American, French, German and Japanese markets, 2) ireland.dublinevents.com : a website providing mostly information about Dublin but also about the whole island of Ireland, 3) www.goireland.com : an online shop window for Irish tourism businesses and a consumer portal for tourist information and reservations, and 4) www.ireland.com : an Irish website offering access to a wide range of relevant web content concerning Ireland. The web pages chosen on the website discoverireland.com covered general information about the island of Ireland as a whole and also more specifically about different cities, counties or areas. Other four websites did not provide as much general information about the island and the web pages chosen for this study were mostly about different counties of Ireland. The data used in this study was collected on these websites between 16th and 19th April 2009.

In this study I searched for adjectives, nouns and verbs that were commonly used in these websites. A programme called Monopro was used to analyze the frequency of the words on these web sites, and to see which the most frequent words were. All the words of the chosen web pages were entered into the Monopro programme to get their frequency order. With the results of the frequency order I decided which words were relevant for this study and concentrated on analyzing them more closely.

Baker (2006) has discussed using corpora in discourse analysis. As it comes to the amounts of data needed for analyses, Baker points out that it is possible to carry out corpus-based analysis on quite small amounts of data, especially when examining a particular genre of language. When building a specialized corpus in order to investigate a particular subject, the quality or content of the data is more important than the quantity. The more specific the use of language is, the less need there is for a large quantity of data. As an example he refers to an analysis based on two letters that together contained only 880 words. In this research the number of words was 152,348. This is in accordance with Baker's idea of the amount of data since the

aim of this study was to look at a particular discourse with a specific use of language that is to say tourism discourse and commercial language.

Frequency is a central concept as it comes to the analysis of corpora. Baker (2006) points out that although frequency lists can be useful and a good starting point for an analysis, they can also be generalizing and oversimplifying. Their main use is in directing the reader towards aspects of a corpus that occur often which could be a result of a particular discourse used. However, frequency lists with words in isolation are not enough for the analysis since context has to be taken into account. Presuppositions should not be made based on a frequency list. This is why an approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis will probably be a better solution than one using only quantitative methods. In this study the approach combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis. It should be kept in mind that this type of research is never completely objective: the researcher chooses which patterns of language to analyze and which to overlook, and the analysis is based much on interpretation and hypotheses. However, there is still quantitative evidence to base the observations on.

3. STEREOTYPES ABOUT IRELAND AND THE IRISH

Probably Ireland evokes some images or mental pictures in most people's mind. Some of the common images are shamrock, St. Patrick, Guinness and pubs, the colour green, harp, sheep, friendly people, problematic relations with Britain in history and troubles in Northern Ireland. Tourism industry has to choose which of these stereotypes to use for their benefit as they promote Ireland for potential tourists. Needless to say, aspects with negative connotations, such as troubles in Northern Ireland, are not usually included in tourism discourse. But the connotations are not always as obvious as that. For instance, there is not a clear answer to if there are positive or negative connotations attached to pubs or sheep. For some potential tourists they may have completely opposite influence than for others. Tourism discourse promoting a certain country has thus to find a balance to attract as many potential visitors as possible.

3.1 REPRESENTATIONS OF THE IRISH AND IRELAND

Cronin et al. (2003) explored how Irish identity is constructed on one-day tours in Ireland's County Wicklow by the tour guides and also by the tourists themselves. Certain themes and

dominant meanings of Ireland and Irishness could be identified. Ireland is most likely presented as a place of unspoilt natural beauty with picturesque scenery. Ireland also remains old-fashioned and traditional: the focus is on historical elements, such as medieval castles and churches, rather than on the Ireland of the present. The Irish people are presented as friendly, entertaining and talkative. However, negative aspects of the Irish stereotype also emerge, as Irish people are shown through jokes to be superstitious, untrustworthy and heavy drinkers. This image of the Irish as loveable but untrustworthy rogues is sometimes called the paternalistic racism towards the Irish, and it is often found in tourism literature on Ireland. (Cronin et al 2003: 145)

According to Cronin et al. (2003), modern-day Irish life may also be mentioned on the tours. Some references can be made to the economic boom and the low unemployment, for example, but politics is generally not much discussed. Political aspects of Irish history are downplayed frequently by the use of humour. Invasions of the Irish history are addressed by the guides, but they are only briefly mentioned. Tourist interpretations are aided by the guiding, for example by informing the tourists that ‘small stone churches and round towers’ have become ‘symbols of Irish culture’, that is to say signs signifying Irishness. Thus is constructed international stereotypical myth of Ireland as ‘Emerald Isle’. According to this stereotype Ireland is an old-fashioned and traditional country with beautiful nature, inhabited by friendly rogues, and decontextualised both historically and politically. (Cronin et al 2003: 146)

3.2 IRISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

Place is inseparable from nationalism: places are invented, and a myth of territory is basic to the construction and legitimation of identity. National identity is created in particular social, historical and political contexts and thus it is not a fixed entity. It is shaped by myths about place and past, and is basically “the work of imagination”, although the power of the nationalist discourse cannot be denied. (Graham 1997: xi)

Irish national identity has for a long time been marked with the conflict between the Catholic nationalists and the Protestant unionists. Nationalist identity was based on traditional Irish-Ireland that was strongly defined by Gaelicism and Catholicism. Culture was also a strong part of the construction of identity: the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association were an important part of the ‘new nationalism’ in the beginning of the 20th century.

Nationalist identity in Ireland has also been profoundly shaped by presuppositions of malignant Britishness, constructed and presented as a collective social fact. For the unionists the whole structure of Irish-Ireland became such a powerful expression of Otherness that it was almost sufficient in itself to define Ulster identity. (Graham 1997: 8)

There are also aspects common for both nationalist and unionist identities, however. Due to Ireland being an island, it has been throughout the history a remote country which has had influence on its social relations. On the one hand it has caused strong social networks and solidarity, but on the other hand introversion and bitterness. Despite the relatively remote situation of Ireland, its past is characterised by interaction of a variety of cultural influences, invasions, trade and social contacts. This has caused also considerable regional diversity and cultural heterogeneity within the island. During the history the north of the island has had links to Scotland and northern England, whereas the south-west has had more connections with France and Spain and the south-east with Wales and English West Country. The far west was more weakly tied into the Western Europe but more connected to the eastcoast cities in America. There is not one homogeneous Ireland but there have been and there are many Irelands. (Graham 1997: 19)

One aspect of Ireland's history is also relatively late urbanization, allowing for the maturation of a complex rural, hierarchical and familiar culture. (Graham 1997: 20) Recent transformations in Ireland have resulted in new ways of being 'Irish'. Globalization, Europeanization, the Celtic Tiger, the peace process and secularization have made Ireland into a more liberal and diverse society that is more open to a multiplicity of identities. Catholic and rural past has less influence over today's Ireland. (Wilson et al 2006: 91)

4. TOURISM DISCOURSE

'Discourse' is a term used in a variety of ways in linguistics and other social sciences. Discourse can be described as 'social action and interaction, people interacting together in real social situations' and the focus is thus on language as it is used. Another way to describe discourse is to see it as 'a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge'. (Gillespie et al 2006: 122) Discourse does not only reflect social reality but also shapes it, as well as it shapes identities and relations between people. Tourism industry shapes our discourses about people and places, and tourism discourse in its turn shapes the identities of hosts, tourists and

destinations. (Jaworski et al 2005: 2) Tourist guides or guidebooks always provide an interpretation of the destination and thus the tourism discourse translates the destination to foreign travellers. Tourism discourse constructs the destination through discursive practices, by interpreting and explaining it. (Cronin et al 2003: 142) Tourism discourse is also inherently persuasive form of discourse since the message must be sufficiently attractive for the potential audience. (Baker 2006: 50)

One aspect to the tourism discourse is the notion of power related to knowledge. An example of this is the relation between a tour guide and tourists. The guide possesses knowledge and professional expertise, which give him or her the power to construct what he or she is interpreting. The tourists are strangers and out of their own culture, and thus they are dependent upon the explanations of the guide in order to 'understand' the destination. Implicit in the tourism discourse lies the claim that the local culture, history or landscape can only be 'understood' from the point of view of the guide. The locals are constructed as 'other', to be gazed upon and not having the power to speak. (Cronin et al 2003: 143) The guide provides explanations and information, which shape the tourists' perception of the world outside. The destination is presented to the tourists, and the guide has the power over which aspects of the destination are brought to the tourists' attention. The guide's narration directs the gaze of the tourists towards carefully selected aspects of Irish history and culture, giving them significance through narration, and thus constructing the tourists' idea of what the destination is like. (Cronin et al 2003: 144)

The same aspects of power can also be identified within tourism websites. Potential tourists who visit the websites are looking for information and thus the people who have designed the website have power over them. They are sharing their knowledge about the destination but at the same time they construct their own interpretation of it. They have made the decisions about what to include on a website and thus the website constructs a certain image of the destination. They have even more power over the image given than the guides on bus tours. On a tour tourists may always see some negative aspects that the guide would not like to introduce to them, but on a website the whole content is under the control of the designers.

In promoting a certain country, tourism industry has to 'brand' it in the minds of prospective visitors, and differentiate it from all the other countries. One of the most successful branding campaigns was as simple as *I love New York* in 1977: the phrase still appears in T-shirts and

other tourism items. (Middleton et al 2002: 336) Branding involves also the transformation of the country's traditional aspects into a product that can be used to promote the country for potential visitors. One Irish example of the traditions being transformed for tourism purposes is Riverdance. Riverdance is a dance show by Irish 'traditional' dancers that was first performed during the interval of the Eurovision Song Contest in 1994. The show became popular all over world and is still being performed. It has encouraged many fans to identify with Ireland and the Irish, even where their connections to Ireland are tenuous or non-existent. For many people the show quickly came to be seen also as a celebration of Irishness, and a symbol of a new-found confidence in Irish identity. However, it also generated much debate about its 'authenticity', its relationship to 'traditional' Irish dance, and its influence over the Irish national identity. (Wilson et al 2006: 93) Riverdance may have helped to generate a new and more self-assured sense of cultural identity, but its principal objective was to make money. It represents cultural identities and artefacts for commercial gain and in doing that it presents a particular view of Irishness by selecting and performing only certain aspects of 'tradition' that are suitable to the global market. It appeals to the sentiments by portraying harmony and community cohesion that is not altogether true with the realities of modern Ireland. (Wilson et al 2006: 94)

5. FINDINGS

The five websites chosen for this study contained altogether 152,348 words. All the words were organized by Monopro programme into a list which gave them in their frequency order, with the percentage that shows their proportion of all the words. The six most common words in these websites were, not surprisingly, articles (*the, a*), prepositions (*of, in, to*) and conjunction (*and*). They are all grammatical words belonging to a closed grammatical class in which the words are not likely to change much over time. The grammatical words have usually high frequency in language use. (Baker 2006:53) The most common word outside these three word classes was *Ireland* with 2302 appearances. However, words like *Ireland, is* (1962 times) and *2009* (1389 times) can naturally be assumed to be found on these websites and are thus not meaningful to this study.

5.1 NOUNS

The most frequently appearing noun that carries some meaning to this study is *festival* (856 appearances). As the Monopro programme gives the words separately according to if they are in singular or in plural, the same word in plural, *festivals*, appears 265 times and thus the total frequency is 1121 times. The high frequency of *festival(s)* is meaningful since it shows that tourism websites want to promote Ireland with its festivals. To illustrate the high number of Irish festivals, Discoverireland.com gives 307 results for the word search of *festival*, including 130 general festivals, 69 craft events, 29 drama, film and theatre festivals, 19 music festivals, 16 traditional festivals, 16 literary festivals, 13 walking festivals, 9 gourmet festivals, 5 angling festivals, 5 heritage festivals, 4 comedy festivals and 1 Celtic festival. As Ireland is famous for its tradition of music, music plays surprisingly small role in these festivals, although this division into groups is somewhat misleading since there are music festivals also under general festivals.

The next most common noun is *county* (785 times, *counties* 94 times) but since the chosen texts were mostly about different counties of Ireland, this word does not carry any real meaning to this study. However, it can be noted that most websites seem to prefer using a division into 32 counties more often than into the four provinces. On all of the five websites that were studied, each county of both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland had been given its own webpage. In the same category with *county* go other nouns for places, such as *city/cities* (485 times), *town(s)* (434 times), *village(s)* (155 times), *area(s)* (197 times) and *region(s)* (143 times). The nouns for places are certainly typical features of tourism discourse that wants to promote different areas and places for potential visitors and suggest places to visit.

One of the most significant findings was that some aspects that most people automatically connect with Ireland did not seem to have such a great importance on these websites than could have been expected. For example *Guinness* (34 hits) and *green* (53 hits) had almost no significance on the websites, whereas *pubs* (144 hits, *pub* 16 hits), *nature* (247 times) and even *music* (322 hits) had also been used surprisingly little in order to promote Ireland. One of the most common symbols for Ireland, *shamrock*, appeared only 9 times (7 singular, 2 plural) in the texts, although it should be noted that it was present in many pictures, however. The words *Riverdance* or *dance* were not present in the texts at all. *Myths* appeared only 14

times (11 in plural and 3 in singular) and *St. Patrick* or *St. Patrick's Day* was mentioned relatively few times, altogether 165 times (*Patrick* 90 times, *Patrick's* 75 times). This might be partly explained by the fact that the chosen websites were promoting the island of Ireland as a whole whereas some of the Irish symbols have stronger connotations with the Republic of Ireland than with Northern Ireland. For example, the colour green has historically been connected to Catholicism and nationalism in Ireland, as opposed to the colour orange which has been symbolizing Protestantism and unionism which is an ideology that favours the strong political ties between Ireland and Great Britain. Thus tourism websites may have wanted to avoid using the colour green even when talking about nature since there are political connotations attached to it. For the same reason other Irish symbols may have been avoided as well.

Music appeared 322 times which was relatively high but left it far away from the top of the frequency order. More appearances could have been assumed since traditional music is often used as an important signifier of Irish national identity. For instance, Ireland is one of the only countries in the world to have a musical instrument, the harp, as its national symbol. Tourism images appearing in brochures, postcards and books also reinforce the association of Ireland with traditional music and dance, especially Riverdance. (Cronin et al 2003: 21)

Although pubs were mentioned altogether 160 times and did not thus appear on the top of the frequency order, is the concept "Irish pub" still crucial to Irish tourism. Pubs have become central to the overall tourism product offering food, drink and entertainment. The Dublin musical pub crawl attracts 6000-7000 tourists every year (Cronin et al 2003: 21) Over the last decade "Irish pub" has emerged as a key marketing motif to sell Ireland as a tourist destination. In large part this is due to the place of pub in external perceptions of Ireland and of Irish people: many foreigners regard Ireland's pub culture as one of the most attractive elements of modern Irish society. In some aspects the Irish pub culture has been objectified and commodified for the tourist experience, which may have implications for Ireland's culture and people. (Cronin et al 2003: 83) The reason for the low frequency of word *pub(s)* despite its importance in Irish tourism could be that the pub culture is assumed to be a commonly known fact among potential customers and need thus not to be especially promoted. Or, since the clients visiting websites can have different ideologies, the pub culture may not want to be emphasized in order to promote Ireland for as large group of potential visitors as possible. As Baker (2006: 50) points out, when promoting a tourist destination the

possibly diverse audience has to be taken into account by deciding what aspects are foregrounded and what aspects should rather be backgrounded. Assumptions about the lifestyles and the interests of the target audience have to be made. Another reason could also be that the stereotype of the Irish as heavy drinkers being a negative one, any association to drinking is rather avoided on tourism websites.

The beer brand Guinness is one of the most successful beer brands worldwide and closely connected to Ireland in many people's minds which is proven also by the fact that the Guinness Storehouse is the most visited attraction in Ireland with 946,577 visitors in year 2007 (Fáilte Ireland: Tourism Facts 2007). Still the word *Guinness* appeared only 41 times in the websites. Out of these 41 times, only 4 times the word was referring straight to the beer, e.g. as in a pint of Guinness. Most of the times it referred to the Guinness Jazz Festival (14 times), the Guinness brewery and storehouse (14 times), or the Guinness family and its members (9 times). Maybe the reason for the low frequency could be the same as for the pub culture: it can also be seen as negative by some potential customers. Or maybe it does not seem appropriate to promote a certain brand over others, no matter how closely connected it would be to the Irish tourism.

Beside the nouns already discussed, most common nouns were mainly nouns that can be assumed to be found on any tourism website. These nouns include *events* (523 times), *services* (481 times), *accommodation* (448 times), *tourism* (336 times), *activities* (321 times) and *attractions* (303 times). These nouns are typical to tourism discourse but they do not have any connection with Ireland in particular. However, although the use of the words such as *attractions* and *activities* does not provide any real information about tourism in Ireland, the words describing these attractions and activities do. Most common of this kind of words are *castle(s)* (418 times), *golf* (299 times) and *gardens* (297 times) which could be thus concluded to be among the major tourist attractions or activities in Ireland. Other common nouns describing attractions were *museum(s)* (214 times) and *churches* (114 times). Similarly nouns describing activities include *walking* (251 times), *fishing* (166 times), *cycling* (147 times), *sports* (143 times), *sporting* (101 times), *equestrian* (135 times), *angling* (134 times), *tours* (128 times) and *cruising* (125 times). Ireland seems thus to be promoted mostly by activities that are based on sports, often with connotations to nature. Activities outside of this category exist as well, for example *shopping* (133 times) and *theatre* (126 times) but they are less frequent. One noun that is more extraordinary is *adventure* (137 times). It is used in contexts

like ‘National Park offering *adventure*’, ‘whether you’ve come for *adventure* or relaxation’, and in a word pairs like ‘*adventure* sports’, ‘gastronomic *adventure*’ and ‘*adventure* centres’.

A number of nouns linked to the nature could also be found on the websites. The word *nature* itself appeared 247 times. More specific words linked to nature were mostly linked to water, such as *river* (189 times), *lakes* (108 times), *sea* (104 times), *coast* (189 times), *beaches* (163 times) and *island(s)* (283 times). The word *water* itself appeared also 123 times. Other words attached to nature included *wildlife* (176 times) and *mountains* (155 times), for instance. *Parks* were also frequently mentioned with 284 appearances (for *park* and *parks* together). The websites contained thus considerable number of words linked to nature. However, considering Ireland’s stereotypical image as a place with beautiful nature, these words were mentioned surprisingly few times on the analyzed websites.

Some other commonly used nouns that have connection to Irish culture, were nouns linked to the earlier notion of Ireland being presented on tours as old-fashioned and traditional, the focus being more likely on historical elements than on the Ireland of the present. Nouns connected with this notion include *history* (242 times), *heritage* (229 times), *monument(s)* (104 times) and *castle(s)* (418 times). Maybe more connected to today’s Ireland was the noun *university* (177 times) although universities mentioned were mostly historical themselves, such as Dublin’s Trinity College that is founded in 1592. However, universities were often linked to the liveliness of the city, such as ‘a booming town with a *university*’ or ‘this vibrant *university* city’.

The websites analyzed in this study contained considerable number of nouns connected to Ireland and the Irish culture. Some nouns that could have been assumed to be found on the websites based on common stereotypes about Ireland had a surprisingly low frequency. However, there was a wide variety of commonly used nouns that had a clear connection to Ireland. These included many nouns linked to the Irish nature or activities typical for Ireland, for example.

5.2 ADJECTIVES

Ireland is often called the green island of Europe due to historical as well as geographical facts. However, tourism does not seem to use this adjective as much as one would assume.

Word *green* appeared only 53 times on the websites. None of these times it was used in a context ‘green Ireland’ and only twice to describe the island as in ‘the green isle’ or in ‘Europe’s Green Island’. 16 times the use was referring to the nature, for example hills or mountains, pastures or fields, grasslands, grass or countryside. Other usage included mostly names of places or festivals, wearing green clothes and ‘green shamrock’ (2 times). The relatively small frequency of *green* could be explained by its historical and political connotations to the national and Catholic part of Ireland which was discussed earlier. It may not be seen as suitable adjective for promoting the island of Ireland as a whole.

Despite the political connotations, *green* could have been assumed to appear more often on the websites. However, it was not the only adjective to have a low frequency on the websites: that is to say that there were not many adjectives that had a substantially high frequency. For example, I assumed that *beautiful* would be commonly used to describe Ireland but it appeared only 183 times. It did not appear at all with “Ireland” but with more specific places like valleys, regions, counties, villages or with scenery, walks and even Victorian bars.

The most used adjective was one of the most common positive adjectives *great* (268 times). The next most common adjective was *international* (223 times). It was used in describing e.g. international festivals and international airports, but also more interesting use of it could be noted. It was used, for example, in sentences like “the Wexford Slobs are *internationally* famous for wild geese”, “the wild flora of the bog is of *international* importance”, “Belleek is renowned *internationally*” and “accommodation in the capital has been brought up to *international* scratch”. In these cases the word choice of “international” or “internationally” is used to emphasize the importance of geese, flora, and Belleek, and to assure the possible client of the high standards of accommodation. It is interesting that the word seems to be used frequently in order to emphasize something. It could have something to do with the fact that Ireland is situated at the edge of Europe and that for the most part of the 20th century its economy was lagging behind that of virtually every other Western European nation. Ireland joined the European Community in 1973 and has made a concerted effort to modernize its economy since then. (Hachey: 261-262) However, it should be noted that although the results suggest that tourism websites want to emphasize the international character of Ireland, the word *national* was not far behind with 174 appearances compared to *international* appearing 223 times. The two words were to be found even in same sentence, “*Nationally* and *internationally* renowned as the undisputed centre of tourism in the South West of Ireland,

Killarney has it all". As a rough estimate it could be thus said that both the national and international sides are represented about Ireland. *National* was, however, quite often used in names such as "National Gallery of Ireland", "National Concert Hall" and "National Botanic Gardens", or in common word pairs like "national park", "national heritage", "national winner" and "national institution".

Besides adjectives already discussed, there were only ten adjectives that appeared more than one hundred times in the texts. These included only two adjectives in their superlative forms, *largest* (139 times) and *best* (113 times). More use of superlative forms could have been expected in tourism discourse. Within these ten adjectives were some that are typical to tourism discourse but that do not carry any relevant meaning to this study, such as *new* (142 times), *famous* (160 times) and *popular* (121 times). Adjectives more specific to Ireland included unexpectedly *English*. Given the historical relations between Ireland and Great Britain and the historical division of the Irish into nationalists and unionists, adjective *English* was used relatively frequently, 141 times. It was used often in historical contexts, such as 'English dominance', 'English settlers' or 'English troops'. Other use included for example 'English-looking town' and the word was also used in a context 'studying *English* in Ireland' when it was of course not used as an adjective but as a noun. Other adjectives that have clear connections to Ireland are *historic* (128 times) and *traditional* (110 times). These adjectives are in accordance with the earlier notion of Ireland often being stereotyped as an old-fashioned and traditional country. Although some adjectives with clear connection to Irish culture were to be found on the websites, all in all the use of adjectives did not seem to be greatly connected with Ireland's distinctive culture. The use of adjectives was typical to tourism discourse and also quite neutral in general.

5.3 VERBS

As with adjectives, verbs did not give any surprising results. Only the most common verbs have a significant number of appearances. The ten most used verb forms are *is* (1962 times), *may* (612 times), *are* (544 times), *find* (420 times), *see* (368 times), *was* (364 times), *has* (342 times), *can* (302 times), *be* (262 times), and *visit* (238 times). *Visit* is the most common verb that is clearly attached to tourism discourse but also *find* and *see* are used in a way typical to tourism discourse. *Find* can be found in contexts such as 'find the ruins', 'find monuments' or

'*find* a hotel' where it is obviously not about finding something that is missing. *See* therefore was used in contexts like '*see* beautiful gardens' '*see* Limerick' 'things to *see* and do'.

None of the most common verbs can be said to carry any real meaning to this study. All in all the verb use seems to be far from creative, the next most common verbs being *hire* (229 times), *have* (228 times), *go* (218 times), *do* (202 times) and *travel* (171 times). Most of the verbs used seem quite neutral. The first verb that is clearly a positive one is *enjoy* (125 times) and more verbs with a clearly positive connotation are hard if not impossible to find. However, verbs with positive connotations are certainly less frequent in general than for example adjectives with positive connotations.

It should be noted, however, that nouns describing activities in Ireland are mostly derived from verbs. These include words such as *fishing*, *angling*, *cycling* and *shopping* that were all discussed before under the chapter of nouns. However, these word forms can either be nouns or verbs, and they were used a few times also as verbs in the texts. Since the issue is not that relevant to this study and since the use of these words as nouns was clearly more frequent than their use as verbs, it was not significant to divide their use into nouns and verbs in this study. All in all, verbs used within the chosen websites were thus typical to tourism discourse. There were not any extraordinary verbs and in general they were quite neutral.

5.4 COMPARISON BETWEEN WEBSITES

Altogether there were 152,348 words on the web pages studied. Between the websites there were significant differences between the numbers of words, due to the fact that the amount of suitable information provided on each website varied a great deal. Discoverireland.com was the website offering the most information suitable to this study and more webpages were chosen to the study from this website than from the others. This website provided also the largest number of words, 82,079 words altogether. Therefore the other four websites provided together only 70,269 of the words studied. There were also notable differences between these four websites. Ireland.com provided 30,566 words, myguideireland.com 18,239 words, ireland.dublinevents.com 13,248 words and goireland.com only 8,216 words. However, these differences were not as significant as the difference between discoverireland.com and the other websites. As it comes to the results of this study, it should be thus noted that discoverireland.com has affected the results significantly more than the other websites.

However, this is justifiable since it is the website that provides the most official view to the tourism in Ireland.

The frequency orders from the five websites do not give any evidence that the words of one website would be influencing this study significantly more than the others. The most common words are fairly alike on each website. Within twenty most common words of each website, the words are quite similar to the results got from all the websites together. They include mostly articles, prepositions and pronouns, or nouns like *ireland*, *county* and *city*. One word that should be mentioned is *festival*: out of its 856 appearances as many as 767 times it is to be found within discoverireland.com and thus the use of this word cannot be generalized to Irish tourism websites in general. However, this does not invalidate the earlier notion about festivals' importance to Irish tourism industry.

6. DISCUSSION: RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The most frequent words found were not really surprising and they belonged mostly to the basic vocabulary of English, uncommon words seemed not to be much in use. This could be due to that those who decide about texts on the websites may want to avoid words that might not be understood by potential foreign visitors. The language was quite neutral to be tourism discourse: for example there were not many verbs with a clearly positive connotation. However there were words in all three word classes, nouns, adjectives and verbs, that clearly belong to tourism discourse. Also many words, mostly nouns, used on the website have a clear connection to the Irish culture.

The importance of the findings lies in the fact that they show what kind of language is being used in the present day web pages. This information can be used when developing new web pages for Ireland's tourism purposes. For example, one can look for the most common words one should avoid if aiming at originality, or vice versa which words seem to be commonly used and thus have probably been proven to work in promoting Ireland. The results are not useful only to the people creating websites to promote Ireland, however: they can be applied to other countries as well since the tourism discourse stays a common feature.

Outside the tourism industry, the results have significance as it comes to the Irish identity. Tourism discourse selectively represents certain features of the Irish culture while dismissing

others. The way Ireland is presented as a tourist destination constructs a discourse on Ireland and Irish identity. (Cronin et al 2003: 141) Thus it is significant to know what kind of image tourism websites give about Ireland. Although the tourism industry naturally tries to give a positive image of the promoted holiday destination, it does not necessarily mean that the result to the national identity is positive. For example, the promotion of Ireland with the use of the pub culture can be seen also in a negative light by the Irish and thus it may have a negative effect on their national identity.

The main weakness of this study is that it is relatively small-scale. To get a more detailed and accurate picture of the word use on Irish tourism websites, more websites should be analyzed. This study gave already a good overall picture, but five websites do not provide enough data for generalizations to be made. There is also the possibility of one word getting emphasized too much in the results even though it would appear only on one of the websites, a problem that was discussed earlier with the noun *festival*. This study concentrated on analyzing the language use on Irish tourism websites but the study could also be taken further by doing a comparative study in order to see if the descriptions of Ireland differ between websites made by the Irish and websites made abroad, e.g. in Britain, United States or Finland. In a more accurate study of the websites, one should also take into account other factors than the text. On a website pictures, videos and font styles, for example, can affect the overall picture as much as the text does.

7. CONCLUSION

Outside the catchy phrases used in advertisements, the language used in tourism often stays in a “safe” area. Tourism discourse uses mainly positive or neutral words that do not carry any double meanings and cannot be understood in a wrong way by any potential visitors. This was true also with the five websites studied: they did not contain any really extraordinary words and the language used was mostly neutral. However, the websites did contain words clearly connected with Ireland and its distinctive culture. They showed the situation of the word choices within websites of today. This knowledge can be used in creating possibly better word choices in the tourism websites in the future.

Research on tourism websites is essential since they are becoming the main way to promote holiday destinations and tourism industry is a major economic and cultural factor in many

countries. Another reason for the usefulness of this kind of research lays in the fact that tourism industry's websites' representations of countries may have influence also on their citizens' national identities, issue that is assumably not yet researched. This was a small-scale study showing the basic word use on the Irish tourism websites but a large-scale study of the same issue would be reasonable and useful to do. The ideas provided by this study cannot be generalized to all Irish tourism websites but they can help in getting a general picture of the language used on them.

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- www.goireland.com
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APPENDIX 1

Most frequent words of the chosen five websites. (Altogether: 152,348 words)

Batch Frequency Data - Frequency Order

8188: 5,3147% the
 5725: 3,7160% and
 4498: 2,9196% of
 2752: 1,7863% in
 2603: 1,6896% to
 2497: 1,6208% a
 2302: 1,4942% ireland
 1962: 1,2735% is
 1389: 0,9016% 2009
 1152: 0,7478% for
 1067: 0,6926% -
 928: 0,6024% all
 914: 0,5933% with
 856: 0,5556% festival
 801: 0,5199% on
 785: 0,5095% county
 669: 0,4342% from
 618: 0,4011% you
 612: 0,3972% may
 596: 0,3869% other
 580: 0,3765% by
 577: 0,3745% south
 571: 0,3706% nbsp
 544: 0,3531% are
 523: 0,3395% events
 520: 0,3375% an
 518: 0,3362% as
 500: 0,3245% irish
 491: 0,3187% one
 485: 0,3148% at
 481: 0,3122% services
 476: 0,3090% it
 472: 0,3064% dublin
 465: 0,3018% your
 463: 0,3005% about
 448: 0,2908% accommodation
 432: 0,2804% its
 426: 0,2765% this
 420: 0,2726% find
 409: 0,2655% west
 396: 0,2570% city
 388: 0,2518% east
 etc.

APPENDIX 2

The words mentioned in this study, given here in their frequency order.

Batch Frequency Data - Frequency Order

8188: 5,3147% the
 5725: 3,7160% and
 4498: 2,9196% of
 2752: 1,7863% in
 2603: 1,6896% to
 2497: 1,6208% a
 2302: 1,4942% ireland
 1962: 1,2735% is
 1389: 0,9016% 2009
 856: 0,5556% festival (265: 0,1720% festivals)
 785: 0,5095% county (94: 0,0610% counties)
 612: 0,3972% may
 544: 0,3531% are
 523: 0,3395% events
 481: 0,3122% services
 448: 0,2908% accommodation
 420: 0,2726% find
 396: 0,2570% city (89: 0,0578% cities)
 368: 0,2389% see
 364: 0,2363% was
 342: 0,2220% has
 336: 0,2181% tourism
 330: 0,2142% town (104: 0,0675% towns)
 322: 0,2090% music
 321: 0,2084% activities
 303: 0,1967% attractions
 302: 0,1960% can
 299: 0,1941% golf
 297: 0,1928% gardens
 277: 0,1798% castle (141: 0,0915% castles)
 268: 0,1740% great
 262: 0,1701% be
 251: 0,1629% walking
 247: 0,1603% nature
 242: 0,1571% history
 238: 0,1545% visit
 229: 0,1486% hire
 229: 0,1486% heritage
 228: 0,1480% have
 218: 0,1415% go
 202: 0,1311% do
 223: 0,1447% international
 189: 0,1227% coast
 189: 0,1227% river

183: 0,1188% beautiful
180: 0,1168% park (104: 0,0675% parks)
177: 0,1149% university
176: 0,1142% wildlife
174: 0,1129% national
171: 0,1110% travel
166: 0,1077% fishing
163: 0,1058% beaches
160: 0,1039% famous
158: 0,1026% area (39: 0,0253% areas)
155: 0,1006% mountains
150: 0,0974% islands (133: 0,0863% island)
137: 0,0889% adventure
131: 0,0850% region (12: 0,0078% regions)
147: 0,0954% cycling
144: 0,0935% pubs (16: 0,0104% pub)
143: 0,0928% sports
142: 0,0922% new
141: 0,0915% english
139: 0,0902% largest
135: 0,0876% equestrian
134: 0,0870% angling
133: 0,0863% shopping
128: 0,0831% historic
128: 0,0831% tours
126: 0,0818% theatre
125: 0,0811% enjoy
125: 0,0811% cruising
123: 0,0798% water
121: 0,0785% popular
114: 0,0740% churches
113: 0,0733% best
111: 0,0720% museum (103: 0,0669% museums)
110: 0,0714% traditional
108: 0,0701% lakes
104: 0,0675% sea
103: 0,0669% village (52: 0,0338% villages)
101: 0,0656% sporting
100: 0,0649% monuments (4: 0,0026% monument)
90: 0,0584% patrick
75: 0,0487% patrick's
53: 0,0344% green
34: 0,0221% guinness
11: 0,0071% myths (3: 0,0019% myth)
6: 0,0039% shamrock (2: 0,0013% shamrocks)