

A MULTIMODAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF FARMHOUSE HOLIDAYS WEBSITES

A comparison between Italy, Germany and Austria

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Abstract – This project aims to analyse the language of tourism as a specialized discourse as well as to investigate the way cultural orientations affect tourists' choices in the before-travelling stage. To this end, a multimodal approach has been applied to the promotion strategies implemented on websites of farmhouses in Italy, Germany and Austria. Websites as hybrid media (Antelmi 2007, p. 218) are particularly worth investigating due to their multimodal nature. Not only words, but also nonverbal elements play a crucial role in producing meaning and are here thereby taken as useful tool to decode culture. A corpus-based investigation of the texts from the websites will then integrate the data of the multimodal analysis, in order to make assumptions about the persuasive strategies within the two cultures and their linguistic realisations. Findings have been interpreted through the framework of 'Cultural Communication Grammar' (Manca 2016b), which provides a classification of the ways cultures express different strings of meaning in communication and relies on other theories provided by intercultural studies (Hofstede 2001; Hall 1982, 1983). Early results already reveal significant differences between the cultural systems involved and also in reference to how verbal and nonverbal language are at work in the promotion of farmhouse holidays in the countries involved.

Keywords: multimodality, tourism, websites, cross-culture, communication.

1. Introduction and previous work

Thanks to the increasing prominence of digitalisation, opportunities for information exchange have grown considerably, and the Web has accordingly become a powerful tool for marketing purposes. Because of these features, the Internet plays a crucial role also in the tourism and hospitality industry at various levels. On the one hand, the growth of the online tourism domain has clearly allowed tourism organisations and agencies to build up direct relationships with potential customers. On the other hand, the Internet has become a valuable source of information available to potential travellers in the planning stage of their journeys.

Furthermore, recent literature has convincingly shown that tourism is not simply a leisure activity (Manca 2016a, p. 1). A journey allows people to cross the borders of cultural systems (Ehlich 2014, p. 15), thus leading to intercultural encounters (Hofstede 2010, p. 392). Although the bond between tourism and culture is largely recognised as strong, doubts can be raised as to whether tourist destinations consider cultural factors while developing their promotion strategies. Admittedly, culture-oriented presentations of travel destinations are acknowledged as key elements in persuasion processes. As suggested by de Mooji (2010, p. 67), in order to establish a successful relationship between consumers and brands, advertising as a cultural artefact must also reflect the consumers' cultural values. Since it implies the direct engagement of potential readers, tourism promotion falls under the label "High Involvement Advertisement" (Janich 2005, p. 25). Likewise, tourist destinations are "High Involvement Products" (Ricci Garotti 2016, p. 19) due to their close interrelation with the needs of the recipients.

In this respect, the investigation of the tourism discourse conveyed through websites implies a new understanding of textual features. Due to their dynamic structure and multimodal nature, websites qualify as hybrid mediums (Santulli *et al.* 2007, p. 218), inasmuch as they are "not only made up of language, but also of a set of culturally and functionally dependent modes which all contribute to the overall meaning, and make the text function as a full system of communication" (Manca 2016a, p. 5). Their characteristics ultimately present a tourist product from different perspectives in its overall complexity (Giacomarra 2005, p. 132).

Hence, while studying the impact of tourism promotion on readers, it is essential to focus on how different modes of communication transform interests and desires in the urge to visit a specific destination (Boyer, Viallon 1994, p. 7). Over the past decades, several scholars have applied the multimodal approach to tourism discourse analysis (Francesconi 2007, 2011, 2012, 2014; Maci 2013; Denti 2012; Manca 2016a, 2016b). To my knowledge, exception made for one study on the construction of the image of Italy on catalogues targeting German-speaking tourists (Ricci Garotti 2016) and two linguistic investigations of *agriturismi*¹ promotion in Germany (Magris 2010; Palmisano 2010), no published research has investigated websites advertising farmhouse holidays to tourists from German-speaking countries from a multimodal and cross-cultural perspective.

Our analysis mainly involves websites advertising farmhouse holidays in Italy, Germany and Austria. The choice of this specific tourist domain is justified by the strong impact of *agriturismi* on the economy of the tourist

¹ "Agriturismi" is the Italian word for "farmhouses".

industry in Italy.² In addition, tourist flows from German-speaking countries to Italy are a well-established phenomenon in history.³ It can therefore be assumed that a detailed analysis of this specific intercultural contact is particularly worth investigating. Since this research project is still in progress, merely preliminary results will be discussed here, as to describe general tendencies in tourism promotion in the analysed countries.

2. Research questions and aim of the study

The paper offers an overview of the most relevant theoretical frameworks and proceeds with a contrastive analysis of Italian, German and Austrian farmhouses websites from an intercultural perspective. Two research questions are relevant here:

1. Are the promotion strategies adopted in the Italian websites advertising farmhouses appropriate for tourists coming from Germany and Austria? Do the features of the Italian promotion mirror those identified in German and Austrian websites advertising local farmhouses?
2. Can possible differences between Italian, German and Austrian farmhouse websites in terms of language and visuals provide evidence about how culture influences the perception of the potential destination in the advertisement process?

The paper combines quantitative and qualitative analyses and focuses on the formal features of the homepages as well as on the investigation of their linguistic realizations. As for the homepages, in order to gain insight into how primary information is transmitted, special attention has been devoted to their layout structure and to the way images activate persuasion. The evidence ensuing from this first part has been then integrated with a closer examination of language. To this end, a corpus-based analysis of the texts included in the websites has been carried out and relevant similarities and differences between the German, the Austrian and the Italian promotion have been assessed.

The overall results have been interpreted through the framework of Manca's Cultural Communication Grammar (2016b), which combines

² According to a study conducted by Agriturismo.it, in 2018 the demand in this sector increased by 12%. One third of the requests came from foreign tourists, among which German-speaking tourists in the highest number (http://www.travelquotidiano.com/enti_istituzioni_e_territorio/agriturismo-boom-richieste-nel-2018-testa-la-toscana/tqid-338030), last accessed June 2019).

³ Italy has been one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the German-speaking cultures since the 15th century, with relevance after Goethe's journey to Italy in 1786 (see Ricci Garotti 2016, p. 16).

Multimodal analysis (Halliday 1978, 1985; Kress, van Leeuwen 2006) and Intercultural studies theories (Hofstede 2011; Hall 1984, 1989). Concluding remarks will outline the importance of the multimodal approach to decode culture in tourism promotion and the need of effective and culture-oriented promotion strategies.

3. Theoretical background

In this section, a general overview is provided on the theories and models which are relevant for the present research. It is widely accepted that people communicate by using different communication channels, such as writing, speaking, gestures, images, and videos, sometimes simultaneously. Hence, multimodality can be defined as “the combination of different semiotic modes [...] in a communicative artefact or event” (van Leeuwen 2005, p. 28). Given the increasing development over the last decades in the combination of various modes of communication, several scholars have focused on multimodal discourse analysis from a social-semiotic perspective. Most of these studies draw upon Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday 1978, 1984). Moving from the core assumption that language is “a systemic resource of meaning” (Halliday 1985, p. 192), Halliday’s framework identifies three simultaneously operating metafunctions which can be applied to clause analysis:

1. the *ideational metafunction*, which describes how our experiential world is construed by language (Halliday 2004, p. 30) and sees clauses as representations;
2. the *interpersonal metafunction*, which considers the interpersonal relationships between speaker and hearer and sees clauses as exchanges;
3. the *textual metafunction*, which is related to the flow of information within a text and sees clauses as messages.

Within this social-semiotic perspective, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have been able to extend the application of Halliday’s model to other semiotic modes, including visual modes. Because of the different characteristics of the visual mode with respect to the linguistic one, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have adapted Halliday’s metafunctions and renamed them accordingly: the representational, the interpersonal and the compositional meaning. They have provided an insightful tool to read images and relate them to verbal elements.

In this respect, Kress and van Leeuwen’s *representational meaning* closely corresponds to Halliday’s ideational metafunction and stands for the representation of human experience through every semiotic mode. More precisely, in visual communication, meaning is said to be expressed through two different kinds of images. Accounting for the first type, *narrative images*

depict participants involved in different actions and vectors are used to connect them. Conversely, *conceptual images*, which have no vectors, represent participants “in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure, or meaning” (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 79).

Furthermore, the *interpersonal meaning* accounts for how visual elements, viewers, and producers are interrelated. While in the verbal mode this meaning is realised through statements, questions and offers, in the visual mode there are specific techniques to establish different relationships with the viewer. Following Moya and Pinar (2008), these features can be summarised as follows:

- the absence or presence of a direct contact with the viewer by means of facial expressions or gestures, which may suggest two different orientations: a demand to carry out a particular action / to behave in a specific way or an offer of information / of concrete things;
- specific choices in terms of perspectives and angles, which determine the level of involvement between the viewer and the depicted participants⁴;
- processes such as close up, medium and long shot, which express the degree of social distance between the represented participants and the viewers;
- colour saturation, depth, illumination, brightness, which refer to the status of participants and their correspondence to what is real.

Finally, the *compositional meaning* accounts for how elements are placed in images. In this case, relevance is borne by elements such as information value (where elements are placed in the images), salience (foregrounding/backgrounding, size, contrast in colour), and framing (use of dividing lines, frame lines, etc.).

An important contribution to multimodal discourse analysis from a cross-cultural perspective has been given by Manca (2016b). While relying on Halliday’s (1978, 1985) and Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) models, she developed a tripartite framework to investigate how culture affects multimodal communication. Independently from the employed mode, the exchange of information is to be seen then as an interactive cultural event. Every communication mode has its own structure which is influenced by values and conventions typical of each culture (Manca 2016b, p. 7). Starting from these core assumptions, Manca (2016b) identifies three strands of cultural meaning, each of which is expressed by means of different systems. Interestingly, Manca (2016b) relates the different configurations of the three meanings to specific cultural orientations, as identified by Hall (1982, 1983)

⁴ Concerning the meaning of different angles in pictures, see Royce (2007).

and Hofstede (2001). Cultural orientations provide insights into the common attitude of a group of individuals in relation to a specific subject. This attitude is influenced by their shared core beliefs and values, and contribute to certain behaviours, particularly in communication.

First, the *expressional meaning* deals with the expression of cultural orientations, relying on the systems of *Doing* and *Being* (Manca 2016b, p. 8).⁵ Doing-oriented cultures mainly focus on the object of communication itself: facts and explicitness are of utmost importance in the interaction. These features are typical of “individualistic cultures” (Hofstede 2001), which emphasize the individual and his own goals rather than the interests of the whole group. In terms of communication style, cultures who realize the expressional meaning through the system of *Doing* are likely to be “Low-Context Cultures” (Hall 1982). In this case, communication needs to be explicit in order to avoid misunderstanding, since the members of these cultures share less knowledge. Whenever meaning is mainly configured through the system of *Being*, instead, reality is expressed through implicitness and personal feelings, and in the visual communication of that culture a high presence of conceptual images is usually recorded. In this case, cultures are very likely to be “collectivistic” (Hofstede 2001), that is to say, the goals of the group are prioritized over the needs of individuals. Cohesion and relationships among individuals represent a core value. Cultures with a tendency towards collectivism can also be defined as “High Context Cultures” (Hall 1982). Because of the shared knowledge and context, explicitness is not required in communication. Impersonal expressions are instead preferred, and the way information is conveyed is more valuable than the content itself.

The second strand of meaning is the *liaisonal metafunction*, which describes how information is exchanged between participants in a communicative act. Cultures may express this meaning through *directness*, for instance by means of dialogic style, salutations, and engagement markers. In this case, pictures usually depict human participants, thus establishing a direct contact with the viewer. Cultures which show a tendency towards *indirectness* use conversely impersonal expressions, indirect addressing, and declaratives. As for images, they tend not to feature human participants. Manca (2016b, p. 10) suggests that these interactional features also imply different orientations of cultural systems with respect to the “Power Distance dimension” (Hofstede 2001), that is to say the extent to which members of a community deal with an equal or unequal distribution of power. The communication style of cultures with a low Power Distance tends to be more

⁵ Manca’s systems of *Being* and *Doing* derive from the orientation of Action first introduced by Brake *et al.* (1995, p. 39) following Kluckhohn (1961), Hofstede (1991) and Hall (1982, 1983).

informal and direct, whereas implicitness, formality and declarative forms suggest that the degree of Power Distance is high.

The third and last meaning, the *structural* one, refers to “the way modes of communication are culturally structured to convey meaningful messages” (Manca 2016b, p. 10). This metafunction brings to the fore the systems of *linearity* and *circularity* (Manca 2016b). As the word itself suggests, the linearity system leads to messages structured according to the KISS⁶ principle (Katan 2004, p. 267). On the other hand, circularity is exemplified by expressions typical of the KILC⁷ style (Katan 2004, p. 267), which is instead writer oriented.

Manca (2016b) applied this model to the analysis of the official tourist websites of Italy, Germany, France and New Zealand. In that case, the Cultural Communication Grammar has proved to be a very useful framework to highlight similarities and differences between the analysed websites in the way culture is at work in the promotion. Similarly, her framework will be useful here to provide a qualitative interpretation of our findings in relation to the theory of cultural dimensions.

4. Data and methodology

Our analysis involves websites of Italian, German and Austrian farmhouses. In a first stage, the investigation focuses on the formal features of the homepages through an analysis of the visual communication. Later, the verbal language used in order to activate persuasion has been considered. Table 1 contains an overview of the regions in which the farmhouses are located.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Regions / Bundesländer</i>	Scrutinised websites
Italy	Marche, Puglia, Tuscany, Umbria, Veneto	1,154
Austria	Carinthia, Styria, Tirol, Vorarlberg	1,139
Germany	Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein	1,167

Table 1
Location of the farmhouses in the three countries.

The scrutinised websites have been selected according to specific criteria: the geographical location, in order to include in the investigation regions with different characteristics; the economic importance of farmhouse holidays in

⁶ The acronym KISS (Katan 2004, p. 267) stands for ‘Keep it short and simple’.

⁷ The acronym KILC (*ibidem*) stands for ‘Keep it long and complex’.

the selected regions; the presence of at least three pictures in the homepage and of three different sections in the website. Table 2 shows the key data used for the formal investigation of the websites.

	Scrutinised pictures	Scrutinised taglines
Italian <i>agriturismi</i>	3,279	815
German <i>Bauernhöfe</i> ⁸	3,215	636
Austrian <i>Bauernhöfe</i>	3,627	753

Table 2
Key data of the formal investigation of websites.

The methodological approach for the analysis of verbal language used in the websites bases on Corpus Linguistics. The language used for promotional purposes has been investigated in terms of frequent words, collocations and semantic preference. Our data are derived from a set of three comparable corpora in German and Italian containing texts downloaded from the Italian *agriturismi* websites and the German and Austrian *Bauernhöfe* websites. Table 3 contains an overview of the analysed corpora.

<i>Corpus name</i>	<i>Tokens</i>	<i>Regions / Bundesländer</i>
AgrIT	648,982	Marche, Puglia, Tuscany, Umbria, Veneto
AgrAT	623,549	Carinthia, Styria, Tirol, Vorarlberg
AgrDE	612,854	Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein

Table 3
Key data of the three comparable corpora AgrIT, AgrAT, AgrDE.

Once selected, the texts have been downloaded and stored in different folders, according to the website's sections:

- A – Homepage*: general introduction to the facility focusing on the history and the owners themselves;
- B – Services and facilities*: overview of the opportunities available to guests to enjoy their time at the farm and of the activities proposed by the farmhouse;
- C – Food and local products*: during their stay, tourists have the possibility to taste local food and wine, much of which is produced at the farmhouse itself;

⁸ “Bauernhöfe” is the German word for “farmhouses”.

D – Rooms and accommodation: detailed description of rooms and apartments in terms of furniture and available services inside the accommodation;

E – Surroundings: information about what to do outside the facility together with tour proposals and neighboring cities worth visiting.

Once assembled, the three corpora have been analysed by using *WordSmith Tools 7.0*, a software for linguistic analysis by means of which frequencies and concordances were retrieved and compared across the three sets of

5. Formal structure of the homepages and visual communication

The study of visuals presented in this section focused on three elements: homepage structure, pictures, and taglines. The investigation of the homepage structure takes into consideration how information and nonverbal elements are organised in the webpage, while the analysis of pictures places emphasis on those nonverbal elements which contribute to activate persuasion. The ensuing findings are then combined with a closer examination of taglines, that is to say, the short catchphrases that express the farmhouse's philosophy, as well as its core values. Concerning the Italian *agriturismi* websites, the frequently occurring features in their homepages are represented in Figure 1.

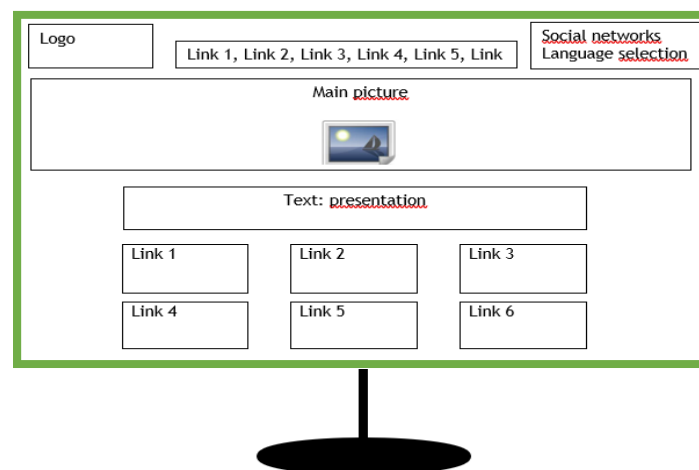


Figure 1

Structure of Italian *agriturismi* homepages in 73% of the scrutinised websites.

The *agriturismo*'s name and the logo are normally placed at the top left. The top bar usually contains the following links [to other pages in the website]: Home, *La nostra azienda* [Our farmhouse], *I nostri prodotti* [Our products] *Attività e servizi* [Activities and services], *Camere* [Rooms], *Dintorni*

[Surroundings], *Contatti* [Contacts]. At the centre of the page, most of the screen space is given to a big cluster displaying a side-scrolling gallery with different pictures. Scrolling down the page, one finds the same links featured in the top bar, now together with pictures and small captions introducing the section. Consequently, visitors are given the possibility to access different sections according to their own purposes, thus enhancing an open narrativity.⁹

The Austrian websites show opposite features. Figure 2 displays the most frequent homepage structure:

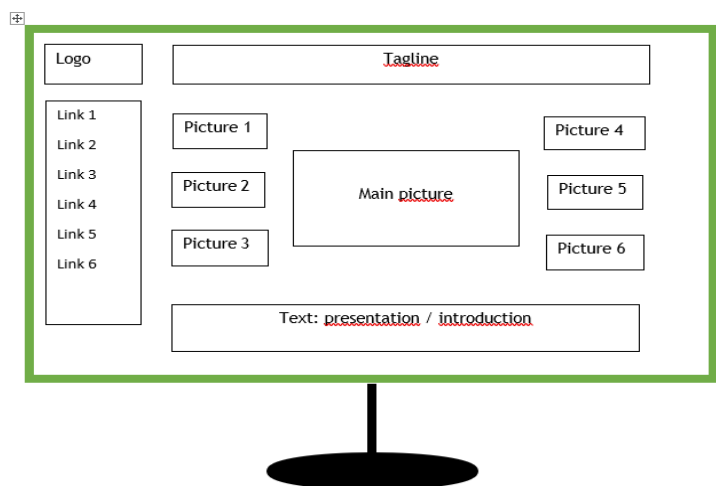


Figure 2

Structure of the Austrian homepages in 68% of the scrutinised websites.

The Austrian *Bauernhöfe* homepages tend to feature a very small amount of text. Here the narrative provides a logical path for the visitors to follow. The number of pictures in this case is higher than in the previously scrutinised Italian websites, although they are much smaller. Featuring similar contents compared to their Italian counterpart, no significant differences have been recorded with respect to the links in the left bar.

As to German homepages, in a continuum where Italian and Austrian websites occupy the two extremes, they stand in the middle. The websites of farmhouses located in Northern Germany (Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein) share several features of the Italian homepages (see Figure 1), whereas the ones located in the South (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria) are very similar to Austrian homepages, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Further confirmation of these results has been provided by the analysis of the pictures featured in the homepages. The images have been manually

⁹ The concept of narrativity of websites has been well investigated by Volli (2005). He points out that the most important effect is the inclusion of the recipients. For instance, the pointer allows people to interact with multimodal texts by opening, closing or zooming windows (Volli 2005, pp. 57, 60).

sorted out according to the depicted subject, and six most frequent participants have been identified. Figure 3 illustrates the significant differences in the distribution of the participants depicted in the pictures available on the websites considered for analysis:

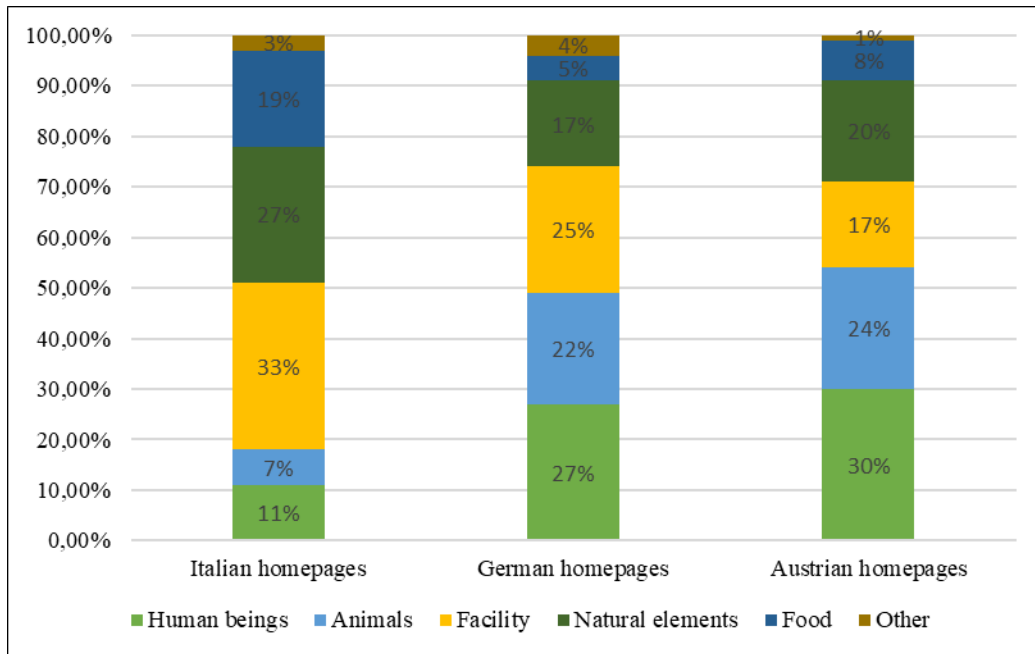


Figure 3

Represented participants in the homepages of Italian, German and Austrian farmhouses.

Italian homepages tend to focus on the presentation of the tourist product and on what is available for guests in the facility. This is confirmed by the high frequency of pictures featuring single parts of the farmhouse, such as the rooms (36%), the swimming pool (22%), and the restaurant (25%), whereas the most depicted elements in German and Austrian homepages are the garden (31%), the courtyard (24%), and the stables (21%).

In all three cases, single elements of the facility are depicted from a low-down angle, highlighting the importance of the represented participants, whereas pictures of the whole facility and the surrounding area are taken from the top-down angle, thus enhancing the view of the website visitor. Furthermore, a high number of images featuring natural elements and the countryside in general has been recorded across the spectrum. These are equally present in all homepages, mostly from a top-down angle, as to involve viewers (Manca 2016a, p. 53). However, Austrian and German homepages often embed natural elements with human participants in the same picture and put them at eye-level. The subject of food is often featured in the Italian homepages and sometimes also in the Austrian homepages, but, whereas the Italian pictures mainly show locally-grown products, such as oil

and wine (43%), Austrian and German websites feature pictures of breakfast buffets (42%) or picnics (21%).

The most significant difference between the analysed systems is the presence or absence of human participants in the pictures. Italian homepages usually do not feature animated participants. Conversely, the most frequent subjects in Austrian homepages are families with children and animals. These are actively involved in the farmhouse activities: children play in the garden with animals from the farm, whereas adults are mainly depicted while walking and exploring, and sometimes playing with children.

These results suggest that the Austrian promotion targets the strong involvement of interactive participants. This is also proved by the use of the eye-level angle, which establishes equality between interactive and represented participants and enhances the stimulation of interest, as well as the identification of the website visitor as potential guest. Similar features have been identified also in the German homepages, although human beings occur as subjects with a lower percentage and mostly in symbolic pictures.

The different levels of interaction used in the promotion of a farmhouse holiday has been investigated and compared analysing taglines, whose main aim is to catch the attention of website visitors. These phrases are usually located close to the farmhouse's logo or at the centre of the homepage. Figure 4 shows the results classified by sentence types:

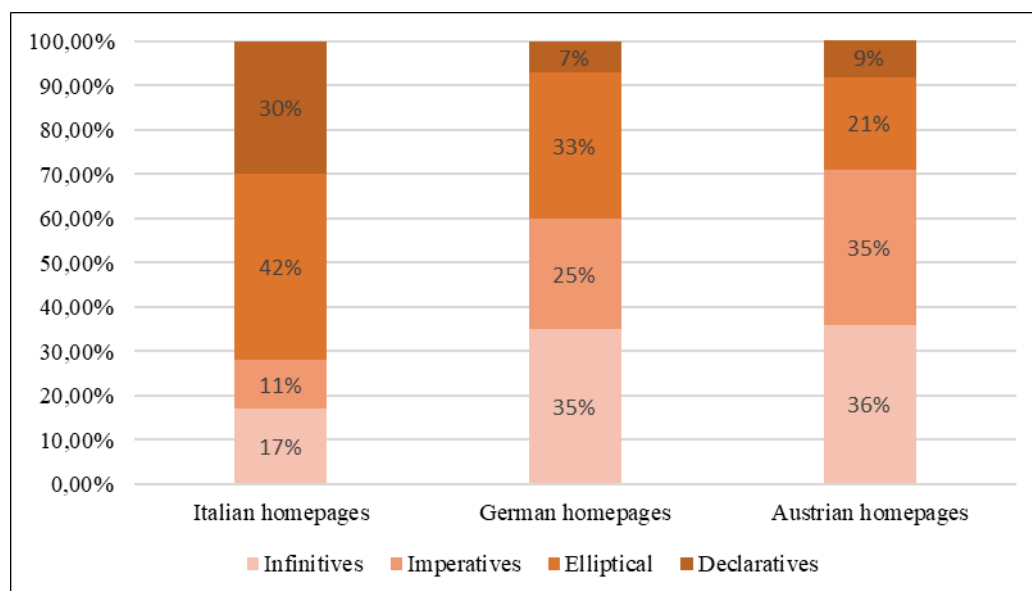


Figure 4

Sentence types in the homepages of Italian, German and Austrian farmhouses.

Elliptical and, to an extent, declarative sentences are predominant in the Italian homepages. As these types of sentence aim mainly to give information, it can then be concluded that interactivity is not the main goal of

the Italian type of promotion. Elliptical sentences are also present in the Austrian and German homepages, although verbal communication here is mainly developed through imperatives, infinitives, and direct questions to the reader. In these cases, recipients are addressed more directly. The frequent use of pronouns (46% in German homepages, 57% in Austrian), for instance, enhances a highly dialogic interaction. These tendencies match those identified for visual communication and seem thus to confirm the assumption according to which language and visuals work together to create persuasion.

Table 2 summarises the identified features across the homepages.

	<i>Italian homepages</i>	<i>Austrian homepages</i>	<i>German homepages</i>
Homepage structure	Several clusters Informative	No clusters Interactive	Few clusters Informative / Interactive
Images	Symbolic	Conceptual	Symbolic and conceptual
Language	Declaratives, Ellipses	Imperatives, Infinitives, Ellipses	Ellipses, Declaratives, Infinitives

Table 2

Main features of the scrutinised homepages in terms of structure, pictures and language.

In the next section, we will integrate these results with a corpus-based analysis of the language in the single websites.

5. Verbal communication: corpus analysis and results

A corpus-based analysis of the texts found in the websites was carried out in order to explore the way persuasion is at work in the systems involved. In the following sections, a list of the most frequent words will be provided for each corpus. The lists will be compared in order to identify similarities and differences in the way verbal language is used in the three cultural systems for promotional purposes.

6.1. Contrastive analysis of frequency lists

Because the first most frequent words in a corpus are usually function words, for the purposes of this study these have been excluded and only content words (nouns, verbs, and adjectives) have been selected.

Table 4 displays the first fifteen most frequent content words in the scrutinised corpora.

	AgrIT	%	AgrAT	%	AgrDE	%
1	<i>agriturismo</i> [farmhouse]	0.42	<i>Bauernhof</i> [farmhouse]	0.33	<i>können</i> [can]	0.46
2	<i>Toscana</i> [Tuscany]	0.42	<i>Urlaub</i> [holiday]	0.31	<i>Hof</i> [farmhouse]	0.44
3	<i>camere</i> [rooms]	0.29	<i>können</i> [can]	0.30	<i>Kinder</i> [children]	0.33
4	<i>ospiti</i> [guests]	0.29	<i>Hof</i> [house]	0.30	<i>Urlaub</i> [holiday]	0.29
5	<i>mare</i> [sea]	0.23	<i>Kinder</i> [children]	0.22	<i>Wohnung</i> [apartment]	0.23
6	<i>piscina</i> [pool]	0.22	<i>genießen</i> [enjoy]	0.22	<i>bieten</i> [offer]	0.21
7	<i>prodotti</i> [products]	0.21	<i>Natur</i> [nature]	0.20	<i>finden</i> [find]	0.20
8	<i>soggiorno</i> [stay]	0.21	<i>Familie</i> [family]	0.18	<i>großen</i> [big]	0.18
9	<i>terra</i> [land]	0.20	<i>Zimmer</i> [rooms]	0.17	<i>Platz</i> [space]	0.18
10	<i>servizi</i> [services]	0.20	<i>Gäste</i> [guests]	0.16	<i>genießen</i> [enjoy]	0.18
11	<i>natura</i> [nature]	0.18	<i>bietet</i> [offers]	0.16	<i>Familie</i> [family]	0.18
12	<i>olio</i> [oil]	0.18	<i>Balkon</i> [balcony]	0.15	<i>Gäste</i> [guests]	0.18
13	<i>azienda</i> [farm]	0.16	<i>Wohnung</i> [apartment]	0.14	<i>zur Verfügung</i> [available]	0.17
14	<i>ristorante</i> [restaurant]	0.15	<i>Sommer</i> [summer]	0.14	<i>Tiere</i> [animals]	0.16
15	<i>grande</i> [big]	0.14	<i>finden</i> [find]	0.14	<i>freuen</i> [be happy]	0.15

Table 4

List of the first 15 content words in AgrIT, AgrDE and AgrAT.

An initial observation of the three wordlists uncovers significant differences among the analysed corpora. The first fifteen words contained in the AgrIT corpus mainly feature unanimated participants. They refer, indeed, to the accommodation itself, such as *agriturismo* [farmhouse], *camere* [rooms], *piscina* [pool], *soggiorno* [stay], *servizi* [services], *azienda* [farm]. Additionally, nouns belonging to the semantic fields of ‘natural elements’ (*mare* [sea], *terra* [land], *natura* [nature]) and ‘food’ (*prodotti* [products], *ristorante* [restaurant]) are recorded as prominent. Furthermore, particularly worth pointing out is the fact that, except from the adjective *grande* [big], the AgrIT wordlist features exclusively nouns among the most frequent words.

Let us now look at the AgrDE and the AgrAT. As for nouns, the results are partially similar to the Italian ones. The semantic field of ‘accommodation features’ is also here widely represented: *Bauernhof* / *Hof* [farmhouse], *Urlaub* [holiday], *Zimmer* [rooms], *Balkon* [balcony], *Wohnung* [apartment],

Platz [space]. Few references to natural elements are included in the AgrAT wordlist only (*Natur* [nature], *Sommer* [summer]). Despite these similarities, it is interesting to notice that AgrAT and AgrDE wordlists prominently feature also nouns belonging to the semantic field of ‘animated participants’ (*Kinder* [children], *Familie* [family], *Gäste* [guests], *Tiere* [animals]). These first results suggest that promotional strategies used by the Austrian and German websites and those used by the Italian ones do not focus on the same aspects of the farmhouse experience. While the Italian promotion is mainly based on the description of the facility and of the surrounding nature, the German and the Austrian ones are geared towards potential tourists, trying to attract them more directly.

Further support to this finding is provided by the analysis of verbs. These latter are believed to play a crucial role in tourism promotion inasmuch as they carry the persuasive function which defines all tourist texts (Manca 2016, p. 78). Nevertheless, the Italian frequency list does not contain any verb. In the German language corpora, while the verb *bieten* [offer] is used to describe the facility and the services offered, verbs such as *genießen* [enjoy], *finden* [find], *sich freuen* [be pleased about / look forward to something] describe actions which can be performed only by potential tourists. Additionally, the high engagement of readers is clearly exemplified by the strong frequency of the modal verb *können* [can] mostly used in the present tense. Frequency list analysis ultimately confirms the insight gained through the previous investigation of nonverbal elements. In order to provide further evidence to our hypothesis, we will extend our quantitative approach to the collocational profile of some words related to the participants more frequently depicted in the pictures available on the websites selected.

5.2. Concordances

In this section, we will present the linguistic profile of some lemmas in the corpora, which are displayed according to the KWIC¹⁰ format through the tool *Concord*. This allows us to investigate the immediate context on the left and on the right of the selected node word. Interestingly, the AgrAT shares many features with the AgrDE, while significant differences have been recorded between the German and the Italian texts.

¹⁰ The acronym KWIC stands for ‘Key Word in Context’.

5.2.1. “Family”

*Familie**¹¹ [family] is one of the most frequent words in the AgrAT (0.18%). A common collocation of this word is the adjective *ganz** [entire] (13%) in expressions such as *für die ganze / mit der ganzen Familie* [for / with the entire family]. In Austrian farmhouses, families are suggested to spend time together, as exemplified by patterns such as *Zeit mit der ganzen Familie verbringen* [spend time with the entire family], *Urlaub mit der ganzen Familie genießen* [enjoy the holidays with the entire family]. During their stay, they share different experiences [*Erlebnis*], relax [*Erholung*] and have fun [*Spaß*]. Moreover, the identity of the farmhouse’s owners is of utmost importance in this promotion, as they usually introduce themselves to the reader. This is visible from the co-occurrence of the possessive pronoun *unsere* [our] (16%) and *Ihre* [your] (12%) followed by a surname to establish a close and friendly relationship with potential guests. Analysing the co-text to the right of the node word, the word shows to be frequently co-selected with *oder* [or] (14%) followed by *Freunde* [friends] in expressions such as *Familie oder Freunde* [family or friends], opening the farmhouse experience also to other categories of guests. Similar results have been found for the same node word in the AgrDE (0.18%). It can nevertheless be concluded that both German and Austrian websites put families and the available activities at the centre of their promotion.

Conversely, *famiglia* [family] occurs in the AgrIT in 0.4% of the instances. While 59% of the occurrences refers to potential guests (*per tutta la famiglia* [for the entire family], *vacanza in famiglia* [family holiday]), several entries of *famiglia* also refer to the farmhouse owners (46%), such as in *gestito dalla famiglia* [managed by family + surname] and *la nostra famiglia* [our family]. Sorting the context to the right, collocates are *amore* [love], *autenticità* [authenticity], *genuinità* [genuineness], *tradizione* [tradition]. These collocations are related to specific core values of the Italian culture, and convey the idea that family-run farms are a guarantee for all those tourists who want to experience a true and authentic *agriturismo*.

5.2.2. “Children”

As the findings of the visual analysis suggest, children play a crucial role in the Austrian and to an extent also in the German farmhouse promotion. In the AgrAT, the word *Kinder** occurs in 0.22% of the instances. Sorting the context to the left, a frequent collocation with the conjunction *und* [and]

¹¹ The use of asterisks in this analysis indicates that the node word has been analysed in its different flexed forms (singular, plural, dative case, etc.).

(16%) can be found. This collocation refers to a joint farmhouse experience together with *Erwachsene* [adults] and *Eltern* [parents]. The frequent co-occurrence of the preposition *für* [for] (15%) embedded in expressions such as *für die Kinder / für Ihre Kinder* [for children / for your children] attracts the following collocates: *Spaß* [fun], *Platz* [place], *Abenteuer* [adventure], *Attraktionen* [attractions], *Erlebnisse* [experiences], as well as the adjective *ideal* [ideal]. Besides, *Kinder** usually co-occurs with the possessive pronouns *unsere** [our] (11%) and *Ihre** [your] (10%). The use of *unsere* works as a welcoming message, as to suggest that guest children will be fully “adopted” by the farmhouse and welcome to take part actively in the farmhouse activities. Analysing the co-text to the right, the word *Kinder** is frequently associated with the German phrase *gibt es* [there is] (12%), followed by a list of available activities for children.

As for verbs, due to the flexibility of the German sentence structure, they frequently collocate with our node word both on the left and on the right. Relevant examples are: *finden* [find], *erleben* [experience], *genießen* [enjoy], *entdecken* [discover], *spielen* [play], *sich austoben* [romp around], *bauen* [build]. Furthermore, the modal verbs *können* [can, be able to] and *dürfen* [may, be allowed to] frequently co-occur with these verbs, as well as in expressions such as *Kinder können / dürfen Kinder sein* [children can be children]. Modality is also expressed through the pattern *haben die Möglichkeit* [have the opportunity]. Promotion addressing children also focuses on feelings and emotions, as in the phrases *Kinderherzen schlagen* [children’s heart leap for joy], *Kinderlachen* [smile on children’s faces] and *Kinder lieben Tiere* [children love animals]. One might then conclude that the large amount of activities in a *Bauernhof* gives the possibility to “go back to the roots” and enjoy childhood in its full essence. Moreover, the *Bauernhof* vacation is closely linked to the discovery of animals, inasmuch as children and adults may observe them in their own environment and interact with them, as previously emphasised by the visual analysis.

A similar linguistic behaviour can be observed with *Kinder** in the AgrAT. The patterns identified are very similar, even though the expression *für Kinder gibt es* is more frequent in the AgrDE (16%). The importance of children in the Austrian farmhouse is also evident in the following frequent compounds: *kinderfreundlich* [children-friendly], *Kinderbauernhof* [children farmhouse].

Let us now look at the concordances of *bambini* [children] in the AgrIT. Besides the differences in terms of frequency (0.08%), in this case the word refers to the accommodation in 39% of the instances (*appartamento per famiglie con bambini*) [apartment for families with children]. and co-occurs with *genitori* [parents] or *adulti* [adults] in few instances (5%, 6%). Furthermore, besides a general reference to playgrounds (*parco giochi per*

bambini [kids' playground]), concrete activities for children are not mentioned. The 3rd person plural form of the Italian modal verb *potere*, that is, *possono*, frequently co-occurs with our node word (14%), significantly only in relation to the general semantic field of 'fun' (*divertirsi* [have fun], *giocare* [play]).

Results suggest that, whereas the German and Austrian promotion strategies are children-oriented and focus on activities and leisures available to them, in Italian farmhouses children are mainly mentioned with reference to a general idea of fun. In addition, the *agriturismi* promotion uses different persuasion strategies addressing children and parents, which are exemplified by different collocations and phrases.

5.2.3. "Nature"

A contrastive analysis of the word nature in the language of tourism can also produce useful insight concerning cultural differences (see Tognini Bonelli, Manca 2004). The word *Natur* [nature] is very frequent in the AgrAT (0.20%) and often co-occurs with adjectives (36%) such as *frei* [free], *herrlich* [magnificent], *unberührt* [untouched], *wunderschön* [wonderful], thus conveying a sense of purity and creating desire of experiencing nature. Another frequent collocation is the modal verb *können* (22%) in association with verbs such as *erleben* [experience], *genießen* [enjoy], *erkunden* [explore], *entdecken* [discover]. The same collocational profile has been identified for *Natur* in the AgrDE (0.14%). In this case, the word nature functions as object and not as subject of the clause. It is therefore to be assumed that nature is presented as a 'leisure activity' available to guests in this promotion. This assumption is also in line with the pictures used in the Austrian and German websites where human beings are often depicted involved in activities in a natural environment.

In the AgrIT, the word *natura* is also very frequent and related to emotions and feelings (0.10%). Once again, the purity connotation is described by the adjective *incontaminata* [unspoilt] (22%). In the description of nature, Italian websites often rely on metaphors, as in the expression *immersione nella natura* [immersion in nature]. As already described in the previous literature (Manca 2012, 2016), in the Italian promotion, nature is presented as an abstract entity and it often features collocates from the semantic field of the five senses (37%). This is exemplified by collocations such as sounds [*suoni / rumori della natura*], scents [*profumi della natura*], and colours [*colori della natura*]. Concerning the collocation of *natura* with verbs, it is interesting to notice that *natura* is always the subject of a clause, as suggested by the strong collocation with the verb *circondare* [surround] (26%) in the 3rd person singular *circonda* [surrounds] and the adjective *circostante* [surrounding]. It can therefore be argued that, differently from the

German-speaking websites, the powerful role played by nature in the Italian tourism promotion develops upon a relation based on subjugation (see Kluckhohn, Strodtbeck 1961).

6. Discussion of findings, cultural interpretation of the results and future developments

In the light of the data investigated so far, it is clear that German, Austrian and Italian websites adopt different promotion strategies to advertise farmhouse holidays in the respective countries.

Concerning homepage layout and nonverbal elements, the Italian *agriturismi* homepages are usually characterised by the presence of several clusters. Pictures are often conceptual and symbolic, as they mainly depict parts of the facility, rooms and services, and the farming landscape. No human participants are depicted in the images. As for language, a high number of declarative and elliptic sentences has been recorded in the taglines and in the introductory text of the homepages. This tendency towards a descriptive promotion based on offer has also been confirmed by the analysis of frequencies. The AgrIT contains highly-frequent nouns belonging to the semantic fields of ‘accommodation and services’ and of ‘natural elements’. Furthermore, nature clearly plays a crucial role in the Italian promotional strategies. Its presence in the *agriturismo* is particularly enhanced through an emotional description of the surroundings and the use of metaphors. Tourists tend to establish a relationship with the surrounding environment by ‘immersing themselves in nature’ and going through a process of purification (Manca 2012, 2016). These promotional strategies tend to emphasise the uniqueness of the tourist experience. It is often advertised, for instance, that during their stay in the farm, visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy unspoilt nature, rediscover traditional farmhouse life, and enjoy local produce, culture and historical heritage. Thus, promotion in this case is oriented towards offer and no direct interaction with readers is established.

Conversely, the Austrian promotion is mainly characterised by persuasion through a direct invitation to take action. The *Bauernhöfe* homepages are organised through a well-defined structure and visitor-friendly paths. As for the pictures, despite their smaller size, they mostly feature animated participants, such as children playing in the garden with animals or riding a tractor, and they are mainly depicted while participating in activities characteristic of farmhouse life. People appear happy and often occupy the centre of the picture. This establishes a direct relationship with the viewer and also provides a much easier identification of the receiver with the people and experiences represented. The high presence of infinitives and imperatives

in taglines and introductory texts validate the results of the preliminary visual and structural investigation. Moreover, the frequencies in the AgrAT show that the promotion here is highly interactive, since the actions described by the most frequent verbs are performed by directly involved tourists. All these features contribute to develop a promotional strategy based on demand.

Finally, visual and verbal communication are well balanced in the German *Bauernhöfe* websites. In the homepages, both interactive and conceptual images can be found. Natural elements are mostly preferred, and the presence of human and animal participants is limited, mainly referring to the farmhouses' owners. From a linguistic point of view, persuasion is achieved through imperatives and infinitives, and potential guests are addressed directly. Hence, persuasion is in this case achieved through an overall balance between demand and offer.

The wordlist and concordance analyses support these first insights. The lexical, grammatical and semantic attractions of the selected words show different tendencies in how tourists are involved in the holiday experience in the three farmhouse contexts. The linguistic differences are in line with previous studies in the same domain (see Magris 2014; Manca 2016b). With respect to our first research question, it can be concluded that the persuasive strategies adopted in the Italian promotion are different from those identified in German and Austrian websites advertising *Bauernhöfe*. Based on the above outlined linguistic and visual features, and with reference to Manca's Cultural Grammar model (2016b) described in section 3, the three cultures here investigated can be classified as follows:

	Italian homepages	Austrian homepages	German homepages
Expressional meaning	<i>Being</i>	<i>Doing</i>	<i>Being / Doing</i>
Liaisonal meaning	<i>Indirectness</i>	<i>Directness</i>	<i>Indirectness / Directness</i>
Structural meaning	<i>Circularity</i>	<i>Linearity</i>	<i>Linearity</i>

Table 5

Cultural Grammar framework applied to Italian, Austrian and German homepages.

Our findings confirm previous investigations pointing to the existence of a strong interrelation between language, images, and culture in the tourism discourse (Manca 2016a) and provide an answer to our second research question. Concerning the cultural interpretation of the results, Manca (2016b, p. 20) maintains that similarities and differences in the realisation of the three meanings of this framework are in line with the orientation of cultures towards specific dimensions, as identified by Hall (1982, 1983) and Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001) and explained in section 3.

Evidence for this assumption was also provided by our results. The promotional features of Italian farmhouse websites confirm that Italy is very likely to adopt a high-context communication style. The communication relies on the use of declarative sentences which aim to describe the accommodation. Readers are not directly invited to take action and the promotion aims to create a relationship of trust through an indirect style. Because of the high score on Power Distance, Italian websites tend to use mostly impersonal expressions. Based on these findings and on previous research, it may be assumed that Italy tends to be a collectivism-oriented culture. Conversely, the direct communication style as well as the orientation towards Doing in Austrian websites confirm Hofstede's findings about this country (Hofstede 2001) in relation to its cultural dimensions: as an individualism-oriented culture and with a very low score on Power Distance, Austria relies on an informal promotional style. Readers are addressed directly, and the verb forms are mostly imperative. The explicitness in verbal language is justified by the low-context communication style. As for Germany, the present paper has shown that the promotional strategies adopted on German *Bauernhöfe* are well-balanced, thus standing almost in the middle between Italy and Austria with a tendency to share more similarities with the Austrian websites. Similar results have been provided by Hofstede (2001) in his scale of cultural dimensions: Germany stands in the middle between Italy and Austria in the scales of Individualism and Power Distance.

It goes without saying that a full validation of this hypothesis would require a more extended investigation. Nevertheless, it can be confidently argued that the combination of multimodal discourse analysis and corpus-based approach is useful for the identification of relevant cultural differences. On the other hand, in order to avoid generalisations, it is of utmost importance to elaborate a new model of cultural orientations specific to the tourism discourse, and accessible to everyone working in the tourist industry. The overall aim is, indeed, not only to avoid the potential pitfalls ensuing from the application of wider cultural dimensions' models, but also and foremost to reshape promotion strategies in a direct and efficient way.

Future developments of this study will include then the following steps:

- the investigation of other words in the corpora;
- the collection of a parallel corpus containing the translations into German of texts from Italian *agriturismi* websites. The contrastive analysis of translations and their source texts is assumed to be particularly insightful with respect to the strategies adopted by translators and the linguistic features of the target texts;

- the employment of other research methods, such as questionnaires to native speakers, to check if their responses confirm the results of the formal investigation of the scrutinised websites.

A long-term objective of this project is to provide translators, transcultural mediators and farmhouse owners with a general framework to be applied in the development of promotional strategies geared towards a specific set of cultural orientations for tourists coming from abroad, and thus significantly increase tourist flows.

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