

## HOW THE LANGUAGE WORKS: A BIOGRAPHY OF HEGEMONY

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*The following notes of research are aimed at disusing succinctly how language works into a tourist organization founding hegemony, conflict and a hierarchal order among involved groups. Basically, it contains the own individual experiences in a rent a car organization where English language is taken not only as a skilful instrument for work but also in a real mechanism to maintain hegemony over the rest of staff. Methodologically, we conducted an ethnographic from 2004 to 2008 in well famous rent a car company who authorities asked us not to reveal the real name. Hypothetically, we will call this company as Rentaldays. Findings should be circumscribed and interpreted in the contexts wherein they have been examined.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Recently studies had devoted many attention in emphasizing that acculturation is present in the encounter among hosts and guests (Dann, 2005) (Schluter, 2005) (Nash, 2001) (Maccannell, 2003) (Santana, 2006), however less attention was given to the influence of languages in process of governance inside the tourist system. Therefore, language looks to be an essential aspect in human life since it assigns sense to our phenomenological world. Everything beyond the boundaries of languages is impossible to be reconstructed by our brain. Not only languages determine our behaviour in social life reinforcing solidarity and reciprocity but also generate conflicts and exclusion for out-group members.

Daily, tourist professionals are in touch with people who speak with more than one language. As an institution that generates social well-



being, tourism is encouraged by countries as a form of alleviating poverty and offsetting the economic imbalances (Cala, 2003) (Santana, 2006) (Douglas, 1996). In recent years, anthropology focuses on how “demonstration effects” in residents allow them adopting from their guests certain practices that not always are positive (Buckhart and Medlik, 1974) (Kadt, 1995) (Santana, 2006).

As the previous argument given, this piece is aimed at describing our individual experiences in a tourist organization situated in rent-a-car market in Buenos Aires wherein English skills have been recently considered as exclusive criterion in the process of recruitment. However, these new measures based on the necessity of professionalization will contrast with older workers who had a weak knowledge of such a language. That way, it is hypothesized that English is working as an hierarchal instrument whose end is to maintain hegemony from an elite over the rest of staff. Methodologically, we have conducted ethnography from 2004 to 2008 inside a famous rent a car company whose authorities asked us not to reveal the real name.

Under such a circumstance, this company will be termed as *Rentaldays*. The following findings are only general and part of a greater investigation approach.

## THE INITIAL DISCUSSION

As earlier noted, language should anthropologically be deemed as a system formed by symbolic components that human being recur to better their own interaction (Bram, 1961). In Berger and Luckmann, language comprises an expression of human ability of communicating. By means of stereotypes, these complex systems contribute to re-construct previous experiences according to a line denoting place and time issues. The sense of words are understood in contrast with their opposite, for example white only can be caught in relation with black while there is with here or today with tomorrow (Berger and Luckmann, 1972). For that reason, language becomes in a preliminary process for human socialization.

In spite of above mentioned issues, some groups intents to take the power creating a distinction with the other members as a real hierarchy to keep the own privileged rank in the society. In other terms, prestige and social distinction works as mechanism that helps the elite monopolizing hegemony over the rest of population. Under this circumstance, languages are utilized as a way of distinction since it separates people according to shared signs and codes (Veblen, 1974:403-406). In past, patricians in Ancient Rome sent theirs sons to study in Greece whereas Indians learnt

Persian as well as Arabic as an alternative option; besides Russian aristocrats afforded to learn French as better form not to be understood (Bram, 1961). Returning to the scientific discourse that nothing is bleared in mind outside the mother tongue; in United States of America a indigenous tribe well-known as Hopi does not use any words for denoting time such as past, present and future; like it is distinction of this culture, Hopi had not further reference about destiny or history but in contrast they had 6 different words to refer shaking acts that western idioms disregard (Saphir, 1941:80) (Lee Whorf, 1971: 245) (Schutz, 1974:20-50) (Searle, 1997:28-35).

Nonetheless not all scholars support this thesis, Von Humboldt and Terwillinger emphasized each language is able to be translated (most likely not literarily) without any problems. The fact is that languages are capable to follow certain similarity and be conditioned by each environment. In consequence, each word may be very well translated from one to another idiom keeping differences of grammar but remaining the essence (Humboldt, 1999) (Terwillinger, 1968). For D. Chandler, even Saphir-Hypothesis appears to be illustrative there are some aspects that would be kept on discussing. Initially, terms and words must not be translated using the same construes but in many cases they would be passed from one to another tongue utilizing analogical meanings (Chandler, 2002). For better or worse, grammar and language provide with some constructions which help developing the human environmental adaptation; paradoxically, like culture the language ties but it divides at the same time (Hall, 1989) (Keen, 1982).

The capacity to imagine our world is internalized historically inside our psychological ego. Symbols and signs follow adaptation processes (Green, 2002) (Casullo, 2004). Somehow, the name (as a code) is not only capable to be analyzed but also provide with certain identity. In this sense, the degree of acculturation in tourism may be very well studied taking in mind three instances: a) ethnocentric, b) admiration and c) curiosity. At first instance, whenever two unknown sides encounter each other, one of them generate specific pretexts and excuses as to why the proper culture is considered in superiority of conditions in comparison with the others. That way, ethnocentrism is aimed at justifying dominance-related practices, such as prejudice, discrimination and sexism. In these lines of thought, Santana (2006) collected a couple of studies wherein stereotypes turned in prejudices in residents at tourist destination. The second typology appears when anyone or both groups adopt unconditionally the foreigner cultural values regardless the possible negative consequences; one example for this is the xenophile. Finally,

curiosity refers when someone opted to interact with a third party moving by curiosity and scientific knowledge. But ¿what does really happen when tourists and residents face?

## **Tourism: guests and hosts encounter**

The urban rules put pressure on the workers determining certain style of life in and beyond the “working contexts”; all who are inserted in a stressful scenario will have to choose on their holidays destination situated in remote sites. By the complexity at time of studying tourism social issues separately. Social anthropology classifies the effects of tourism development in two types: a) over certain territory wherein social structure is modified and b) upon the role of tourists and their expectations in holidays. Many have argued that (mentioning several research examples) traveler practices produce negative effects on host regions. Tourist system encompasses three parts: a) dynamic, b) static and c) consequential (Santana, 2006).

Under such a context, Santana-Talavera argues that demand of services and consumption in tourist-generating countries works as a vehicle towards the dynamic of system while tourist-receiving countries are characterized by having the population with their basic needs unsatisfied. For instance, static component is made up for certain attributes regarding local environment such as hotels, restaurants, museums and attractions of other nature. Whereas modern citizens choose paradisiacal destination for their vacations, peripheral communities do their best to capture and capitalize such fluxes inside their tourist offering.

The last concept here appears to be related to entropy. By means of that, the system in question is restored. The inequalities surfaced in the interaction of guests and hosts are based in two mainstream causes: a) a faster development and b) an alteration of customs and rules in the residents. Some other key issues to emerge from studies in United States and Europe prove that most rapid a tourist project is planned and finished more likely to experience unwanted consequences (Santana, 2006). Sometimes, hosts changed certain traditions or customs as well as proper form of expressing themselves. By adopting a foreigner language, local community experiences an acculturation process. Gradually, certain words are replaced by common expression that alienates their own world. As J. Derrida reminded, “the hospitality is linked to language” (Derrida, 2006).

This is the reason as to why a sustainable analysis must consider the implicitness of language in hosts. Even though considerable attentions

have been devoted to the relationship between hosts and guests interaction on tourist destination, little attention was indeed given to the role of language in acculturation process. The next lines of this notes of research are a synthesis afterwards a work-field of four years. Technically, the role of observer was occulted and systematically recorded using non-invasive methodologies. For other hand, the observation totaled 1.000 days with emphasis on January, February, March, August and November from 2004 to 2008. Additional information of this survey is aimed at focusing on phenomenological theories.

### **How the language works**

Rentaldays is Leader Company on rent a car trade for more than 10 years and have presence in almost 24 locations in Argentina and beyond. Internally, the organization is based on three structures: one Chief executive Officer, three Managers, 10 local supervisors and more than 70 agents.

The process of recruitment is defined in four stages: at the first phase, the applicant is tested by a battery of psychology exams; once the enrollment is formally done, the new employee is socialized about the rules and procedures of the company emphasizing on the kindness with the client. In a third and fourth facets, employees are guided by managers to develop their own curricula. Formally, even though English is a prerequisite for being part of rentaldays, upper-management gradually opted not to follow all these inducement process in all cases. In part, this was because the higher expenditures implied the contract of psychologists and other experts. That way, in the lapse of one year (in 2005) only the applicants to upper appointments were tested in other language and skills.

Furthermore, the scoring system, applied on employees by increasing the degree of sales, played a key role in exacerbating the conflicts between managers and agents. After further examination, since the system of awards was expressed in money, agents not only increased their efficiency in the attendance of renters but also used their language limitations to force them to accept other optionals such as baby seats or additional insurances. Of course, the terms and conditions of the agreement between renters and company was orally explained and accepted voluntarily by a sign. However, renters who do not communicate in Spanish come across with a surprise at time of closing the rental.

Anthropologically, interviews demonstrated that agents constructed a discourse to validate their practices with political reminiscences. To the question about their resistance of learning English, agents answered a

declination of their cultural identity in association with the policies of United States in Middle East as a negative pretext of expansion. In other cases, involved employees pointed out interests in learning a foreigner language but have no time to accomplish their studies. Whatever the case may be, their concerns were aimed at emphasizing the importance of English's advance in the business world.

On the other side of the river, managers stated that English is of pivotal importance in future times not only to reinforce the bondage with renter but also in promoting future appointments abroad. In fact, the manager's concerns stressed the possibility to work abroad in a country of First World in United States of Europe where other subsidiaries of the company lie. Unlike for agents in manager's discourse, English was an instrument for assuring a well-being beyond Argentina and widen the possibilities for a potential migration. Quite aside from this, one of main problems found in this organization was the dissociation between instructions of managers as well as sales-related policies and the practices followed by agents in all dimensions. These glitches were not provoked by English it-self, but such an idiom broadened the gap between ones and others.

As a result of this, at the bottom of pyramid we have found front desk employees who have daily dealing with foreigner tourists. Even if it is obligatory to contract employees with a good level, in fact only a 15% of whole staff read, write and speak fluid in English. In past, customer manager told informally us that many complaints would have been avoidable whether front desk staff had enough knowledge of English to bolster a conversation and capitalizes the needs of renters. At time of returning at home, a considerable number of consumers do not know how the rental charges composed are.

After further examination, English works in Rentaldays in two different ways: for one hand, it encourages discrepancies between customers and employees; as we have already noted, this point was negative for the company since renters did not interpret how they were charged after rental. For the other, we had found many instances wherein the lack of English was an excuse to overcharge the renter and earn more than due in commissions and fees. Basically, each time a Rental is opened renter must sign an agreement where he or she engaged to honor all clauses specified there as well as all preferred optionals. Once signed the agreement, renter had not any right to claim. The document in question was entirely written in Spanish and scarcely is being translated to English in writing. In case of legal disputes, agents provide with signed Agreement and renter is pledged to pay involuntarily.

Four years of ethnography results in many interviews, observations and dataset that were published in many other articles; most likely the following lines will be fruitful for other researchers. In fact, findings are obviously summarized because of time and space limitations:

## **CONCLUSION**

It is not surprising that English was used into this organization as a mechanism to create certain difference among all involved groups. The surplus in this organization forced these groups not only enter in conflict each other, but with renters. Under such a perspective, the privileged groups have been observed promoting hegemony basing that distinction on certain skills they manage such as English. Some employees (10 over 60) demonstrate to feel admiration by English but mysteriously have several problems to understand and learn it (hegemony). A major part of English speakers looked to despise the colleagues who lack of such ability.

Based on a superiority criterion, English speakers earn wages more than twice in relation with non-English speakers while these last ones uses that for earning more over-commission fees. In a lapse of one year, there would be computed more than 40 percentage of whole complaints related to communication problems because of front-desk employees were unable to speak English with foreigner renters. Finally, just a couple of interviewed employees (5 over 60) lacked of interest in learning English whereas only 2 (over 60) rejected the financial possibility given by the company to conduct futures courses in such a idiom (resistance). By the way, all efforts for the organization to provide to staff a course to learn English failed because of different reasons. Higher rates of absence in agents were found. This means that event though company made the pertinent arrangements for these courses, workers demonstrated any interests in assisting. The encounter between guests and hosts facilitate diverse internal process of hegemony, cohesion as well as resistance around certain skills but in detriment of others.

All these outcomes were not only interesting since there is no previous background in tourism literature about how language creates in organization certain hierarchal circles but also may open still to be investigated in futures approaches. Immediately, there would be some surfaced questions: ¿how may Spanish work in English speaker tourist organization?; ethically, ¿is the language an instrument for creating hegemony or an excuse to take advantage from absent-minded outlanders?.

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