

# TRAVELBLOGS AND EVIDENTIALITY

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We can define travel blogs as informal touristic cyber-discourses where habitually travellers present both visually and verbally their experiences, entering in this way the Community of travellers (community being in capital letters), and integrating the sphere of expertise, as Calvi and Bonomi state (Calvi 2010; Calvi & Bonomi 2008). These multimodal spaces and their authors have a huge success amongst those who want to visit foreign spaces and prepare their trip, and who in some cases want to report on their own experiences. The virtual personal relationship some of them establish is a strong link that seems to increase the pleasure of the travel experience, and that actually encourages new desires and questions, a few of them too insistent.

Tourist places change, “they can appear and disappear”, and most of them “have over the [sic] time been inscribed with specific 'imaginative geographies' materialised and mobilised in and through books, brochures, postcards and photo albums” as Urry and Larsen wrote (2012: 116). Travel blogs contribute to this emotional, but also economical construction, with their graphical and verbal memoirs or hopes. But not all blogs are the same, and we think it could be interesting to point out briefly to the differences between professional and amateur blogs we have noticed<sup>1</sup>. They differ on the structure and on the form in which their authors tell the travel story. The second ones give us many more details about activities, about blogs' authors encounters and opinions, and always upload their own pictures. The first ones, on the other hand, are more concise, use public information and some others' photographs, and usually give some space to advertising.

Our corpus is composed of some of these professional blogs, authored by a group of bloggers called Travel Inspirers, who have occasional external collaborators. They present themselves as “8 of the main travel bloggers in Spanish language; professionals in journalism, photography, video and online marketing with a long experience in travel content creation, destination broadcasting and compilation of useful advices [sic] in the world of travelling.” Adding later “[w]e are overall [sic], travellers.”<sup>2</sup> Their success is evident if we take a look at the numbers they present about users, sessions, page views, Facebook fans and Twitter followers.<sup>3</sup> Because of this popularity, a great number of readers' comments, generally brief ones, but sometimes much more comprehensive than those written by the bloggers themselves are posted.

Travel bloggers are supposed to be witnesses, and this quality prepares readers to deal with emotional meanings. But professional bloggers act especially as information dealers, and guide the

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1 See the study of some of these unprofitable blogs, dealing with Norway in Cortés (2015).

2 To know more about their activities read Turci (2014).

3 See Travel Inspirer's presentation at <<http://travelinspirers.com/>>.

future visitors. The guiding services include in our corpus items such as schedules, comments about History and prices, pictures, advice, and maps. Moreover, links to advertising suggest new destinations and tend to facilitate access to services such as car rentals or flight reservations.

We were evidently forced by the enormous amount of posts about hundreds of destinations to define a thread. We decided that Paris<sup>4</sup> would be a very significant destination, objectively and personally, even if one of these bloggers hasn't any comment about the City of Light.

We wanted to know how bloggers present information and sources in our corpus, how they validate them, and how they interact with the receivers to perform a practical and persuasive witness image. We thought that the study of evidentiality and modality, which values, assuming Torner (in print) but enlarging the field, are intimately related but different, could help us. Let's look at these concepts which are marked by controversy, as researchers are not in agreement about which categories convey the evidential and modal systems, nor in this second case which are the valuable components of subjective expression to be modal ones.

Modality is for Vion (2010: 206) “the universe in which the speaker enrolls the (subjective) representation constructed with his *dictum*.” As Plungian said (2010: 45),

[i]n the strictest sense, the conception of modality includes, above all, the expression of possibility and necessity (including also epistemic values, i.e. an assessment of the certainty of an event); a broader conception would also include the expression of volition and all other types of assessment, as well as the expression of the speakers' subjective attitude in general.

Even if we agree with this enlarged conception, we only take into account for our purposes epistemic modality, expressing speaker's evaluation of the truth of the statement, alethic modality, indicating logical necessity or possibility, and volitive modality that expresses speaker's wishes.

Changing tack, according to Bermúdez (2004: 4) evidentiality is the “semantic domain related to the sources of the information expressed in the statement.” Spanish language hasn't developed any grammatical specific evidence marker; we don't have any special form to express direct or indirect knowledge sources. Aikhenvald (2004) speaks about evidential strategies concerning languages such as western European ones. Habitually, it was thought that only lexicon units could express evidentiality in Spanish, but some grammar items, such as verbal tenses, adverbs and syntactic structures are swelling the ranks of evidentiality expression. So, if we consider the evolution of the studies on this topic, we observe an enlargement of the field, from specialised morphemes to morph-syntactic or lexical means that usually must be appraised in context. Research has been mostly developed on written, monomodal discourses, and on face-to-face interaction, increasingly seen as multimodal ones. But there is still a lot to be done concerning computer mediated communication and particularly discourses which integrate visual and verbal objects, interactive

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4 We have excluded the blogs speaking about Disneyland Paris and Versailles.

links with receivers, and external links to other web sites. In this regard, we think that information source can be revealed in different ways, not only linguistic, and therefore, that evidentiality could be considered in a wider sense.

Willett (1988) distinguishes between two types of evidentiality, direct and indirect. Direct evidentiality is expressed by direct knowledge markers indicating sensitive perception. In turn, indirect knowledge is conveyed by indirect means, such as inference, quotation or hearsay. After Willett's work some other aspects have been taken into consideration, such as shared knowledge and endophoric evidence, a direct one which includes imagination, desires and “the operations of world creation” (Bermúdez 2004: 11). We will use these distinctions in order to explain how evidentiality works in the blogs we have studied.

Before describing the use in our corpus of both semantic categories, we would like to focus very briefly on the switching between different subjects. We shall begin with the personal ones. First person singular doubtlessly makes reference to the speaker, the blogger or the collaborator, and to the blogs' readers who have become writers, habitually appearing in past tense phrases. First person plural can refer to blogger and fellow travellers, but also to the ensemble formed by the blogger and the reader mostly to express either possibility or certainty including testimony. This usage implies interpersonal implication. Second person plural involves prospective actions based on the testimonial value countersigned by the blogger's previous experience, usually expressed in future tense or imperative mood. Second person singular has often an impersonal value, typical of Spanish language, including I and you, and as it is perceived by the individual receiver as a direct address, it strengthens the ties between the blogger and the reader. It is not rare to find second person singular object pronouns involved in infinitive phrases that relate to prospective-testimonial value as we have said for second person plural. Impersonal constructions in present tense usually have the same effects as the first person ones. Those different forms and their combination, very common in face-to-face communication, have an important role in the construction of evidence and modal effects.

### **Direct evidentiality**

Concerning evidentiality in Spanish language, in principle we agree with Marcos Sánchez (2004). She states that direct evidentiality presents no formal marks in Spanish, as assertive statements indicate by default that the speaker has perceived that which he speaks about. That is especially true when personal experiences presentation seems to be one of the main characteristics of the sub-genre of travel blogs, and in fact it is the case in most of the bloggers statements. But we encounter many verbal and even nominal allusions to vision, and a few references to other senses in bloggers' posts. What does it mean? As Estrada (2014) points out, Marcos Sánchez (2006) considers perception verbs explicit in the statement as intensifying evidential strategies of the assertion, speakers use

them to enhance its testimonial value. The verb *ver* and its synonyms appear constantly in the posts: *divisar*, *contemplar*, *visualizar*, *mostrar* having an object, a place or a trip as the subject of the sentence,  *echar una ojeada*. Even in a metaphorical way, verbs whose meaning is far from visual meaning such as *embriagarse de*, where the visual impact is enclosed into the nouns and adjectives that complete the verb.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, second person constructions can not be considered evidential structures. But could we say that it is something like a referred perception? For Ouellet (2000) the enunciation is the space where sensitive experiences become discourse thanks to mental imagery. Enunciation creates new worlds that have been perceived and conceived and that will be also read. Even if our blogs are far from literary works, enunciators foresee the hypothetical visit, conceived on the basis of their own (narrated) [in brackets] perception. In turn, but not in Ouellet's reception act idea, readers will configure new realities in their minds or reshape their memories. In fact, verbs denoting or connoting vision can have not only a reinforced testimonial value but also in such contexts where receivers are invoked they become endophoric evidential structures.

(1) Porque en apenas un rato nos topamos con dos mercadillos navideños más que añadir a la lista de todos los que vimos por París. (El Rincon de Sele, *Cuando en París es Navidad*).

(2) Desde el techo del edificio se ven unas espectaculares vistas de París, de las mejores que hay en la capital gala [...]. Si miramos hacia el este, siguiendo los Campos Elíseos en dirección al Louvre, veremos la Plaza de la Concordia, los jardines de las Tullerías y el Arco de Triunfo de Carrousel, de menores dimensiones. En la dirección opuesta, hacia el oeste, divisaremos [...]. (3 viajes, *Arco de Triunfo de Paris*).

The reflexive passive form of *poder + ver* has the same value as (2), adding alethic modality. In this case, contingency is based on external circumstances or on the desires of the readers, once they become travellers. But the perceptual basis persists, the blogger has experienced that about which he or she writes.

(3) Se puede ver a Papá Noel felicitando las fiestas al igual que a un asno comiendo paja como si estuviese en plena campiña. (El Rincon de Sele, *Cuando en París es Navidad*).

There is another constituent that often provides eyewitness testimony. Bloggers insert pictures that support their statements, preceding or closing a site, a scene or a monument description.

(4) [...] nada mejor que contemplar el anochecer parisino desde lo alto del edificio, viendo como (sic) paulatinamente se van oscureciendo las doce calles que nacen o mueren a sus pies.

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5 París es una ciudad que es imposible de descubrir en un fin de semana, sin embargo es el tiempo suficiente para embriagarte de sus bellas calles, sus impresionantes jardines y edificios. (3 viajes, *Fin de semana en Paris*).



[Atardecer desde el Arco de Triunfo en Paris]

(3 viajes, *Arco de Triunfo de Paris*).

In this way, cybernauts perceive a piece of the blogger's real observation captured in the photograph, an endophoric evidentiality artifact that represents a subjective new reality. But this is only in the case that the blogger has also authored the photograph.

Speaking about pictures, verb *fotografiar* is a star in travel blogs, not only in our corpus. It implies necessarily a visual perception that has been immortalised.

What about nouns? This is not rare to find nominalization in tourism discursive sub-genres used in order to avoid explicit mention of the action. In the case of *vistas*, that is an action's sensitive and cognitive result, and that can be redundant as in (2), we think that it can have an intensifying testimonial value but it is often used as a descriptive get out of a jail card.

As vision is privileged in travel blogs, the other perception sources are less directly represented, we find *oler* (5), and *olor*. Do these forms intensify perceptual information access as Marcos Sánchez (2004) states? We don't think so because vision is considered actually the assertion origin by default, but olfactory perception expression is almost always explicit in Spanish, even more so in descriptive texts.

(5) Huele a comida recién hecha y al vino caliente (El Rincon de Sele, *Cuando en París es Navidad*).

On the contrary, auditory perception is never expressed, receivers must reconstruct it lying behind

*música y algarabía alegre* (El Rincon de Sele, *Cuando en París es Navidad*), or *bullicio de turistas*, they must infer and include it in the new individual reality created by the act of reading. Could we construe these signs as evidential structures? It is not certain. But, when wondering about the word *música* in Spanish, we thought about a real life reaction. On some occasions, when we suddenly hear a piece of music, the word *música* comes out, and we usually make a gesture. We would seldom say *Oigo música*, it would be almost as redundant as saying *ver vistas*, even if *oigo pasos*, *oigo voces* commonly co-occur. Cold.

Endophoric evidentiality and volition modality are habitually carried by verb *querer* in present tense in readers' posts. Bloggers only use this verb in past tense, their initial desires have been almost always answered, as they narrate below. All of them hope to travel, to visit, to see, to take pictures.

### **Indirect evidentiality**

In travel blogs there is a lot of information that doesn't derive from personal perception. It makes mostly reference to History, to sites that the blogger has visited, and to schedules. The information structure, the format and the grammar differ. We find narrative passages written in third person past or present tense, including passive, in front of very schematic notes with practical contents. Habitually there is no reference to its origin, but its style lets us suppose that it has been found in brochures and web pages. In some cases, bloggers let us know the web data sources they have used in preparation for the trip to Paris (Gracias a Myvuelingcity).

Quotation in verbal text is unusual and most often the author is unknown as in (6). They also quote inscriptions or modify quotations making a play with words, implying shared understanding.

(6) Hubo quienes aseguraron sobre la misma que era “una torre absolutamente ridícula que domina a [sic] París [...]”. (El Rincón de Sele, *5 ángulos de París donde obtener las mejores fotos de la Torre Eiffel*)

We think that in almost all cases photographs have a quotative function in our corpus. They give a true picture of the information that has been or that will be provided in verbal text, while verifying it. Especially when authored by the bloggers, not only motives authenticate it, but also some plastic elements such as colours, forms or composition. But they do more, in most cases helped by Paris' monumentality, by using low angles that impose objects' grandness or, less often, high angles, that emphasize the photographer's perspective, stressing both attractiveness and testimony.

Both pictures' aesthetic appeal and testimonial value become central issues in readers' comments, referring to the city's or to the pictures' beauty, or expressing the wish to visit a site or to take a picture. But readers hardly ever quote bloggers' words. There are some exceptions that are always indirect quotations. Everyone, excepting the tourist in (7), corroborate enthusiastically bloggers'

words and views.

(7) dice que una de las mejores tomas se hace desde las espaldas del Sacre Coeur en el barrio de Montmartre pero yo he hido ahí y no he podido encontrar ese punto.. me di millones de vueltas, baje y subí millones de veces miles de escalones y nada.. donde está precisamente este punto.. alguien que podría enviarme el link de google maps .. me la pase horas y horas y nada.. no he conseguido dar con esta vista... (El Rincón de Sele, *5 ángulos de París donde obtener las mejores fotos de la Torre Eiffel* - Marta, 17/10/2014)

In (7) Marta describes her fruitless search of a Tour Eiffel's particular view, and reproduces indirectly the blogger's words. And she's right, verbal text contradicts picture content and so reality. The blogger's mistake becomes a disrupting disorder. The tacit contract between blog author and reader seems to have broken, as she asks for help from other readers and speaks about blog author in third person, not in second one, which is the normal feature.

Changing our perspective about pictures quotative action, we'll briefly consider now pictures authorship. Apart from those authored by bloggers, we discover some pictures already published on Internet. Sometimes, bloggers let us know its provenance, but there are also anonymous ones, that we can easily find them surfing on a hotel web, for example. But nobody minds and everybody seems to accept plagiarism, maybe they don't notice it.

In readers' recommendations as in bloggers' descriptions, inference usually relates to evaluative interventions based on direct physical evidence. In fact, in (8) we must infer sensory evidence (visual, olfactory, tactile), from the adjective *sucio*, the nouns *mal olor*, *grasa* and the prepositional phrase *por todas partes*. As in (8), speakers use in almost all cases the present tense to state logical conclusions (*hace años que por esa cafetería no pasa una ballea* [sic]). Moreover, in most contexts, as here, epistemic modality and inference are involved (*estoy seguro*).

(8) Os recomiendo no perder el tiempo en ir a Le Pure Cafe, una auténtica bazofia de sitio, sucio, mal olor, grasa por todas partes... hace años que por esa cafetería no pasa una ballea. De hecho estoy seguro que está entre las 3 o 4 cafeterías mas asquerosas de París (la mayoría de ellas muy buenas). (3 viajes, *Antes del atardecer en París* - David, 28/02/2009)

Some hearsay evidential structures such as *se cuenta que* or *dicen que* introduce information that the blogger has not experienced. Moreover, conversational epistemic marker *al parecer* also informs about an indirect source for the statement content, as in (9).

(9) Y a los mismos pies del Sacre Coeur, [...] había otro ya más grande y que, al parecer, se montaba por primera vez. (El Rincon de Sele, *Cuando en París es Navidad*)

We'll finally mention shared knowledge, that often underlies assessment, but that can appear explicitly when using expressions such as *ya se sabe que* with an universal value, even in a metaphorical way as in (10), or *lo normal ... es* implying restriction for non-initiated.

(10) Ya se sabe que París es como una dama muy coqueta que te mira siempre por encima del hombro. (El Rincon de Sele, *Cuando en París es Navidad*).

## Conclusions

To summarize, apart from some most of the time redundant allusions to direct perception, pictures usually underpin blogger's credibility. In fact, in this kind of travel blogs more than in amateur ones photographs both focus attention upon image itself and are the basis of text development, that implies also redundancy. Pictures compose new realities when directly taken by authors, and photographers, but not only in this case, because bloggers also quote some others' images. All of them are evidently authored, which actually challenges reception process but doesn't detract from its *raison d'être*, reliability. Even if we have analysed both iconic and plastic elements composing pictures, due to the lack of time we are unable to present here our findings in a detailed enough way. Nevertheless we have mentioned pictures' capacity to underpin verbal content value, but we wanted to point out that bloggers prefer to show an awful picture to prove they have been there, rather than not to put any at all or to choose a beautiful one. Correspondingly indirect evidentiality structures are significantly under-representated in verbal text. Bloggers hardly ever quote or mention sources information, except when it can't be found through conventional channels such as guides, brochures, or web pages, making it clear that he or she has heard it said. So, even if a lot of indirectly known information appears in blogs, personal experience is supposed to frame travel bloggers' discourse, both verbally and visually. Blog structure, tenses, verbal subjects and objects, adverbial strategies and above all, pictures, help to set that idea. In fact we might say that both modality and evidentiality, considering photographs as evidential structures, support reliability. Modality conducts discourse to the author-reader understanding crossroad. Desires and knowledge are real manifestations of the individual, possibility enables imagination, and they share them. Those things make bloggers human, they are not money makers for readers. Evidentiality seems to module expression and gives guarantees of this idea. Some other questions might have arisen, such as the role of memories, or hypertext. Finally we want to mention the implications of considering evidentiality in an enlarged view that does therefore raise the question about lexical or rhetorical items such as nouns or figurative language.

## CORPUS

### 3 Viajes al día

<http://www.3viajes.com/librerias-y-anticuarios-en-los-muelles-de-paris/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/arco-de-triunfo-de-paris/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/fin-de-semana-en-paris-dia-1/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/series/que-ver-en-paris/> Qué ver en París Viajes – 3viajes

<http://www.3viajes.com/la-torre-eiffel-cumple-120-anos/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/librerias-y-anticuarios-en-los-muelles-de-paris/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/la-playa-del-sena/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/arco-de-triunfo-de-paris/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/paris-en-celuloide/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/antes-del-atardecer-en-paris-no/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/puntos-de-interes-de-paris-en-formato-fondo-de-pantalla/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/recorre-las-entranas-de-paris/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/mercadillos-navidenos-en-paris/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/fin-de-semana-en-paris-dia-1/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/series/que-ver-en-paris/page/2/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/fin-de-semana-en-paris-dia-2/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/que-ver-en-paris-la-segunda-vez/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/hoteles-de-lujo-la-tremoille-paris/>

<http://www.3viajes.com/los-10-museos-mas-visitados-del-mundo/>

### El Pachinko

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/recomendaciones-para-la-primera-vez/>

<http://elpachinko.com/category/viajes-paris/>

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/colas-para-subir-torre-eiffel/#more-4053>

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/recomendaciones-para-la-primera-vez/>

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/viaje-a-paris-cerrado-por-vacaciones/>

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<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/montmatre-noche-niebla/>

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/notre-dame-colas-gargolas/>

<http://elpachinko.com/gastronomia/viajes-paris-chez-leon-cous-cous-montmartre/>

<http://elpachinko.com/gastronomia/viajes-paris-chez-leon-cous-cous-montmartre/>

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/arco-del-triunfo/>

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/la-gioconda-louvre/>

<http://elpachinko.com/viajes-paris/mercadillos-de-navidad-en-paris/>

### **El Rincón de Sele**

<http://www.elrincondesele.com/recomendaciones-paris-navidad/>

<http://www.elrincondesele.com/un-paris-de-regalo-para-2008-breve-historia-de-un-fin-de-semana-en-la-ciudad-de-la-luz/>

<http://www.elrincondesele.com/5-angulos-de-paris-donde-obtener-buenas-fotos-de-la-torre-eiffel/>

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<http://blogs.elpais.com/paco-nadal/2015/05/20-cosas-que-nunca-hacer-paris-.html>

### **Viajablog**

<http://www.viajablog.com/museos-gratis-en-paris-o-casi-gratis/>

<http://www.viajablog.com/paris-lo-mejor/>

<http://www.viajablog.com/paris-13-paseo-menos-turistica/>

<http://www.viajablog.com/cementerios-paris-montparnasse/>

<http://www.viajablog.com/candados-pont-des-arts-paris/>

<http://www.viajablog.com/torre-eiffel-nuevo-diseno-aniversario/>

<http://www.viajablog.com/museo-del-louvre-viajando-contigo/>

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