SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

TRẦN THỊ HIẾU THUỶ

BRITISH TRAVEL BLOGGERS' PORTRAYAL OF VIETNAM: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

(PHÂN TÍCH HÌNH ẢNH VIỆT NAM QUA BLOGS CỦA CÁC BLOGGERS DU LỊCH NGƯỜI ANH THEO CÁCH TIẾP CẬN ĐA PHƯƠNG THỨC)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

This research work posited itself in the theoretical world of tourism discourse study, multimodality as its analytical approach with an attempt to decode the tourist gaze at Vietnam from the linguistic and visual meaning-making resources in travel blog posts. It was inspired practically by the growing importance of positive reviews on social media to the development of tourism industry in Vietnam.

Recently, tourism studies have been relocated in social sciences and environmental sciences, with a focus on social interactions in tourism discourse. The analysis may be approached from several other dimensions, seeing how tourism discourse spells out the relations between *tourism and persuasion* (Bruthiaux, 2000; Beeton, Weeler & Ham, 2005), *tourism and the consumption of place* (Snepenger, 2007; Yui, 2008; Urry, 2010), *tourism and national identity* (Palmer, 1999; Pretes, 2003), *tourism and the destination image* (Calzati, 2013; Denti, 2015), and the *tourist gaze* at the destination (Francesconi, 2014; Denti, 2015; and Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). The overwhelming subjects of tourism discourse study are the language use in conventional tourism materials, such as advertisement and promotion webpage of the destinations. On the other hand, travel blogs, a modern genre of tourism discourse, are often treated as an object for discussion in a study rather than the subject of the study itself. Reccently, travel blogs have gained the reputation of being a useful source of travel information for frequent internet users who trusted their reviews, trip photos and advice (Pabel & Prideaux, 2015; Kassegn & Sahil, 2020). The implication is that the gaze placed by the bloggers on a destination and the destination image constructed through their experience is considered an authentic one which might not be distorted for marketing purposes like the one in tourism promotional materials. Therefore, there is room left to investigate into how the bloggers, by using a combination text and visuals on their travel blogs, have portrayed the destinations and explicitly or implicitly encouraged/ discouraged the travel decisions of their readers. This room for research may be even larger in the case of destinations being Asian countries, such as Vietnam, which are often thought of as an exotic and mysterious land by travellers-to-be from countries of Western cultures.

The practical motivation for this current research lies in the fact that tourism plays an essential role in the economic structure of Vietnam and so, understanding how Vietnam is portrayed and appreciated as a tourism

destination by travel bloggers may assist the promotion of Vietnam travel. The fact that more and more people are blogging about, responding to and sharing travel-related contents about Vietnam indicates that such blog posts can provide rich information to construct a portray of Viet Nam and offer valuable data for linguistic study. However, as for Vietnam, there have not been any linguistics studies to date in either Vietnamese or English on travel blogs in general, and very few research works have focused on how the country is depicted in the content of posts by international bloggers in particular. Besides, on travel blogs, visual and linguistic signs always co-occur and interrelate with each other. This, methodologically, requires approaching travel blogs multimodally so that analysis can be done on both of the two meaning-making resources.

Given that the concept of *multimodal analysis* is relatively new in linguistics and the number of travel blogs being analysed multimodally for tourist gaze and an Asian destination image is still modest, a research work conducted in this direction can offer new insights into the issue. Therefore, the current study entitled "**BRITISH TRAVEL BLOGGERS' PORTRAYAL OF VIETNAM: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS"** was conducted to fill in the current research gap in terms of subjects for study, research methods and the data base for research and hopefully provide further insights into travel blogs as a genre of tourism discourse while contributing practically to the development of tourism and tourism English learning in Vietnam.

1.2. RESEARCH AIMS, OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.2.1. *Aims and Objectives*

The study aims to investigate British travel bloggers' appraisal of Vietnam as a tourism destination which rooted from their experience of touring the country. Specifically, it looks for evidences of linguistic and visual realisations to find out how British travel bloggers' gaze at Vietnam and the sociolinguistic perspectives of tourism discourse reflected in their gaze.

1.2.2 *Research questions*

In order to achieve its aims and objectives, the dissertation seeks answers to the following research questions:

(1) What did the British travel bloggers in question gaze at and appreciate through their portrayal of Vietnam?

- *Which aspects of the country did they gaze at?*

- *What degrees of appreciation did they have about Vietnam as a tourism destination in each aspect?*

- *In what ways have texts and still images interacted to realise their appreciation?*

(2) How are sociolinguistic perspectives of tourism discourse reflected in the British travel bloggers' gaze at Vietnam?

> *- Which sociolinguistic perspective(s) of tourism discourse can be found prominent in the travel blog posts?*
> *- How do the texts and still images in the travel blog posts co-contribute to the exhibition of these perspectives?*

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study based itself on the theoretical background of social semiotic approach to multimodality, more specifically, the interpersonal metafunction that linguistic signs and visuals in travel blogs have to offer. The chosen elements to construct a theoretical SFL-based multimodal framework comprise of appreciation qualities of evaluative adjectives and interactive meanings of still images.

In terms of research methodology, the study defined itself as a qualitative case study. The case to be studied was made up of seven British professional travel bloggers who had toured Vietnam at least twice. Data were limited to ten posts on their travel blogs which date from 2014 to 2022 and reflect the bloggers' experience of leisure and heritage tourism. As a result of the purposive data sampling process, a database consisting of both words and still images was generated. The text part of the database had 21,062 words, with 256 are adjectives that appeared 1162 times in total. The still image part of the database was comprised of 133 photos. By carrying out content analysis of the database, the study investigated into how Western travel bloggers appreciate a destination in Asia and discovered evidences of sociolinguistic perspectives in their blog posts.

1.4. RESEARCH METHODS

This case study used content analysis strategy, and built an analytical framework for analysing multimodal data in travel blogs, which was proved to useful when investigating authentic domain-specific instances.

First, the text data was processed with the assistance of computational tools, such as Keyword and Frequency in order to establish the "domain" - or common aspects of Vietnam being gazed at and appraised in the travel blogs. At the same time, POS Tagger and Concordancers helped tag and count adjectives and provide materials for deciding on evaluative adjectives and determining the constructions of evaluative adjectives and their collocating lexis/ phrases, which established the "specific instances" – or appraised items that corresponding to each domain. The still images, on the other hand, were counted and arranged according to domains manually. The categorisation of still images according to domains also helped identify whether there was an

equal representation of still images for each instance in the domain.

Then, the constructions [evaluative adjective] + [specific instance] which had been determined by means of Concordancers were further analysed to determine the positive/ negative appreciation of the appraised items. Still images were also analysed to capture the embedded interactive meaning through their image act, size of frame, camera angle, the presence of background and degrees of representation. Such analysis of the language mode and visual mode also contributed to the decision on prominent sociolinguistic characteristics expressed in travel blogs.

1.5. CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretically, this study has made efforts in contributing to the acknowledgement of the SFL multimodal framework and filling the current gap in tourism discourse analysis. The concept of "multimodality" was introduced and promoted by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001). The advent of internet and communication technologies has boosted an unprecedented growth of visual materials in tourism media, particularly in travel blogs. However, while there have been a few multimodal studies that take travel blogs as their subject, the number has not increased in parallel to the significantly rich data source that travel blogs are capable of providing. As young as it is in the world, multimodality is of course a promising area of study in Vietnam where tourism discourse is under-researched. Therefore, the study is hopefully beneficial to those are interested in theoretical backgrounds and literature on SFL multimodal framework, especially researchers and students of linguistics and tourism studies.

Findings from this research have contributed ***practically*** to the development of tourism communication as well as teaching and learning English in Vietnam. The understanding of how travellers depict Vietnam might assist stakeholders in tourism industry, particularly destination marketers, in developing specific strategies to improve travellers' experience of "authenticity" and enhance what is considered the signatures of Vietnam. Meanwhile, there are promising opportunities to employ the blog posts as sources of authentic materials for translation training in the field of tourism, cross cultural communication lessons and topical vocabulary teaching in English skills courses for EFL students.

1.6. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The dissertation is composed of five chapters, each of which dealing with a different aspect of the study.

Chapter 1, Introduction, briefly presents the rationale, the research aims and questions, the scope, the contributions of the study, and the organization of the thesis.

Chapter 2, Literature Review, overviews the multimodal approach in English that served as the backbone for the construction of a multimodal framework of this study, which are Halliday's SFL and its two extensions, the Appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005) and the Grammar of Visual Design (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). This chapter also critically reviews the relevant literature to the study, including the linguistic and visual characteristics of tourism discourse and travel blogs, the concept of tourist gaze and destination image, the explanation of sociolinguistics perspectives of tourism discourse, together with an extensive investigation on respective previous studies.

Chapter 3, Research Methodology, presents and reasons the choice of research design, research approach and method, reviews the two stages of pilot study, and based on these, justifies the data collection procedure and its analytical framework.

Chapter 4, Findings and Discussion, provides the findings of the study in line with text analysis and still image analysis in order to answer the first research question *(What did the British travel bloggers in question gaze at and appreciate through their portrayal of Vietnam?)* and brings the findings of the study in line with the conceptualization of lingualscape in order to answer the second research question *(How are sociolinguistic perspectives of tourism discourse reflected in the British travel bloggers' gaze at Vietnam?).*

Finally, ***Conclusions*** are drawn in Chapter 5, followed by the implications for theory, practice and further research. Inevitable limitations of the thesis are also indicated, which are aligned with the recommendations for further research.

References and Appendices come at the end of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1.MULTIMODALITY IN ENGLISH

Multimodal texts rely on more than one communication mode. Two of the most common ones are ***verbal and visual*** modes whose relation to each other are both complex and complementary in the sense that they provide different information which is semantically related in the sense that both contribute value to the meaning of a message. Modern technology today is allowing increasingly easy access to visual information and is accordingly making discourse to rely even more on multimodal resources. This is especially true to the expressive discourse that incorporates both linguistic signs and visuals to establish its social relations between participants. This reality triggers

the needs to study expressive discourse, like tourism discourse, from a multimodal perspective.

With **verbal mode**, on extending Halliday's SFL, (Martin & White, 2005) propose the **Appraisal** framework, featuring the possibility of linguistic analysis of the text from the perspective of its evaluative properties. The framework places *attitude* at the centre of appraisal resource. Among three domains of Attitude, **appreciation** looks after "evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena, according to the ways in which they are valued or not in a given field" (Martin & White, pp.42-43). As this dissertation seeks to outline the British travel bloggers' portrayal of Vietnam, **appreciation** features the most suitable choice because it orients towards the "appraised", i.e. the phenomenon/thing under evaluation, rather than the subjective "appraiser", i.e. the human subject doing the evaluation.

Grammar realization for appreciations is **adjectival**, which is also found to be of significant use in tourism discourse, travel blog posts not an exception. The use of adjectives enables the bloggers to indicate what qualities make the object of interest worth visiting (*impact*). It evokes certain aesthetic feelings that the bloggers may have experienced at the site, making the site even more (or less) desirable (*composition*). By using adjectives, especially gradable adjectives, bloggers also allow readers, who may be potential travellers, to compare a described entity with others of the same category and position it in a scale (*valuation*).

As for **visual mode,** Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) make it that apart from representing ideational meaning, a visual can constitute and maintain *interaction* between its producer(s) and its viewer(s). The interactive meaning of a visual is also demonstrated in the placement of the viewer and the visual socially. As noted, their social placement affects what may be represented, the ways that it is represented and how it may be read and put to use. Since images in a blog post can combine with verbal description to tell the blogger's evaluation of the destination, the analysis of images typically focused on answering these questions:

- What are the *represented participants* in the images?
- What *message(s) – interactive meanings* would the blogger like to send to the audience via their choices of images?

Realisations of interactive meanings in still images are the following properties: *contact, social distance, attitude and certain markers of modality.* This involves analyzing such elements as the gaze, the distance of shot, the type of angle, and colour saturation.

To sum up, the critical reviews above have brought to discussion two

salient issues. First, multimodal analysis is feasible for the examination of tourism texts in general and travel blogs in particular. Therefore, it is reasonable for this study to use tools of multimodal analysis for the investigation of authentic domain-specific instances. Second, it would be overwhelming for this study to work on every single aspect of each metafunction exhibited in the text and the images. Therefore, informed choices have been made to include the system of appreciation (Martin & White, 2005) for analysing texts and properties of interactive meanings (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) for analysing still images in travel blogs.

2.2. TOURISM DISCOURSE

Tourism as language establish itself as having a discourse of its own, which features a system of language such as vocabulary, jargon, registers, structure, grammar, stylistics, semantics and neologisms. The operation of this language is realised through a conventional system of symbols and codes, with a purpose of persuading would-be tourists to become active purchasers of tourism products and services.

2.2.1. Verbal dimension of tourism discourse

According to Dann (1996, 2000), the four properties that are often present in tourism texts include Functions, Structure, Tense and Magic. One category is the *expressive/emotive/affective functions* which can be observed when the speaker, by using verbal language, expresses their emotions, attitudes, judgements and feelings. *Structure* is more recognizable in tourism promotion texts. *Tenses* are often Present, and can be switched back and forth with Past, although "historic present" is preferred. Imperatives are commonly used to persuade or dissuade, to give instructions or advice. *Magic* can be created with nomenclature.

2.2.2. Visual dimension of tourism discourse

When the tourist-to-be decides to see the destination with their own eyes, they constantly compare their previously constructed destination image with their *gaze*, i.e. what they are experiencing, which allow for the reconstruction of the destination image. The *kodakisation*[1] of the world (Urry, 2002) has opened up a time when, with their camera, any traveller can bring their experience home by sharing their photographs, and later, video clips, with their friend circle; and for travel bloggers, with their readers and followers. Photos of the destination, which represents a visual gaze of the tourist, can

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[1] "Kodakisation" started in the 20th century with the popularity of Kodak camera (Francesconi, 2014, p.76).

therefore contribute greatly to the process of portraying and confirming their portrayal of a destination.

In short, tourism discourse should be studied multimodally, i.e. by analysing its verbal and visual dimensions, rather than in a monomodal fashion.

2.2.3. The sociolinguistic perspectives of tourism discourse

In light of what Halliday wrote: 'the linguistic system is a sociolinguistic system' (1978: 72), many linguists have viewed linguistics as, in fact, sociolinguistics, arguing that every act of communication is socially relevant. Since tourism has been relocated in social sciences, sociolinguistics can offer comprehensive theoretical perspectives to research language functions which refer to both studying components of meanings in the language system (the potential) and studying social meanings of individual speech acts (the actual).

Discussion of theoretical perspectives of tourism discourse started in the 1970s with *originality* being introduced by McCanell and his followers. Next, Cohen (1972) suggested the prospect of the *unknown*. Said (1978) proposed the prospect of *conflict.* However, it was not until 1996 when Dann provided the first systematic sociolinguistic treatment of language and tourism. Dann (1996, 2007a, 2007b) introduces four major theoretical perspectives on tourism, namely *authenticity, strangerhood, conflict* and *play*.

The authenticity perspective (authentication) claims that the main tourists' motivation is the search of authenticity although, for the sake of tourism, the real life of the Others has been largely manipulated and commercialized. Important words expressing authenticity are *typical, very, actual, authentic, real, true*, *pure, genuine* and so on.

The strangerhood perspective (differentiation) emphasizes that a driving motivation for travelling is the search for strangeness and new experiences (Dann, 1996). Thurlow (2012, p.11) also notes that tourism strives to present places as different, distinctive and unique. Some words for strangerhood include *untouched, remote, unspoilt, colourful, picturesque, quaint, fascinating, almost, unknown, primitive, simple, unsophisticated, natural, different, exotic, spectacular, remote, timeless, unchanging, tradition, adventure, discovery, etc.*

The play perspective (recreation) treats tourism as a game and provides tourists with special experiences, which do not often match cultural and natural conditions of the visited destinations (Dann, 1996). This is exposed when tourist attractions are constructed and represented by signs and often

placeless and timeless; and travelers can bring back status symbols and/or trophies of consumption.

  The conflict perspective (appropriation) concerns differences between the provided thrilling experience and the real past and present of the visited areas and their inhabitants (Hollinshead, 1993, cited in Dann, 1996). While the other three elements are directly and explicitly incorporated into language use, the conflict perspective manifests itself much more implicitly.

  The extent to which these sociolinguistic components are found in a certain genre of tourism discourse can help to determine how the language of tourism is being used in that genre.

2.2.4. Travel blog as a genre of tourism discourse

  The advent of technology has given birth to and nurtured the development of the travel blogosphere. Travel blogs can be recognized as part of the informal family of tourism discourse. It is a macro-genre, facilitating two-way communication, i.e. a ''customer-to-customer'' (C2C) communication platform, and being characterized as of informative, descriptive, persuasive and advisory functions. It is also a genre with distinctive linguistic features. According to D'Egidio (2014), linguistically, narration on travel blog posts is in the first person, consisting a lot of positive and negative expressions, and conveying the writer's subjectivity regarding the various aspects of the destination and holiday in general, and the traveller's cultural needs and expectations. A travel blog features an inclusion of verbal and multimedia materials, both of which contribute to the communication of its author's messages and complement each other in the manipulation of the readers.

  In sum, it can be seen that travel blogs, which is an emerging genre in the tourism discourse family, may have a lot on offer to linguistics. First, they serve outstanding functions of tourism discourse like being informative, descriptive, persuasive, and explanatory. Besides, they feature an interpersonal relationship between the bloggers and the blog readers through the travel stories, appraisal and implicit/ explicit advice told with means of texts and images. In addition, they are reflexive, which means that they often manage to recount the journeys with an emphasis on the authenticity of the blogger's travel experience. These characteristics prove that the author of each travel blog, through the verbal and visual account of their travel to a destination, may present their gaze on different aspects of that destination and express their evaluation of each experience. Therefore, multimodality can be an appropriate approach to examine the gaze and the appreciation of the gazed, and basing on a generalised pattern for the gaze and its appreciation to draw a portray of the destination in discussion. Apart from the destination portrayal, it can help filter

out the sociolinguistic features that are expressed by both modes of meaning-making in the travel blogs.

2.3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES
2.3.1. Tourism discourse studies in social science research

Traditionally, tourism studies have been influenced by positivist and post-positivist paradigms, focusing on economic aspects and being based on quantitative research methods (Jennings, 2009, cited in Francesconi, 2014, p.7). However, social sciences and environmental sciences have gradually taken their parts in redefining tourism as *"complex, multifold, and plural"* (Francesconi, 2014, p7). This has led to a growing interest in studying tourism from multidisciplinary perspectives. As Djafarova (2008, pp.12-13) remarks, the marketing experts analyse "marketing tourism objects", the economists work on "economic issues of tourism", the anthropologists observe effects of tourism on culture, the sociologists look into "the effects of tourism on members of societies" and the semioticians study "the meaning of linguistic signs in tourism signs".

It is worth noting that studies on tourism discourse have been conducted on a number of perspectives, with a number of text types. For example, business researchers have looked into constructing models of destination image by studying place brochures, leaflets, advertisements or other promotional materials while linguistics tend to pay more attention to how the language use of tourists and travelers can visualize the destination. Yet, this is not a linear distinction; in some cases, tourists' reviews are analyzed for the implications of destination strengths and weaknesses. Besides, most research works on travel writing which use multimodal analysis framework are mostly case studies.

2.3.2. Destination image studies in travel blogs

Tourists' reviews have been the source data in a number of studies on destination image. It is noteworthy that most of these research works are concerned with branding and marketing rather than linguistic implications.

With a view to constructing an *analytical model of destination image*, there are works by Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998), Orbaiz and Papadopoulos (2003), Li & Vogelsong (2002), and Elliot (2011) that used reviews from tourists as their data. The first three studies triangulate the destination, the product and the country image. They point out that cognitive country image has greater influence on product factors than on destination factors, while affective country image has greater influence directly on receptivity than indirectly on beliefs. Meanwhile, the study by Elliot (2011)

proposes a destination image promotion model in which the construction and marketing of destination image lie in the hands of the Destination Tourism Organization.

In terms of discovering a *perceived destination image* in travel blogs which imply *further tourism service improvement*, there are works such as those by Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts (2007) and Wenger (2008). Pan and his team gained insights into the bloggers' travel experience and addressed several ways for destination marketers to assess their service quality and improve travelers' overall experience. Meanwhile, Wenger (2008) analyses the content of blog entries in order to identify positive and negative perceptions of Austria. She concludes that the blog entries in question offer largely consistent positive content about Austria as a holiday destination. There is very little in terms of destinations, attractions, styles of transport or accommodation and such. Wenger suggests further research be carried out to assess the degree of usefulness that information about destination image can be drawn from blog content.

Studies on Viet Nam's destination image are rare and conducted in a monomodal fashion. There have been only two studies that look at destination image in online travel reviews, such as forums and other user-generated-content websites. The closest work is perhaps that of Luong (2019) in which he attempted *key attributes and descriptors* of Vietnam destination image. Meawhile, Dinh (2020) approached the destination image visually by analysing Vietnamese travellers' photographs and their captions collected from travel photo forums.

In general, research on destination images in the world and in Vietnam are more for marketing and branding purposes than the socially constructed image of that destination. As in the case of Vietnam, there is modest research on consumed/ reproduced destination image on travel reviews by international travellers, which implies that there should be further investigation into this field in order to be informed about what tourists from other countries perceive as Vietnam's attributes. Also, none of these studies took multimodal data from travel blogs, but relied on one mode of data instead. This informs the gap for this research work to fill in.

2.1.2. Tourist Gaze studies in travel bogs

Investigations into the embodied **tourist gaze**, *i.e. what tourists actually do and gaze at when visiting a tourist site and how they evaluate it*, are often more convenient to be conducted by exploring the language used by the travel bloggers and trip reporters. Studies have been able to link tourist gaze with certain aspects of social interaction.

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In terms of *whether or not the gaze might be gendered*, Zhang & Hitchcock (2017) study Chinese female travellers' experiences and their gaze at Macao. It is indicated in the research that while the Chinese women travellers are from time to time confused about modern life and their memories of tradition on touring Macao, they consider travelling to this destination as a way to strengthen their self-identity as well as enhance relationship. The findings reinforce Urry's general hypothesis that the "tourist gaze" is a culturally learned way of behaving reflecting what the tourist expects to see. It also follows that the gaze is gendered and that it is a socially contingent phenomenon.

In terms of *what might affect the tourist gaze*, D'Egidio (2014) explores the language used by ordinary travellers through a corpus-based analysis of travel blogs and trip reports written in English and Italian. She establishes that within the studied corpora, the tourist gaze can be mediatised through brochures, travel guides, websites, etc. Another finding is that the outsiders' tourist gaze at a tourist site is particularly more highly mediatised than the insiders'. She also calls for attention from designers and translators of promotional tourist texts so as to produce texts that fit readers' expectations and raise international consumption accordingly.

In terms of *cultural perspectives* reflected in the tourist gaze, Grossman & Enoch (2010) and Denti (2015) both examined blog writings by outsider travellers. Grossman & Enoch (2010) look at how writers from different national backgrounds encounter a foreign culture. They then distinguish two types of tourists, ''the cosmopolitans'' who are willing to engage with members of a different culture and ''the provincials'' or ''locals'' who mostly remain rooted in their own culture. Denti (2015) investigates 10 bloggers' perceptions about Italy and their cross-cultural representations. She highlights the use of *persuasion devices* in conveying the bloggers' feeling about Italy and evidences of ''authenticity'' as perceived by the tourists.

In short, most previous tourism research works that take travel blogs as the subject of study focus on analysing embodied tourist gaze by exploring the language used by the authors of the blogs, and in certain research works, their choices of still images in each blog post. As travel blog posts always consist of both verbal and visual resources, it is obvious that they can be studied multimodally. In the next section, multimodality study in the Hallidayan approach is conceptualized in order to lay a foundation for constructing a conceptual framework to conduct multimodal analysis of travel blogs. By reviewing and synthesizing these issues, a conceptual framework for this dissertation will be constructed.

2.4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

All in all, the research took SFL as the overarching theory to develop a multimodal conceptual framework for studying domains in the interpersonal metafunction of travel blogs. The framework lends itself to The Appraisal Theory to discover the appreciation qualities encoded in the bloggers' choice of evaluative adjectives, and The Grammar of Visual Design to decode the interactive meaning of still images. The co-occurrence of these two sources of meaning-making encompasses the tourist gaze and how the gazed is appreciated, which accordingly formulates the destination image, or in this research, the portrayal of Vietnam. This co-occurrence at the same time suggests identification of the features that characterise travel blogs sociolinguistically.
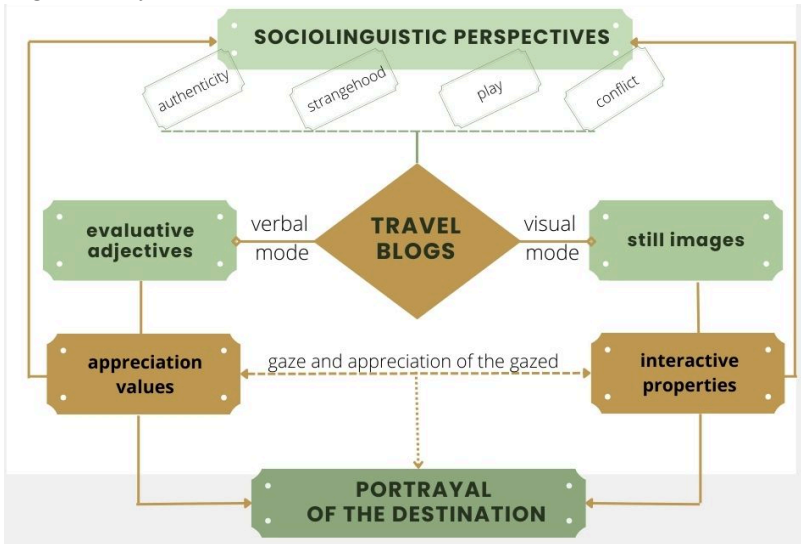
CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study lent itself to the social constructivism paradigm, or *worldview*, taking a social semiotic multimodal perspective, and being a *case study*. In order to find out answers to the two research questions, the procedure of *content analysis* was performed on multimodal data. This procedure included the collection and coding of multimodal data, the use of computer programmes to thematise the data by domains and patterns of adjectival constructions, and qualitative treatment of data to gain a deep understanding of the instances in each domain.

3.1. The social constructivism paradigm

This study on interpersonal metafunction of travel blogs is social constructivism-driven in the sense that tourism is a social phenomenon, and therefore what happens in its world should be observed and interpreted in their highly contextual situations (Hollinshead, 2006). In this way, tourism artefacts, natural scenes and local lifestyles can facilitate direct interaction with the tourist. They can be consumed as the projection of their inherent symbolic meaning, and such a consumption can contribute to the tourist's constructed image of the site. The interaction between the tourist and the sites can also accommodate an expression of sociolinguistic perspectives that the tourist holds. In other words, by adopting the social constructivism worldview, this study can look into the interaction between the destination and the visitor and derive a pattern of meaning from such a communication.

3.2. The case study research design

The study characterises itself as case study in that it describes an "event", which was the bloggers' travels to Vietnam. Since a blogger's motivation to post online is in a large part due to their reciprocal relationship with the audience who bestow them with social capital as a condition of their interaction with blog content (Papacharissi & Eastman, 2012), their blog posts tend to offer narration of their travelling experience as well as provide travel advice. Therefore, by conducting a case study, the researcher would be able to investigate into how the bloggers described the events and seek to understand their gaze and appreciation.

The "event" being dealt with in this study were the bloggers' travels to Vietnam, so it was of course out of control or manipulation of the researcher. The data collection to be analysed consists of *21,062* words and **113** photos and collages of photos, which was manageable for the researcher while at the same time possible to provide rich materials to explore the bloggers' description and perceptions of the country. This potentially richness and vividness were achieved by interweaving the analysis of texts and visuals in answering each research question and achieve the research aim.

3.3. The content analysis method

Since the main research questions of this research focus on the portrayal of Vietnam as a tourism destination by British travel bloggers and the sociolinguistics perspectives that stand out in what were gazed at, it was necessary to find out what bloggers were describing with the texts in their blog posts. By undertaking the procedure of content analysis method, text data was categorized and coded, and visual resources were organised around focal themes. The procedure of content analysis enabled the researcher to identify the

tourist gaze embedded in their verbal and visual narrations of the trips as well as the appreciation of the gazed, and arrived at sociolinguistic meanings of the blog posts.

3.4. Pilot study

On journeying this dissertation, the researcher conducted two phases of pilot study. Both of them relied on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics theory and its extension in visual analysis, which is Kress and van Leewen's Grammar of Visual Design. They brought about important theoretical and practical considerations. Especially, the second stage of Pilot study raised several issues for considerations. Firstly, it has proved that a framework rooted from Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) and Grammar of Visual Design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) does work. Secondly, it returns interesting findings that either support or reject current findings in research on tourist gaze, which triggers further study to confirm if patterns can be generalised. Most importantly, it has shown that while computational content analysis by means of keyword counts can be useful, it is the data revisited process by the researcher that make great contribution. Therefore, it might be useful to limit the number of bloggers but instead increase the number of their blog posts in the data pool for deeper analysis.

The findings and considerations from Pilot study informed the decision for the procedure and analytical framework of this official study.

3.5. Procedure of data collection and analysis

Overall, the procedure of data collection and analysis was developed from the suggested procedure of data analysis in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and, more specifically, in qualitative content analysis (Krippendoff, 2004).

In *step 1*, the researcher collected multimodal data for the study.

In *step 2*, data went under a cleansing process to get ready for keyword extraction and frequency calculation.

In *step 3*, the text body in the data collection was colour-coded. Still images in their separate folder were numbered and coded after the anonymous name of each blogger. A coding system were constructed following Martin & White's categories of adjectival appreciation and Kress & van Leeuwen's classification interactive meanings in visual designs.

In *step 4*, three computational tools were used simultaneously in order to (1) extract a Keyword list, (2) rank the frequency of words from the data pool, and (3) identify the concordances of frequently appearing words in the data pool. By doing so, the domains (or themes) in which the bloggers gazed at Vietnam were drawn and cross-checked. Still images were viewed several

times in terms of their roles in relation to the text descriptions and the represented participants in it. This helped to put the still images into domains/ themes being gazed.

In *step 5*, analysis was conducted on each of the domain for specific instances. Evaluative adjectives were tagged and processed in Concordancers to figure out patterns of appreciation encoded in each instance of the domains. Still images were further synthesised by domains and instances in order to find out if there were any instances being appreciated verbally but not visually and vice versa.

In *step 6*, qualitative content analysis was performed on both texts and still images. More specific description of interactive meanings of still images were given, together with evidences from verbal data, which helped interrelate the appreciation degrees and sociolinguistic features that these travel blogs indicated.

In *step 7 and 8*, interpretation of the meanings arising from interrelating the themes, its descriptions, domains and instances was made; and findings from data analysis were discussed. The researcher then came to a conclusion for the study.

CHAPTER 4:
THE BLOGGERS' GAZE AT AND APPRECIATION OF VIETNAM

4.1. Aspects of Vietnam being gazed at by the bloggers

The data pool consists of 21,062 running words and 133 photos. The keyword lists suggest that to these bloggers, topics in discussion range from **places to see** (e.g. Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hoi An, beach, market, museum, temple, etc.), **activities to do** (sightseeing, food, shop, etc.), **food to try** (food, coffee), **accommodation** to **local life to gaze at** (motorbike, culture, local people). There are hints of the bloggers' evaluation of these (delicious, famous [food], beautiful [scenery], friendly, helpful [local people], crazy [traffic]).

A scan of adjectives used in the blog posts shows that all five bloggers remarked Viet Nam as a vibrant place which feature diversity. Qualitative content analysis of the data corpus shows that although the travellers started their trips at different places, they set foot in pretty similar *destinations*.

In terms of *activities to do*, the travellers recounted their experience with sightseeing and food sampling in all destinations, but shopping in HCMC, Hoi An and Hanoi, water sports in Ha Long Bay and Nha Trang, nightlife in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hoi An and Nha Trang, and hands-on workshops in Hoi An. As for **food**, street food in general, and coffee and pho in particular are

what dazzled the travellers. They also fell for the Vietnamese way of life, accommodation, safety and cheap prices, and were taken back by the country's narrow streets and crazy traffic. None of them recommended buying things from street vendors.

4.2. The bloggers' appreciation of the gazed

Appreciation of different aspects of the country can be found by conducting textual analysis and image analysis. A comparison between the number of running words and the number of images in these blog posts show that texts play the main role and still images play a subordinate role in recounting the experience of the travellers. In other words, still images act as evidences of "been there, done that" to clarify the textual account.

4.2.1. Appreciation of Places to see

Data shows that Ha Long Bay and Hoi An were the two most favourite places, praised by all travellers in all respects. HCMC were appreciated for their traits of a cosmopolitan. Hanoi and Nha Trang received higher counts of negative appreciation than other places. Nha Trang and Phu Quoc were given lower scores than their Thailand counterparts. Sapa, Hue and Da Lat were appraised positively by travellers who visited them, albeit minor negative values. It is also well worth noting that the "chaotic" feature of Hanoi, though marked as negative composition, does not necessarily express negative appreciation of the travellers. Instead of feeling uneased by the chaos, most travellers found it a characteristic of this city, and were happy to gradually emerge themselves in such chaos.

Photos of places without the co-presence of people accounted for the largest number and appeared in all posts. There are 57 photos which fit in this category, all of which were taken in long shot, from a far distance, from low or eye-level angles. The long shot in photos of destination represent an impersonal relationship between the travellers and the destination. The photos are to show travellers' objectivity in description. They persuade readers that what they have described textually are original and worthwhile, which realises the valuation property of the texts.

4.2.2. Appreciation of Activities to do

The second category, Activities to do, featured a diversified list of evaluative adjectives depending on the nature of the activities. Strong adjectives were often used, for example *"massive", "exhilarating", "fantastic",* which generally expresses positive impact reaction and compositional appreciation value to the activities. There were 23 photos of the bloggers in activities, which were taken in medium or close shot, from top-down or low angle, in frontal view. They may intentionally or

unintentionally create a connection between the bloggers (as the animate represented participants) and the viewers, invite the viewers to observe the activity and make decision to join the activity.

4.2.3. Appreciation of Food to try

All travellers recommended Vietnam as a great place for sampling local cuisine. They used repeatedly such adjectives as "delicious" and "amazing" to compliment on Vietnamese food. Among the described aspects, food is the only categorization that were appraised positively in all properties. Adjectives found in this category tend to express travellers' positive reaction (impact - the answers to the questions "did it grab me?" and quality - "did I like it?") to the food in Vietnam.

There are six photos of food and drink altogether. This reflects the small percentage of detailed verbal description for food in the database. Also in the text body, the bloggers did not call out the name of any local specialities other than *Pho, coffee, beer, bun cha* and *banh mi/ banh xeo*. **4.1.2.2. Appreciation of Local lifestyle and Accommodation**

The two last aspects presented mixed degrees of appreciation. While traffic and street vendors were appreciated negatively with adjectives like "*crazy, mad, chaotic*" and *"frustrating"* that show negative composition value, local people were complimented for being *"friendly, helpful"*, the positive valuation feature of appreciation, and prices were "*cheap*", which is also positive valuation. Accommodation was mostly complimented as "*clean*" (positive composition) and "*cheap*" (positive valuation). Photos in these two categories show an absence of the travel bloggers from the daily activities of the locals and at the accommodation. While the photos provided detailed pictures of the local life and accommodation, they also expressed a refusal of the travel bloggers to step in and act as a local.

CHAPTER 5:
THE BLOGGERS' PORTRAYAL OF VIETNAM FROM SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES

Dann (1996) suggests that tourism can be treated sociolinguistically by drawing on both semiotic analysis of tourism and the content of tourism materials. The language of tourism can exhibit four perspectives, namely authenticity, strangehood, play, and conflict. In the corpus of this study, *authenticity* and *strangehood* are the two perspectives of tourism discourse which were realised with the use of adjectives and still images. Meanwhile, conflict occurred in one instance, and play was not exhibited at all.

5.1. Authenticity expressed in the blog posts' text and images

Authenticity, which is a pronounced perspective, is exposed in the

travellers' narration of the places they went, the activities they did, the food they had, the people they came into contact with, and the prices in Vietnam. The use of adjectives with *positive impact reaction and positive quality reaction* such as "unique", "local", "truly", and adverbs like "really" that can be translated into positive appreciation in these themes suggests an indicator of authenticity. Photos of places, food, and the bloggers themselves in activities were posted with a primary purpose of evidencing their verbal narration, and these photos also narrated the experience of the travellers.Findings from the analysis of multimodal data in the concerned travel blogs showed that texts and images co-contributed to the manifestation of authenticity. While adjectival structures with positive impact reaction and positive quality reaction played as linguistic realisations of authenticity, photos which either offered information or demanded action from the viewers could realise a sense of authenticity, provided that they inscribed the bloggers' willingness to accept the local way of life (being involved). The viewer is invited "*to enter the represented natural or artificial space, which seems to be waiting to be visited*" (Francesconi 2014, 82).

5.2. Strangerhood expressed in the blog posts' text and images

The **Strangerhood** perspective was found the strongest sociolinguistic feature of this data collection of travel blogs. There were two types of them, positive strangerhood, which is encoded by adjectives with positive impact reaction and positive composition, and negative strangerhood, encoded by adjectives of *negative quality reaction and negative composition* values. Photos that show positive strangerhood included many of those of places, activities, and local lifestyles. Photos that show negative strangerhood were comprised of the instances of Hoa Lo Prison, War Remnant Museum, and the traffic in big cities. "Strangerhood" photos were taken in medium or close shot, from side or behind, from an oblique camera angle, at eye-level. They revealed that the bloggers mostly viewed the destination and the locals' routine activities through the lens of an observer. For most of the time, they gazed at "the Others" [Vietnam] with curious eyes and seemed to be excited on seeing strangeness. While these photos could be an indicator of "been there, seen that", the non-presence of the travellers in such photos might imply that the travellers would like to view how local people practice their routines rather than try participating in those routines. This refuses the conclusion of D'Egidio (2014) that tourists always try to avoid touristy destination, and search *"to be a part of the country"*. It should also be noted that in a number of cases, *strangerhood* and *authenticity* co-existed. In addition, the instances/ aspects of Vietnam that were considered negatively strange were in fact not rejected by

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the bloggers, but instead being recommended to the blog readers as something that they should try (with caution) for a taste of difference.

5.3. Discussion of findings

The travellers held an overall positive attitude towards the cultures and way of life at the destinations, the local food, and even the traffic. What they have experienced corresponds with what the media often speak about Vietnam – a country where traffic being the first thing to notice, and then "*with its dramatic landscapes, fascinating history, epic food and pulsating energy, Vietnam will electrify all of your senses and seize you from all angles*" (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/vietnam-travel-reasons-to-visit_n_6272222).

According to Urry (2003, p.164-165), "much travel results from a powerful compulsion to proximity that makes it obligatory, appropriate or desirable". Analysis of the blog posts feature a tourist gaze of "the Others" (Urry, 2002) in the context that the travellers went a long way and spent their money to experience the destination corporeally. In the posts, lexical resource (evaluative adjectives of appreciation properties) and visual resource (still images) exhibit a search to *"discover authentic places"* (D'Egidio, 2014, cited in Denti, 2015, p.64) of the travellers as well as their gaze at the strangeness in each place.

By mapping evaluative adjectives and corresponding interactive qualities of still images in the database, it is possible to determine a number of relationships between "*the writer and reader, the visitor and the visited, the tourist and the destination*" (Denti, 2015, p.56) in these travel blog posts. This sociolinguistic view enables the establishment of the way that appreciation values of adjectives and photos (as one of the *language functions*) in such a situated discussion convey social meanings or imply certain aspects of the bloggers' identity. Specifically, the favour of authenticity and strangerhood which were expressed in the interface between texts and photos showed what the bloggers viewed as being local and exotic, and featured the memories of the trips that they would like to lock. *Authenticity and strangerhood* are what motivate them to introduce Vietnam in general, and specific domains of Vietnam in particular, to future travellers. A marked finding is that there is a *tourist dilemma* arising in this corpus, which is tourists dislike touristy destination. This can be seen in the case of Nha Trang, which received negated comments such as "touristy", "characterless", "not much [to see] in terms of culture". However, the reaction of the travellers was too mild for anti-tourist practices. Unlike anti-tourist vacationers who attempt to distance themselves from the tourist category by trying the local style and exploring unfamiliar places (Jacobsen, 2000), the travellers in this study complained about the

touristy beach town, but still enjoyed it. In addition, there was no evidence for travellers' desire to be considered an "insider" of the local community, which refuses the conclusion of D'Egidio (2014) that tourists always try to avoid touristy destination, and search *"to be a part of the country"*.

There are numerous implications of such a highlight of authenticity and strangehood. First, the travellers underscored the authenticity of their experiences with the destinations, the activities and the local lifestyle so that their narrations are "real", and tell stories of the strangeness so that their advice is worthy. Given that travel blogs like these operate on popularity and affiliated marketing, real-time stories and feasible advice would attract readers, increase the blog traffic and help with monetization as a result. Second, the abundance of advice and recommendations given by the travellers signals an increasingly close relationship between the travel bloggers and the readers. This features a growing C2C (customer-to-customer) exchange of information (Dann, 2007) and may impact on travel decisions of future tourists. According to Culler (1990, p.6), "*the 'real' thing must be marked as real, as sightworthy; if it is not marked or differentiated, it is not a notable sight*". Therefore, it is necessary that tourism stakeholders work on destination images and enhance the authenticity of the destination.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS
6.1. Summary of the study
This research was conducted under the overarching guide of Halliday's SFL theories to study the interpersonal metafunction of travel blogs. It borrowed the concepts of attitude domain from Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) and interactive meanings from Grammar of Visual Design (Kress & van Leewen, 2006) to develop a multimodal conceptual framework for the translation of appreciation value and interactive qualities encoded evaluative adjectives and still images into aspects of tourist gaze and corresponding appreciation values and degrees. The co-occurrence of text and still images accordingly formulate the destination image, or in this research, the portrayal of Vietnam. This co-occurrence at the same time suggests identification of the features that characterise travel blogs sociolinguistically.

Regarding research methodology, the research took social constructivism as the research paradigm, case study as the research design, content analysis as the research method, and social semiotic as the approach to multimodal analysis. The multimodal data were collected from 10 travel blog posts written by seven British professional travel bloggers. Using purposive sampling method, the researcher was able to form a data pool of 21,062 words

and 133 still images. Quantitative treatment of text data relied on computational tools, such as Keyword extractor, Frequency, Concordancers, POS Taggers and Excel, and of visual data resorted mainly to Excel. Qualitative treatment of data involved viewing the multimodal data base multiple times with constant reference to the analysis toolkits for Appreciation value of evaluative adjectives and interactive meanings of still images. Results of quantitative data analysis were then arranged according to aspects of the country that the bloggers gazed at, which served as the domains for further qualitative analysis of instances in each domain for an accurate and vivid portray of Vietnam.

The research found out that in the blog posts by British professional travel bloggers, Vietnam is portrayed as a destination which is rich in culture and has a lot to offer in terms of places of interest while at the same time being of pronounced contrast. The analysis of 21,062 words, 256 adjectives and 133 photos in the data pool revealed that there were five aspects of Vietnam at which the bloggers directed their gaze, at different degrees of appreciation. The first aspect, *places to visit* was appreciated mainly with four evaluative adjectives, "beautiful", "chaotic", "amazing" and "spectacular" which carried a positive impact reaction value; and with photos of landscape which delivered an impersonal or social relation between the participants and the viewers so as to describe the place "as it is". The second aspect, *activities to do* was expressed through strong evaluative adjectives and photos of the bloggers in activities which demanded the viewers to make decision on taking part in the activity. The third aspect, *food to try* was appreciated positively with "delicious" and adjectives with positive reaction and valuation. Photos of this category expressed an offer of information and an invitation to the viewers for stepping in and try out the food. Finally, the fourth and the fifth categories, ***Local life to contemplate and Accommodation to stay***, were appreciated with both positive and negative values of adjectives. While traffic and street vendors tended to show a strangeness, local people and prices were positive traits of Vietnam. Photos in these two categories showed the travel bloggers' hesitation to temporarily being a part of the local community.

As for the sociolinguistic perspectives, the research pinpointed ***authenticity and strangerhood*** as the two prominent sociolinguistic features in these travel blog posts. While authenticity was achieved through a combination of positive appreciation in adjectives and involvement in photos, strangerhood was more complicatedly formed, with positive strangerhood achieved by positive appreciation and detachment, and negative strangerhood achieved by negative appreciation and detachment. The play feature was not found in the

posts, and there was only one case of tourist dilemma, which to some extent indicated the conflict feature. Also, analysis of still images show that, in many cases, regarding the sociolinguistic perspectives, picture could speak louder than words. There was evidence of staged photos when comparing the photo by the blogger and the original one, which happened to disclose that their portrayal of the destination may not always be objective or free from cultural or social influence.

6.2. Implications of the study

Theoretically, this dissertation featured a courageous attempt towards filling the current gap in its research area and contributing to the acknowledgement of one contemporary linguistics theory.

Besides, the study hopes to be beneficial to those concerned, especially researchers and students of linguistics and tourism discourse studies. For example, Chapter 2 offers readers critical reviews of literature on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design theories. Given that materials on Visual Communication are not that abundant in Vietnam, the Chapter hopefully serves as a reliable source of literature on the matter, and a trusted source of reference for research of the field. Meanwhile, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 exemplify the procedure of conducting a research in multimodality approach, which is believed to be of assistance to people intending to adopt multimodality analysis in their future study.

Findings from this research are expected to contribute practically to the development of tourism, tourism communication as well as teaching and learning English in Vietnam.

The understanding of how travellers depict Vietnam might assist stakeholders in tourism industry, particularly destination marketers, in developing specific strategies to improve travellers' experience of "authenticity" and enhance what is considered the signatures of Vietnam. As for tourism communication, training on how to produce effective travel writings can be a goal of a customized course for copywriters and social media content marketers.

With respect to teaching and learning English in Vietnam, the analysis of how British identities are reflected in the blogs will have a say in such courses as tourism translation and cross cultural studies. Another practical application might be to take the posts as a source of authentic materials for classroom learning of four language skills.

6.3. Limitations and suggested further studies

First, in terms of the case being studied, due to the purposive sampling result, only seven British professional bloggers were included in the case. This number is rather modest compared to the exponential growth in the world of travel reviewers, bloggers and travel sharing platforms. As a result, future studies may increase the number of bloggers and blog posts, and extend their scope to compare with blog posts of Vietnamese bloggers in order to depict a comprehensive portrayal of Vietnam.

Second, the blog posts which provided multimodal data for this study date from 2014 to 2022, corresponding to the pre-Covid and during-Covid time. This characterises a time of unprecedented economic and transport impacts, limiting opportunities to travel, especially of the readers of the blog. It would be interesting if further studies be conducted on post-covid data to find out whether the portrayal of Vietnam is the consistent in two collections of data.

Another point for consideration is that due to the limitation in the scope of a dissertation, this study only focused on the interactive meaning resources of still images in Grammar of Visual Design, with attention being paid also to represented participants in each visual. Other research works can take this study as the springboard to dive deeper into the other two elements of a visual, which are representation meaning and compositional meaning.

Last but not least, this study focused on linguistics with minimal discussions of culture being integrated. There are a number of other perspectives that can assist the formation of a comprehensive picture of meanings being encoded in travel blogs, such as culture, sociology and arts and media. The decision to publish a sign and the way that it can be decoded, especially in the case of a visual sign, can never be a linear process. As such, Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) may be adopted given that speaker's or writer's intentions, their ideologies hidden in their blogs are crucial issues for investigation in this type of research. On the same line, multidisciplinary studies may be an option for future research directions.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS
RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION CONTENT

1. Trần Thị Hiếu Thuỷ (2017). Information: Reading Images – The Grammar of Visual Design. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, Vol.33, No.6 (2017) 164-168.*

2. Trần Thị Hiếu Thuỷ (2018). Multimodal Instruction in Initial Teacher Training: Prospects and challenges. *Kỷ yếu Hội thảo khoa học quốc tế Dạy và học Ngoại ngữ gắn với chuyên ngành trong bối cảnh hội nhập quốc tế: Lý luận và thực tiễn.* VNU University of Languages and International Studies (290 - 302).

3. Trần Thị Hiếu Thuỷ (2018). *"Good morning, Hanoi!": A Multimodal Analysis of Travel Blog Posts by British Travellers.* 2018 International Graduate Research Symposium. *VNU University of Languages and International Studies (671 - 686).*

4. Trần Thị Hiếu Thuỷ (2021). A framework for analysing interactive meanings of still images in travel writings. *Journal of Science, Hanoi Open University, No75, 01/21* (67-75).