

## **Tourist Language Learning: A Way of Grasping Human Interaction**

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**Abstract:**

Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival: *Languaging, Tourism, Life* represents a critical analysis of the motivation for as well as nature and impact of human interaction in multilingual and multicultural tourist language-learning settings. This is approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including modern languages education, anthropology, linguistics, and sociology as well as tourism and intercultural and literary studies. Commencing with an identification of “commonplaces of language pedagogy, communicative learning and intercultural communicative competence” (p. 2) in chapters 1 and 2, this monograph further invites and encourages readers to travel, both imaginatively and physically, through various dimensions of tourist language learning. Thus, chapters 3 through 9 are dedicated to instances of risk, way finding and the following of directions, pronunciation, conversations, games, speech rehearsal, and the concept of “breaking English”. The final two chapters provide an in-depth recapitulation of the “gains and pains” of tourist language learning as forms of the human need for survival.

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Alison Phipps: *Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival. Linguaging, Tourism, Life*. Clevedon et al.: Channel View Publications, 2007 ("Tourism and Cultural Change" 10, ed. by Alison Phipps). 205 p., Paperback, 28,99 Euro. ISBN: 1-84541-053-X

The volume begins by enumerating some widely held assumptions. For example: Intercultural communication leads to mutual understanding, peace, and harmony, and the command of foreign languages ensures better employment opportunities. Languages are abstract and acquirable; tourist places are inert. Tourist language learning is therefore no more complex than practising how to order a coffee. Tourist orality is primitive, whereas – by logic of elimination – literacy is cultured. Tourists are loud, have no mind-broadening qualities, and are quite simply bad, while sojourners have knowledge-advancing potential and are good; tourist relationships are dehumanising; tourism is a threat to cultural and linguistic diversity.

Contradictory though it may sound, it is precisely this wealth of "commonplaces of language pedagogy, communicative learning and intercultural communicative competence" (p. 2) which, as correctly remarked by Phipps (cf. p. 31), emphasises the relevance and importance of the study of tourism and tourist language learning. As part of the series *Tourism and Cultural Change*, this monograph successfully challenges them. This is achieved in examinations of Phipps's own perceptions and experiences as a tourist language learner and those of other tourist language learners through the methodologies of auto-ethnography and auto-anthropology (cf. p. 9 f). After discussing the above-mentioned commonplaces in chapters 1 and 2, Phipps proceeds to analyse dimensions of tourist language learning – such as risk taking, way finding, pronunciation exercises, conversation, and play – in chapters 3 through 9. This is concluded by a summary of tourist language learning as a form of the human need for survival in chapters 10 and 11.

Thus, although the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of people from various ethnic groups is certainly desirable, it is questionable whether these desiderata manage to grasp frictions of human relatedness (cf. p. 26), in general, and intercultural contacts, in particular (Lüsebrink 2005: 31f). Rather, it seems reasonable to presume that they serve the interests of "global players". As Phipps puts it, these may manifest themselves within the framework of certain agendas, such as "[...] those of perpetuating massive internationalist bureaucracies" and "[...] of increasing the 'take'" as a "[...] 'quick fix' for the future" (p. 26). In addition, while it might be the case that there is a beneficial relationship between the command of foreign languages

and employment opportunities, it is equally the case that, as Phipps convincingly stresses, such discourses of economic benefit reduce language learning to “purely functionalist, utilitarian skills” (p. 35).

Moreover, rather than being abstract and acquired in an unchanging environment, languages can be “fully embodied” (p. 3) and “language” (p. 9; p. 116) by tourist language learners as an “experience of doing tourism” (p. 18). This exemplifies Heidegger’s (1971: 144 ff) concept of “dwelling”. As Phipps notes, “[the whole person] engages actively with the shared concerns of the tourist group, it enjoys the difference and possibility of the imaginative potential of others’ holidays. Meeting others, using the language, surviving, “getting by” are all important concerns for the learners [...]”(p. 43) Furthermore, Phipps indicates that, not only is there more to tourist language learning than ordering a coffee but, in fact, this “most maligned of language tasks” (p. 18) reveals the learner’s desire to leave the safe and habitual speech of the native language (cf. p. 90) for new, though effortful and occasionally awkward (cf. p. 138), ways of speaking in a tourist language, while simultaneously gaining insights into “[...] different, more relational ways of interacting with people and phenomena that one encounters in everyday life.” (p. 12)

Besides, orality and literacy do not have to, as suggested by Ong (1987: 7), constitute binary oppositions. Rather, literacy serves as a point of departure for achieving tourist orality through tourist language learning in classroom situations and real encounters (cf. p. 84; p. 102). In struggling to do so, tourists emerge as passionate risk-takers and playful survivors who, despite situations of risk and inconvenience (cf. p. 58), bother to learn foreign languages. As Phipps remarks, “[l]arge numbers of people – many more than those studying for language degrees in universities – attend classes in adult and continuing education in order to learn languages that they might be able to use when on holiday.” (p.16)

Given this observation, which likely comes as a surprise– against the background of negative perceptions of as well as risks and pains involved in tourist language learning, one might enquire after the motivations for learning tourist languages. The monograph offers a variety of responses. Some relate to an affective dimension, covering social, personal, and cultural fulfilment and happiness (cf. p. 15; p. 45 ff). Others refer to the protection offered from assorted types of risk. These involve imagined risks in classroom situations, ontological and material risks, such as the assertion of identity through documentation and other material possessions, and epistemological risks that involve a dearth of factual and practical knowledge of rules and legal action in everyday encounters (cf. p. 49). More generally, in language learning, basic human needs become active. These include relation and connection, comprehension and understanding, love and esteem, laughter and play as well as courtesy and charity (cf. p. 172 ff). The impact is crucial to human development, for changing perceptions towards one’s environment and a critical reflection of engagement and human interaction (cf. p. 32; p.54).

In sum, this book is worth reading for reasons of content, style, and mode of research. In concert with other publications in the series, such as *Tourism and Intercultural Change: Why Tourism Matters*, it is passionately written, electrifying, and insightful. It can serve as an example of the tensions and challenges involved in the adoption of a transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary mode of research which has been cogently advocated in socio-linguistic studies of tourism (Fox 2008: 20). Thus, it lends merit to replacing what has been identified as the “smoother’ category of interdisciplinarity” (Bachmann-Medick 2009: 12) by the category of “[t]ranslation between disciplines” (ibid). In this sense, the book is recommendable for all interested in the complex relationship between tourism, language, intercultural dialogue, and human interaction.