

SAMSON C (2011). *Ex-sacred territories on the Internet. Examples of space, identity and discourse interconnectedness in museum websites.* . RASSEGNA ITALIANA DI LINGUISTICA APPLICATA, vol. 1-2, p. 245-262, ISSN: 0033-9725 - Articolo in rivista

Ex-sacred territories on the Internet. Examples of space, identity and discourse interconnectedness in museum websites

Christina Samson
University of Florence, Italy

Abstract

A lungo i musei sono stati considerati “territori sacri” distaccati dal resto della società e caratterizzati dal loro alto potere culturale, dalle loro attività e da un pubblico specializzato. Ultimamente però sempre più frequentemente, come molte aziende, i musei si rivolgono ai loro visitatori tramite l’uso di siti museali con l’intento di promuoversi ad un vasto pubblico eterogeneo. Questo studio analizza come lo spazio e l’identità museale siano rappresentati in un corpus di siti museali. I risultati quantitativi e qualitativi evidenziano come la preposizione of si collochi in sequenze semantiche indicanti variazioni nella rappresentazione di spazio e di identità nel corpus. I dati inoltre suggeriscono una interconnessione spazio/identità sinergica e sincronica nel discorso dei siti museali con scopi culturali/promozionali su internet.

1. Introduction

For long, museums have been viewed as “sacred territories”, or repositories of cultural products detached from the rest of society, juxtaposing incompatible objects and discontinuous times. The role of museums has been “to create spaces of illusion denouncing all real space, all real emplacements [...] as being even more illusory” (Foucault 1998:184). In this role museums have developed into cultural authorities, repositories of authentic knowledge, or truth purveyors (Harrison 2005) mainly addressing small, already well-educated samples of population.

Ultimately though, in a rapidly changing cultural market closely related to marketisation in the public sector, museums have become more visitor - than product - oriented. In other words, museums have gradually passed from not only “collecting, interpreting, exhibiting” but also using words and phrases like “access”, “social responsibility” or/and “community involvement”, in the attempt of “pushing” and “pulling” (Uzzell 1984) a less elitarian public. To achieve their aims, museums are therefore creating websites to communicate with, and promote themselves to, a vast heterogeneous public (Samson 2007; 2009).

Websites are an effective branding tool by which museums can build their identity whilst enacting, what Ravelli (2006) terms, “their role as social, socialised institutions engaging in the world by finding ways of re-presenting themselves”. Such a role is enhanced by every webpage including several texts with diverse communicative purposes which enables museums to interact dynamically with their browsers and construe meaning through the combination of verbal, visual, and sound semiotic systems. This mix, with the particular mode in which the systems are joint, has led to what Ravelli (2006:151) defines as the process of “*intersemiosis*”. That is, the combination, as a meaningful whole, of different sign systems which constitute the museum website space (§2) and identity.

Specifically, the verbal component contributes to representing the museum’s ideology and identity at a representation level, in terms of the relationship between hypertext and browser, and in terms of its expressive dimension. Representations (Fairclough 1989) construe versions of the world and in this specific case museum websites construe views on how a culture functions and

engages web browsers for several purposes. “*Representation*” is thus a concept that helps us link our experience and cognition to linguistic encoding.

Despite growing interest in how new technologies affect written communication (Boardman 2005; Posteguillo 2003), marketing (Nielsen 1999; Janoschka 2004; Calisir 2003), identities in the semiotic landscape (Campagna 2007; Fodde, Memoli 2007), visual communication in multimodality (Cranny-Francis 2004), linguistic features characterizing style (Samson 2010), viewpoint and promotional discourse in company websites (Samson 2009; Turnbull 2009), the construction of ideology and identity via the verbal component has to date received limited attention (Bondi 2009; Samson forthcoming), especially from a semantic sequence analysis perspective.

Drawing on Hunston (2008: 271), I refer to semantic sequences as recurring sequences of words and phrases that may be very diverse in form and which are, therefore, more usefully characterised as sequences of meaning elements rather than as formal sequences. Semantic sequences may be observed in each case taking a lexical word as the ‘core’ item. The sequence will consist of the core word, the pattern associated with that word and a number of phrases occurring with the core word which, in spite of being diverse in form, are consistent in terms of meaning.

Focussing on groups of semantic sequences in a Corpus of Italian and South African museum websites (CISAMWs henceforth), this paper attempts to answer the following questions: How are space and identity represented and interconnected through the mediation of discourse in CISAMWs? Are there variations in the semantic sequences encoding space and identity in CISAMWs?

This paper, after focussing on the concepts of space and identity in §2, analyses the corpus in a quantitative and qualitative approach (§3). In §4, the findings are illustrated and discussed with examples from the corpus, in order to highlight how space and identity are interconnected through discourse with variations in the semantic sequences encoding them across the corpus. In §5 the paper ends with some concluding remarks.

2. Museum website space and identity

A growing body of literature (Samson forthcoming; Caballero 2008; Garzone 2007; Askehave, Nielsen 2005; Kwasnik, Crowston 2005) indicates that the study of websites requires an approach moving beyond the content, situation, context and communicative purposes characterising print genres (Bhatia 2004; Devitt 1993; Swales 1990). To understand how features of the electronic medium shape web-based discourse practices, it is essential to consider functionality. The functional system allows browsers to connect textual chunks, or informational nodes, inside a text (internal links), or to link a given text to other texts through external links. Hyper textual linking activates two different reading processes: ‘reading-as-such’ and the ‘navigating mode’, which entail two different cognitive capacities and types of behaviour (Finnemann 1999), when the browser shifts from one mode to the other in the website space.

Both reading processes are constructed in terms of physical space entailing the use of frames of reference (FoR) (Levinson 2003). FoRs are coordinate systems used to compute and specify the location of objects with respect to other objects in every utterance which occurs in a particular spatio-temporal situation. The orientational features of language are expressed through deixis which, in this case, includes the use of expressions directing the browser through the museum’s virtual space. This according to the origin of the reference can be: relative or deictic/viewer-centred, i.e., presupposing the origin of the coordinate system in one of the participants (the writer or the addressee); intrinsic or object-centred, wherein the reference object has sides that enable understanding how other objects are placed; absolute or extrinsic/environment centred where the coordinate system originates from outside the scene (ibid.). Deixis can thus refer to markers of reference that signal the spatial (e.g. *here, there, in, out, around*), temporal (e.g. *now, then, tomorrow*), identity (e.g. *I, you, what*), proximal (e.g. *here, this, today*) and distal (e.g. *there, that,*

the, in the past) location of what is represented. However, the full understanding of a deictic marker depends on the context of utterance – here the museum websites – and it is thus indexical. In websites spatial deixis is particularly ubiquitous, as it anchors participants in a shared, virtual space (Benwell, Stokoe 2006:255) through linguistic qualities and technological properties whilst affecting a website's identity.

The concept of identity has undergone broad paradigmatic shifts over the centuries. According to Taylor (1989), it is a product of its historical conditions, reformulated in strategic ways by the period under which it arises. From being a rarefied formulation of philosophers, identity became a self-fashioning project of the self whilst, through more recent understandings of social and collective identity and according to postmodern accounts, it is seen as fluid, fragmentary, contingent and essentially constituted in discourse (*ibid.*:17). Thus identity is increasingly treated as something that is actively and publicly accomplished through discourse. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) define identity in terms of how people display who they are to each other; in this case I refer to identity as the way museums represent, display their cultural values to, and are constituted by, a vast public in their website space.

Dixon, Tredoux and Clark (2005:407) argue that space “has been treated as a taken for granted container when actually all aspects of social life unfold within material and symbolic environments that are both socially constituted and constitutive of the social”. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) in investigating how space is produced in, and as a topic of discourse, consider space as channelling human activity along identity lines. Space is thus viewed not as a static, objective phenomenon but as an ongoing and dynamic tool of thought and action, as it is not only people that make spaces, but also spaces make people by constraining them and by offering opportunities for identity construction. In this sense, museum websites rather than containing particular subjects may be viewed as actually and actively creating them whilst enhancing interaction through their functional system.

3. Data and methods

The data consist of a small specialised corpus - CISAMWs - selected and downloaded from Italian (IT) and South African (SA) museum websites on the Internet. The CISAMWs includes approximately 50,000 tokens divided into three sub-corpora of about 15,000 words each regarding Museum Descriptions, Museum Collections and Museum Exhibitions. Each sub-corpus includes the English version of the IT museum websites referring to museums located in three Tuscan towns (Florence, Siena and Prato) and the English versions of SA museum websites of museums in two towns (Cape Town and Pretoria).

Although the corpus includes museum websites of two very different countries, they nevertheless share a concern for representing and describing their national culture through their museums whilst attempting to reach heterogeneous audiences. My choice for including Italian and South African museums in the corpus was furthermore driven by: 1) the similar type of sponsorship the institutions receive, i.e. they are sponsored by the Ministry of Arts and Culture which excludes private funding; 2) the way space and identity are encoded in semantic sequences. Moreover, in creating the corpus, I concentrated on the linguistic features of the main body of the descriptive web pages forming the CISAMWs, which meant excluding images and any other graphical elements, or texts organised by lists of links, or scattered around the main body.

The analytical approach followed was a mixed one. I began the corpus driven analysis by using Wordsmith Tools (1998) to create Keyword Lists obtained by comparing the wordlists for each IT and SA sub-corpus with a reference corpus of 256,895 tokens. Keywords were calculated by comparing the frequency of each word in the smaller of the two wordlists with the frequency of the same word in the reference wordlist. All words which appeared in the smaller list were

considered unusually frequent, in comparison with what one would have expected on the basis of the reference corpus (Scott 1998).

A further function of the Keyword Lists was to discover possible variations in the closed-class grammar words, specifically prepositions across sub-corpora of the CISAMWs, and the clusters emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 tokens in the corpus. The qualitative analysis proceeded by analysing the formal and meaning patterns preceding the core item in the most frequent clusters forming semantic sequences in the IT and SA sub-corpora.

4. Findings

The results of the Keyword search across the sub-corpora are listed in Tables 1-6 below:

Table 1

IT Museums - Descriptions			
N	WORD	FREQ.	%
1	THE	1.052	11,81
2	OF	573	6,43
3	AND	275	3,09
4	BY	216	2,42
5	ROOM	67	0,75

Table 2

SA Museums - Descriptions			
N	WORD	FREQ.	%
1	THE	735	7,23
2	AND	424	4,17
3	OF	417	4,10
4	MAPUNGUBWE	62	0,61
5	HE	68	0,67

Table 3

IT Museums - Collections			
N	WORD	FREQ.	%
1	THE	1.027	11,61
2	OF	477	5,39
3	AND	328	3,71
4	ROOMS	26	0,29
5	PALAZZO	26	0,29

Table 4

SA Museums - Collections			
N	WORD	FREQ.	%
1	THE	406	6,52
2	AND	266	4,27
3	OF	238	3,82
4	COLLECTION	129	2,07
5	GOLD	35	0,56

Table 5

IT Museums - Exhibitions			
N	WORD	FREQ.	%
1	THE	691	9,76
2	OF	334	4,72
3	AND	248	3,50
4	EXHIBITION	43	0,61
5	WILL	25	0,35

Table 6

SA Museums - Exhibitions			
N	WORD	FREQ.	%
1	THE	142	8,14
2	OF	65	3,72
3	AND	52	2,98
4	SLAVE	18	1,03
5	JULY	14	0,80

A comparison between the data in Tables 1 through 6 shows closed-class grammatical words having the highest significant scores at the top of the lists. Thus, following Hunston (2008) and Groom (2007), I decided to focus on preposition *of*, since prepositions are the best starting point for identifying semantic sequences in specialised corpora. As mentioned, sequences are crucial in creating textual meaning as they identify what is said. The non-random association between such sequences and the groups of words that occur with them serve to classify semantically the lexical words with which they frequently occur.

As Tables 1-6 show, preposition *of* is included in all six sub-corpora with a relative high frequency which makes it a key-key word (Scott 1999). As can be seen, its frequency per 1,000 tokens varies across the sub-corpora. In Table 1 (IT Museum Descriptions) *of* has a relative higher frequency than in Table 2 (SA Museum Descriptions), respectively, *of*=6,43 and *of*=4,10. Similarly, in Table 3 (IT Museum Collections) *of*=5,39 *of* has a relative higher frequency than in Table 4 (SA Museum Collections) *of*=3,82 as well as in Table 5 (IT Museum Exhibitions) *of*=4,72 and Table 6 (SA Museum Exhibitions) *of*=3,72.

The results of the clusters emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 tokens across the sub-corpora are listed in Tables 7-12 below:

Table 7

IT Museum Descriptions		
N	cluster	Freq.
1	part of the	15
2	floor of the	13

3	of the museum	8
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Table 8

SA Museum Descriptions		
N	cluster	Freq.
1	the university of	48
2	university of pretoria	43
3	the history of	15

Table 9

IT Museum Collections		
N	cluster	Freq.
1	one of the	19
2	of the sixteenth	18
3	of the fifteenth	18

Table 10

SA Museum Collections		
N	cluster	Freq.
1	one of the	11
2	of the collection	10
3	part of the	8

Table 11

IT Museum Exhibitions		
N	cluster	Freq.
1	a series of	7
2	of the florentine	7
3	of the work	7

Table 12

SA Museum Exhibitions		
N	cluster	Freq.
1	history of	7
2	university of	5
3	one of	5

It is important to underline that the qualitative analysis did not reveal a constant correspondence between the above clusters and the semantic sequences retrievable in the sub-corpora. Therefore on the basis of the above clusters very often no recurring semantic sequences were found.

4.1 Museum Descriptions

The most frequent semantic sequence to emerge in the IT Museum Descriptions sub-corpus was *PART+OF+EXTERIOR/WHOLE* as shown in examples 1, 2 and 3:

- (1) 1 Already in 1978 engineer Attilio Mazzoni had drawn up an urban plan in the eastern **part of** the city aimed at "tertiary services", located at the crossroads of the large avenues (Viale Leona pecci.txt
- (2) The museum occupies large **part of** the former Vallombrosan convent dedicated to San Salvi and derives its name from the grandiose cenaco.txt
- (3) The rectilinear building delimits the **part of** the museum running parallel to Viale della Repubblica
welcom.txt

The sequence in the above examples indicates that fixing the location of the museum which occupies parts of specific areas is an essential function in the Description web pages. The browser is thus provided with an Absolute FoR, or a global reference system of coordinate axes projected onto the described museum, to define parts or sections (*part of the city, part of the Vallombrosan convent, rectilinear building*) and corresponding regions of space that encompass the museum as a whole. The axes are typically projected from the standpoint of the website writer assuming canonical orientation to the museum described. Thus, the museum's virtual space is anchored to physical space by specifying the museums' locations through exophoric references to fixed external points: *in the eastern part; located at the crossroads of the large avenues, parallel to Viale della Repubblica* which create a mix of virtual/physical space.

However, in examples (4), (5) and (6) the spatial FoR changes. The system becomes intrinsic or object-centred, as the reference objects (*Pitti Palace; the large building*) have sides that assist understanding how the museums are relatively located within the various sections of the projected spatial structure. Static verbs (*is located, occupies*) in present tense in the semantic sequence *PART+OF+WHOLE* direct the browser's attention to the inner space of the building occupied by the museum (*in the Summer Apartments; on the ground floor; on the mezzanine floor; the top floor; the whole left wing of the first floor*):

- (4) The Museum is located in the Summer Apartments on the ground floor and on **the mezzanine floor of** the Pitti Palace. pittim.txt
- (5) The Uffizi Gallery occupies **the top floor of** the large building erected by **Giorgio Vasari between** 1560 and 1580 to house the administrative offices of the descpt.txt
- (6) The Palatine Gallery occupies the whole left wing of **the first floor of** Pitti Palace, which was the residence of the Medici grand-dukes pittit.txt

In addition to spatial references, examples (5) and (6) include the origins of the museums which are calendrically (Levinson 1983:73) located in specific time (*between 1560 and 1580*) or a period of time (*the Medici grand-dukes*). This contributes to enhance the historical/cultural value of the museum within a promotional discourse strategy.

Absolute and intrinsic FoRs are also included in the SA Museums sub-corpus where the browser is provided with an exterior (*Pretoria main campus; grounds of the University of Cape Town, campus of the University of*) and interior space location (*in the Old Merensky Library; house*) of the museums within the sections of the projected spatial structure. This is encoded by the semantic sequence *PART+OF+WHOLE/EXTERIOR* as examples (7), (8) and (9) show:

- (7) The Museum, which was opened in 1995, is housed in the Old Merensky Library on the **University of** Pretoria main campus. edoard.txt
- (8) This house became the Irma Stern Museum in 1971. It was established by Trustees of her estate and is located on the grounds of the **University of** Cape Town. irmas.txt
- (9) Villa donated several large steel sculptures that are exhibited on the campus of the **University of** edoard.txt

Like the IT sub-corpus, not only the perspective is along the axes projected from the standpoint of the website writer, but also time reference is used (*1995, 1971*) with verbs in the past tense (*was opened, became, was established*) to highlight an established tradition and value of the museum which recalls a typical promotional discourse strategy. The aim is to build a contrasting effect leading to the impression of “past still present” (Dann 1996) in the attempt of pulling and pushing the museum website browser to actually visit the museum.

Within the IT and SA Descriptions sub-corpora great importance is given to identity, which museums try to convey through their representation of culture. Indeed, the core item *of*, its patterns and number of associated phrases, encode variations in identity representation. For instance, the IT museums’ identity appears to be closely linked to the cultural heritage built on specific criteria followed and/or acquisitions of ancient masterpieces (*works of art, criteria evaluating the choices, a variety of objects*) and to the use of verbs in past tense (*acquired over time, spurred, to be adopted, offered*) which have both the function of underlining the particular care taken in building the cultural value of the museum and its aims at differentiating itself from other similar institutions. The semantic sequence *PROPERTY+OF+WHOLE* in examples (10), (11) and (12) highlights this point:

- (10) works of art themselves, acquired over time to build the heritage of culture and identity that forms the foundation and identity **of the museum**. peccip.txt
- (11) the synthesis was also spurred by an internal debate over the criteria to be adopted - another sign **of the museum's** vivacity and identity - when evaluating the choices and cultural directions peccip1.txt
- (12) (South Kensington Museum) offered a variety of objects to contribute to the formation **of the museum** bargel.txt

However, another representation of identity is provided in the SA Descriptions sub-corpus. Emphasis is not so much on ancient works of art but on South African history. Although the most frequent sequence is *PROPERTY+OF+WHOLE*, as in the IT sub-corpus, meaning is built by the link between the social history (*Mapungubwe, Slave Lodge, Social History sites*) and scope of the museums (*identify, collect and preserve, information*) entailing an exophoric temporal reference (*history of Mapungubwe, the history of the Museum, history of the Cape of Good Hope*). This can be seen in examples (13), (14) and (15):

- (13) The archives serves as a depository to identify, collect and preserve records of archival value relating to **the history of** Mapungubwe mapung.txt
- (14) This photograph collection is a unique primary resource of information illustrating **the history** and identity **of** the Museum through the camera lens. unipre.txt
- (15) In addition to the Slave Lodge a number of Iziko Social History sites are linked with **the history of** the Cape of Good Hope slavel.txt

Interestingly, although examples (10)-(15) are characterised by the same core item *of* and similar semantic sequences the word ‘identity’ acquires a different meaning in different societies. In the Italian context identity is related to art masterpieces; in the South African context the same term is associated with the country’s social history.

4.2 Museum Collections

Further differences emerge from the analysis of the IT Museum Collections sub-corpus which is particularly characterised by FoR shifts, that is by the verbal description of the museum rooms. Such virtual mobility is linguistically expressed by the semantic sequence INTERIOR SPACE+OF+QUANTITY/QUALITY:

- (16) the most famous works in the rooms are by Gentile da Fabriano, considered **one of** the greatest Italian painters between the third and fourth decade of the fifteenth century uffizi4.txt
- (17) Hanging opposite the entrance to the room is the Tondo Doni, **one of** the most famous paintings in the Gallery, a youthful work commissioned uf1cf.txt
- (18) This room houses **one of** the masterpieces of Italian fourteenth century painting, a panel uf3.txt

In (16), (17) and (18) browsers are offered a verbal description of the museums' rooms focussing on how paintings are mounted by using deictic macro reference (*opposite the entrance to the room*) instead of micro-references, i.e., detailed descriptions of the artworks characterising art reviews (Radighieri 2009). Additionally, the macro-reference is represented verbally but with visual and hyperlinking references in the sites entailing navigation from one room to another (*in the rooms; this room*) and construe meaning through intersemiosis. Hence, the verbal information in each webpage is affected not only by the functionality of the medium but also by the spatial FoR which is the web-writer's attempting to establish a relationship with the browser. This is achieved by pointing at, and illustrating the historical importance of artworks in a specific space (*the most famous works in the rooms are by Gentile da Fabriano, opposite the entrance to the room is the Tondo Doni, this room houses one of the masterpieces of Italian painting*) and time (*between the third and fourth decade of the fifteenth century, fourteenth century painting*). Pointing in the CISAMWs, though, seems to hold a limited metadiscursive guidance role, as the browser can ignore it when opting for a personal visual path/navigating mode.

This is the case in the SA Museum Collections sub-corpus wherein the focus is on underlining the uniqueness of the museum's collections by the use of superlatives. The browser is mainly provided with micro-FoRs, that is, some details of the collections and/or artworks in the museum which are referred to with highly evaluative and promotional discourse (*The mere breadth and depth of the entire collection, the foremost museum collections, finest late 17th century views, the most important public collections*) underscoring the historical value of the works located in time (*1641-1710, early colonial*). The semantic sequence QUALITY+OF+QUANTITY+WHOLE/PART QUALITY encodes this, as examples 19, 20 and 21 underline:

- (19) The mere breadth and depth of the entire collection make it **one of the** foremost museum collections for use in comparative studies and research. mapugu.txt
- (20) of special note is the large canvas by Aernout Smit (1641-1710), showing the bay, the old fort and the Castle, **one of the** finest late 17th century views of the Cape castle3.txt
- (21) concerning the peoples and landscapes of early colonial South Africa. It is **one of** the most important public collections of artefacts of the period. castle.txt

4.3 Museum Exhibitions

Evaluative and promotional discourse typifies also the Exhibitions sub-corpora. Specifically, examples (22), (23) and (24) indicate how, in the IT Museum Exhibitions sub-corpus, exhibitions are introduced by an operation of ‘anchorage’ (Adam 1986), i.e., by basing the reconstruction of the context on the cognitive process of perception in time and space before looking at selected aspects of the exhibition. Thus *meetings, installations/environments, very significant parallels of the applied arts* – are foregrounded while the object of the exhibition is implicitly or explicitly evaluated (*high-profile personalities and intellectuals, a unique idea of the environment, more than 130 works*). The semantic sequence *QUANTITY+OF+QUALITY* and examples (22), (23) and (24) show this:

- (22) the aim of the exhibition is to bring together themes that link '68 to the present day. During the exhibition, **a series of** meetings complementary to the project will be held in which high-profile personalities and intellectuals peccib2.txt
- (23) The display begins with **a series of** installations/environments, or "exercises in architecture" which develop a unique idea of the environment by altering the inform1.txt
- (24) The more than 130 works on show include **a series of** very significant parallels of the applied arts: between the glass manufacture pittim1.txt

The examples reveal evaluative discourse addressing the exhibition, the artist’s work and the degree of expertise of the museum in the field of Arts.

By contrast, the SA Museum Exhibitions sub-corpus includes the semantic sequence *QUANTITY+OF+PHENOMENON* which encodes macro (*Slave Lodge, Iziko Social History sites, exhibition galleries*) and micro-references (*narrative of slavery, thought provoking texts, history of the site*) related to historical phenomena (*slavery*), with the purpose of making browsers and potential museum visitors aware of the country’s historical issues, as in (25), (26) and (27):

- (25) In addition to the Slave Lodge a number of Iziko Social History sites are linked with the **history of** slavery. Different strands in the narrative of slavery slavel.txt
- (26) Aspects of the long **history of** slavery are highlighted through the use of thought provoking texts slavel.txt
- (27) New exhibition galleries opened in June. An audio guide to take the visitor on a tour of the **history of** the site itself is available. iziko.txt

Both IT and SA Exhibitions sub-corpora underscore how exhibitions at a macro level focus on socio-political-historical topics characterised by evaluative discourse with the function of emphasising the importance of specific concepts/projects to be developed by generating awareness in the browsers. However, at a micro level the topics vary according to the societies by which they are constituted and constitutive, as highlighted by variations in the semantic sequences encoding the museum exhibitions’ identity.

5. Concluding remarks

The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the six CISAMWs sub-corpora – Descriptions, Collections and Exhibitions – revealed a strict interconnection between space, identity and discourse with variations in the semantic sequences encoding them. In all the sub-corpora, museum website space is represented through various degrees of intersemiosis and is clearly defined by FoRs anchoring the browsers in a shared virtual space whilst providing a metadiscursive guidance

role. Thus, through the discursive representation of museums' website content, the IT and SA institutions build and convey what they are through their identity.

Furthermore, the semantic sequences encode variations not only in how space is built and represented but also in the meaning of identity across the subcorpora. The IT and SA Descriptions sub-corpora include similar semantic sequences, even though 'identity' represents different cultural aspects. In the IT context identity is exclusively related to art heritage; in the SA context to socio-historical heritage. Unlike the Descriptions sub-corpora, the IT and SA Collections sub-corpora are characterised by highly evaluative discourse. The IT sub-corpus is also characterised by intersemiosis associated to macro and micro FoRs whilst the SA sub-corpus includes very limited spatial descriptions. These differences between the IT and SA sub-corpora increase in the Exhibitions. While both sub-corpora show a paucity of spatial references, the IT sub-corpus highlights close links between art and socio-political aspects, whereas the SA sub-corpus is focused on particular socio-historical phenomena which have an important impact on its society.

The CISAMWs thus shed light on how ex-sacred territories, that is, museums and their websites can be seen as examples of synergetic/synchronic space, identity and discourse interconnectedness whilst attempting to communicate with a vast heterogeneous public in an era of marketisation.

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