

Preliminary Study on Tour Guide Discourse as a Basis for Technology-Based Model Development

Lili Perpisa¹, Sri Imelwaty², Rino Zulyahdi³

^{1,2}Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat, Padang, Indonesia

³Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT: West Sumatra possesses rich tourism potential encompassing natural, cultural, and historical attractions. However, the quality of tourism services is often constrained by limited communication competence among tour guides, particularly those who serve as tour guides without formal tourism education. Many travel agencies assign drivers to concurrently act as tour guides, resulting in destination explanations that are spontaneous, unstructured, and insufficient in conveying cultural and historical values. This study is positioned as a preliminary phase of a Research and Development (R&D) approach, focusing on the analysis of tour guide discourse practices and needs as a foundation for future technology-based model development. The study involved 33 participants from three travel agencies in Padang City. Data were collected through observation, questionnaires, and interviews, and analyzed descriptively to examine discourse structure, communication challenges, and perceived needs. The findings indicate that tour guide discourse practices lack clear openings, coherent sequencing, and effective closures. Tour guides experience significant difficulties in explaining cultural and historical aspects of destinations. The needs analysis further reveals a strong demand for structured discourse guidance supported by information technology. Rather than producing a finalized model, this study provides an empirical basis and conceptual direction for the future development of a technology-based tour guide discourse framework. The results highlight the importance of discourse competence as a key component of tourism human resource development in culturally rich regions such as West Sumatra.

KEYWORDS: Tour guide, discourse structure, tourism communication, technology-based learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background and Objectives

Tourism is a strategic sector that plays an important role in regional economic development and the preservation of local culture (Pitana & Diarta, 2009). Within the tourism context, tour guides serve as key actors in delivering information, mediating cultural meanings, and shaping tourists' overall experiences. The quality of tour guide discourse significantly influences tourists' levels of satisfaction and understanding of the destinations they visit (Richards, 2017). Recent scholarship further highlights that tour guides' communication competence directly affects service quality and visitors' interpretative experiences, forming a critical factor in cultural and nature-based tourism (Akgunduz & Eser, 2022; Um & Yoon, 2021).

West Sumatra is widely recognized for its outstanding tourism potential, encompassing marine tourism in the Mandeh area, natural attractions in Alahan Panjang, historical and cultural tourism in Bukittinggi and Batu Sangkar, as well as nature-based and culinary tourism in Payakumbuh. Such richness requires tour guides who not only possess destination knowledge but also demonstrate strong speaking skills and the ability to construct systematic and engaging discourse. Moreover, contemporary research in tour guiding emphasizes the evolving role of technology in supporting tour guide communication practices, indicating a shift toward digital and mobile communication tools integrated with guide services (Koc et al., 2025).

However, field conditions indicate that many tour guides in West Sumatra do not have formal education or training in tour guiding. Several travel agencies even assign drivers to simultaneously serve as tour guides without adequate communication training. As a result, destination explanations are often delivered spontaneously, lack clear structure, and fail to adequately represent Minangkabau cultural and historical values. This condition is consistent with previous regional studies that have identified challenges in tour guide performance, including limitations in communication skills and service quality (Novra et al., 2025).

The use of information technology presents a potential solution to address these limitations. Information technology enables the provision of digital discourse guidance that is accessible, flexible, and aligned with the practical needs of tour guides in the field (Munir, 2017). Additionally, emerging studies on communication in tourism highlight the importance of intercultural competence and language proficiency in enhancing communicative performance and overcoming barriers in diverse contexts (Rachim & Salam,

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2025). Nevertheless, before such guidance can be designed or developed, a comprehensive understanding of tour guides' discourse practices and needs is required.

Accordingly, this study is positioned as a preliminary investigation focusing on the analysis of tour guide discourse practices and needs as a foundation for future technology-based framework development. The objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyze tour guides' needs related to discourse practices in explaining tourism destinations in West Sumatra;
2. Examine existing tour guide discourse characteristics and communication challenges; and
3. Provide an empirical basis for the future development of a technology-based tour guide discourse framework for travel agencies in Padang City.

B. Literature Review and Novelty

Discourse in the context of tour guiding constitutes a form of structured and context-sensitive spoken communication that functions not only to convey information but also to construct meaning and experience for tourists. From a linguistic perspective, discourse effectiveness depends on coherence and cohesion, which enable messages to be delivered systematically and comprehensibly (Halliday & Hasan, 2014). In tourism settings, discourse is inherently situated, as it is shaped by destination characteristics, cultural context, and audience expectations.

Previous studies on tour guiding emphasize that tour guides act as cultural mediators and interpreters, rather than mere information providers (Weiler & Black, 2015; Cohen, 1985). Effective tour guide discourse therefore integrates informative, narrative, and persuasive elements, allowing tourists to connect factual knowledge with cultural meaning and emotional engagement. Narrative and storytelling approaches have been shown to enhance tourists' understanding and satisfaction, particularly in cultural and heritage tourism contexts (Moscardo, 2014; Pabel & Pearce, 2016).

More recent research highlights communication competence as a key determinant of tour guide performance and service quality. Studies indicate that tour guides' ability to structure explanations, adapt language to audience needs, and deliver coherent narratives significantly influences tourists' interpretative experiences (Black & Ham, 2019; Akgunduz & Eser, 2022). However, much of this literature focuses on general competencies, such as knowledge, attitude, and language skills, rather than examining discourse structure as an analytical unit.

In parallel, tourism studies increasingly acknowledge the role of information technology in supporting tourism communication and human resource development. Digital tools and mobile technologies have been shown to facilitate access to learning resources, enhance flexibility, and support just-in-time information delivery for tourism practitioners (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015). Nevertheless, existing studies primarily address technology use for destination marketing or tourist experience, while technology-supported discourse guidance for tour guides remains underexplored.

In the Indonesian context, and particularly in West Sumatra, empirical research on tour guide discourse is still limited. Existing local studies tend to focus on service quality or tourist satisfaction, with little attention to how tour guides linguistically construct destination explanations, especially in relation to Minangkabau cultural values and local wisdom. Moreover, there is a lack of research that systematically analyzes tour guides' discourse practices as a foundation for technology-based support frameworks.

C. Research Novelty

The novelty of this study lies not in producing a finalized discourse model, but in providing a preliminary, discourse-oriented needs analysis that integrates linguistic theory, tourism communication, and information technology perspectives. Unlike previous studies that emphasize general tour guide competencies, this research specifically examines discourse structure and communicative practices as the analytical focus. Furthermore, by situating the analysis within the local cultural context of West Sumatra, this study offers an empirical basis for future development of a technology-based tour guide discourse framework that is culturally grounded and practically relevant.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach, positioned at the preliminary stage, focusing on needs analysis and empirical investigation as the foundation for future model development. The R&D approach was selected because it provides a systematic framework for understanding real-world conditions and identifying essential requirements prior to the design and development of an educational or training model (Borg & Gall, 2003).

The research design was limited to the initial phase of the R&D process, emphasizing needs analysis and situational analysis. At this stage, the study did not proceed to model design, development, testing, or revision. Instead, the research focused on examining tour guide discourse practices, identifying communication challenges, and analyzing tour guides' needs related to discourse structure and technology use. This preliminary design is consistent with tourism human resource development research, particularly in contexts where tour guides operate without formal educational backgrounds in tour guiding. The findings of this phase serve as an empirical basis and conceptual reference for subsequent stages of R&D, including model design and validation in future studies.

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B. Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in Padang City, West Sumatra, involving three travel agencies actively operating tour services to major tourist destinations such as Mandeh, Alahan Panjang, Bukittinggi, Payakumbuh, and Batu Sangkar. The participants consisted of 33 individuals including tour guides and drivers who concurrently served as tour guides, selected using purposive sampling. This sampling technique was applied to ensure that participants represented the real conditions of tour guiding practices in West Sumatra, where informal and experience-based tour guiding is common.

C. Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using multiple instruments to ensure data triangulation, including:

1. **Observation sheets:** Used to examine tour guides' discourse practices during tour activities;
2. **Semi-structured interviews:** Used to explore participants' experiences, difficulties, and needs related to discourse delivery;
3. **Questionnaires:** Conducted to identify tour guides' needs and perceptions regarding discourse models and information technology; and
4. **Documentation:** Collected to support observational and interview data.

These instruments were designed to capture both linguistic and practical aspects of tour guiding communication.

D. Research Model and Data Analysis

The research model focused on analyzing the structure, content, and delivery of tour guide discourse in explaining tourism destinations. Qualitative data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed descriptively to support qualitative findings. The developed discourse framework structure was evaluated based on field feedback to ensure its practicality, clarity, and relevance to tour guides' real working conditions.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1) Description of Participants

The participant composition reflects the actual condition of tourism human resources in West Sumatra, where tour guiding is often performed without formal professional training.

The first travel agency involved 24 drivers who simultaneously acted as tour guides. None of these participants had formal educational backgrounds in tour guiding or tourism. Their knowledge of tourist destinations was acquired primarily through on-the-job experience and repeated interaction with tourists.

The second travel agency involved seven participants, consisting of five drivers who concurrently served as tour guides and two individuals functioning solely as tour guides. These two tour guides had educational backgrounds at the senior high school and undergraduate levels, respectively; however, neither had academic training in tourism or tour guiding.

The third travel agency involved two tour guides who had performed the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. This religious experience influenced their communication style, which tended to emphasize moral values, politeness, and ethical narratives.

The detailed distribution of participants based on agency, role, educational background, and specific experience is presented in Table I.

Table I. Distribution of Participants Profile

Travel Agency	Participant Role	Number of Participants	Educational Background	Specific Experience
Agency 1	Driver concurrently serving as tour guide	24	Non-tourism background	Experience-based guiding
Agency 2	Driver concurrently serving as tour guide	5	Non-tourism background	Experience-based guiding
Agency 2	Tour guide	2	Senior High School / Bachelor Degree	Informal guiding experience
Agency 3	Tour guide	2	Non-tourism background	Performed Hajj pilgrimage
Total		33		

As shown in Table I, the majority of participants (29 out of 33) were drivers who concurrently acted as tour guides. Only four participants functioned exclusively as tour guides, and none had formal academic qualifications in tourism or tour guiding.

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2) Tour Guide Discourse Practices (RQ1)

Research Question 1 examined the characteristics of tour guides' discourse practices in explaining tourism destinations. Data were collected through direct observation using six discourse-related indicators. The summarized results are presented in Table II.

Table II. Evaluation of Tour Guide Discourse Aspects

Discourse Aspect	Adequate (%)	Inadequate (%)
Opening of explanation	18%	82%
Logical sequencing of information	15%	85%
Cultural and historical content	21%	79%
Discourse coherence	12%	88%
Closing or summary	9%	91%

Table II indicates that most participants demonstrated inadequate performance across all observed discourse aspects. The weakest performance was found in the closing or summarizing stage, where 91% of participants failed to conclude their explanations clearly. Similarly, discourse coherence and logical sequencing were weak, with more than 80% of participants unable to organize information systematically.

3) Tour Guides' Needs for a Discourse Model (RQ2)

Research Question 2 focused on identifying tour guides' needs regarding a structured discourse model. Data were collected using a questionnaire administered to all participants. The summarized results are presented in Table III.

Table III. Summary of Tour Guides' Needs for a Discourse Model

Need Indicator	Agreement (%)
Need for a structured discourse guide	94%
Difficulty explaining cultural and historical aspects	91%
Low confidence in destination explanation	82%
Need for simple sentence patterns	85%
Preference for technology-based guidance	97%

As shown in Table III, participants expressed a very high level of agreement across all need indicators. The strongest agreement (97%) was related to the preference for a technology-based discourse model, indicating a high level of readiness to adopt digital learning tools. Additionally, more than 90% of participants acknowledged difficulties in explaining cultural and historical aspects of destinations.

B. Discussion

1) Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this study indicate that tour guiding practices in West Sumatra are largely characterized by unstructured discourse delivery, particularly among drivers who concurrently serve as tour guides. Most participants demonstrated difficulties in organizing destination explanations into coherent openings, systematic information sequences, and effective closures. These results support discourse theory which emphasizes that coherence and cohesion are fundamental requirements for effective spoken communication (Halliday & Hasan, 2014).

From a tourism communication perspective, the absence of structured discourse limits tour guides' ability to function as cultural interpreters. Previous studies have highlighted that tour guides play a crucial role in transforming factual information into meaningful tourist experiences through narrative and interpretative communication (Weiler & Black, 2015; Moscardo, 2014). The present findings suggest that although tour guides in West Sumatra possess experiential knowledge of destinations, they often lack the discourse competence necessary to translate this knowledge into engaging and meaningful narratives.

2) Discourse Competence and Tour Guide Professionalism

The results further reveal that higher formal education or extensive guiding experience does not automatically lead to effective discourse performance. Tour guides with senior high school or undergraduate educational backgrounds showed greater verbal fluency, yet still struggled with discourse organization. Similarly, tour guides with strong experiential or religious backgrounds demonstrated persuasive communication styles but lacked systematic discourse structure.

These findings align with recent research emphasizing that communication competence in tour guiding is not solely dependent on experience, but requires structured guidance and training focused on discourse organization and audience-oriented communication (Black & Ham, 2019; Akgunduz & Eser, 2022). This reinforces the argument that discourse competence should be treated as a distinct and essential component of tour guide professionalism.

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3) Technology as a Supportive Medium for Discourse Guidance

Another important finding is the strong readiness and preference among tour guides for technology-based support. Participants expressed a high level of agreement regarding the need for digital discourse guidance that can be accessed through mobile devices. This finding is consistent with contemporary tourism studies which indicate that information technology can enhance learning flexibility and provide just-in-time support for tourism practitioners (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Xiang et al., 2015).

Namun demikian, berbeda dengan penelitian terdahulu yang menitikberatkan teknologi untuk pemasaran destinasi atau keterlibatan wisatawan secara pasif, studi ini menyoroti peran potensial teknologi sebagai media pendukung kompetensi diskursus pemandu wisata secara mandiri. Temuan ini menyiratkan bahwa teknologi tidak menggeser peran pemandu, melainkan berfungsi sebagai instrumen pendukung dalam menyusun penjelasan sistematis, memilih diksi komunikatif, serta mengadaptasi struktur pembicaraan berbasis karakteristik lokal.

4) Implications for Research and Model Development

As a preliminary study, the primary contribution of this research lies in its diagnostic and analytical function. By systematically analyzing discourse practices and identifying tour guides' needs, this study provides an empirical foundation for subsequent stages of Research and Development. The findings suggest that any future technology-based discourse framework should prioritize simplicity, flexibility, and cultural relevance, particularly in relation to Minangkabau values and local narratives.

Moreover, the emphasis on discourse analysis distinguishes this study from prior research that predominantly examines general competencies or service quality. By foregrounding discourse structure as the analytical focus, this study contributes to tourism communication research and offers a clear direction for future model design and validation.

5) Limitations and Generalizability

This discussion should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. The study involved participants from only three travel agencies in Padang City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the research focused on qualitative and descriptive analysis rather than experimental testing. Nevertheless, the identified discourse patterns and needs are likely to be relevant to other tourism regions with similar human resource characteristics.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study addresses the problem of limited discourse competence among tour guides in West Sumatra, particularly those who serve as tour guides without formal tourism education. The findings demonstrate that tour guide discourse practices are predominantly unstructured, characterized by weak openings, limited coherence, insufficient integration of cultural and historical content, and ineffective closures. These discourse limitations directly affect tour guides' ability to function as cultural mediators and to deliver meaningful destination explanations.

In line with the research objectives, this study confirms that tour guides experience significant difficulties in constructing systematic and engaging discourse, despite possessing experiential knowledge of tourism destinations. The needs analysis further reveals a strong and consistent demand for structured discourse guidance supported by information technology. This indicates that improving tour guide professionalism requires not only destination knowledge but also explicit support for discourse organization and communication competence.

Rather than producing a finalized model, this study provides an empirical and analytical foundation for the future development of a technology-based tour guide discourse framework. The conclusions are supported by observational and questionnaire data from all participants, demonstrating that discourse competence is a critical yet underdeveloped component of tourism human resource quality in West Sumatra.

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