

Feeling superior? National identity and humour in British Castles

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Abstract

This study explores how humour in tourism can communicate facets of national identity. In particular, the paper focuses on the presentation by guides of two English and two Scottish castles. Drawing on multiple sources, including an analysis of promotional materials, the text of the guide's narratives, on-site observation, and TripAdvisor comments from tourists, it was revealed that the guides repeatedly jokes to create clear boundaries between being English and Scottish. The guides' command of nuances in language was a pivotal skill underpinning the humour. Through employing interactive jokes, the guides engaged the tourists' attention and drew attention to the contrasts between English and Scottish characteristics. The research not only captures how the role of tourism-linked humour can function to interpret the distinctiveness of a destination, but also suggests further possible implications of humour in heritage tourism contexts.

Keywords: Humour, interaction, superiority, heritage tourism, national identity

Introduction

Although tourists travel for various reasons, enjoyment and having fun are substantial drivers for many holiday makers (du Cros & McKercher, 2014; Prebensen et al., 2014). Recent studies have argued that the inclusion of humour in tourism settings has considerable potential to build good times for tourists (Frew, 2006; Filep & Laing, 2018; Pearce & Pabel, 2015). Foundation studies of the humour-tourism relationships have considered the wide applicability of humour (Frew, 2006; Pearce, 2009; Pabel & Pearce, 2018). Specific empirical studies have noted the effectiveness of humour in tourism advertisements (Carden, 2005). Other researchers have explored the symbolic meaning of humorous postcards (Francesconi, 2011) and tourists' response to tour guides' humour in different contexts (Pabel & Pearce, 2016; Pearce & Kanlayanasukho, 2012; Zhang & Pearce, 2016). The opportunity to develop humour and tourism studies in the context of heritage settings is a novel direction taken up in this study.

Within previous humour related tourism studies, the focus has been primarily on how humour is utilised to create value and enhance tourists' experiences (e.g., Pearce, 2009). In regard to nationally significant historical attractions, the benefits of adopting humour have broader implications other than enhancing tourists' experiences. Indeed, there is growing recognition that heritage attractions are integral parts of nationhood and, by visiting such locations, people experience and develop a unique sense of belonging (Park, 2011; Pretes, 2003; Zhang et al., 2018). Nationally significant heritage, in particular, is primarily promoted internally and externally to tell unique national stories (Smith, 1991; Zhang et al., 2018). In this vein, Zhang and Pearce (2016) found that as popular cultural attractions tend to demonstrate the uniqueness of a destination, humour adopted in those

attractions also contributes to the uniqueness of a place. While Zhang and Peace (2016) show the possible connection between humour and a sense of destination, their study still focuses on tourists' experience rather than the broader implications of humour in tourism settings. Given that humour is often widely applied in significant heritage attractions (e.g. Pearce, 2009), the current study takes the first step towards exploring the broader implications of humour by introducing the concept of national identity, which defines and locates individuals in unique societies (Smith, 1991).

To link humour with national identity, the study focuses on how making people laugh and smile, and sharing that process, can contribute to the identity-making in the heritage context. The research specifically addresses the kinds of humour used and the extent to which nationality identity content infuses the humour employed. The study is conducted in two English settings (Windsor castle, The Tower of London) and two Scottish castles (Stirling and Edinburgh). All four are well-visited, prominent heritage attractions in Britain where humour is employed as a routine interpretive tool.

Humour, superiority theory and national identity

Before exploring the humour-tourism link, some fundamental points about humour need to be noted. The term humour is complex and dynamic. In everyday use humour tends to be related to laughter, jokes, fun and positive feelings. This common understanding of humour is related to Berger's (1976) definition, which suggests that humour is a special form of communication that is defined by its outcome; i.e. that it causes laughter. A more comprehensive approach is offered by Ruch (1993). For him, humour is a communication that results in emotional state of mirth or exhilaration. Martin (2007) agrees with such a conceptualisation and adds that responses to humour might be apparent but they can also be well hidden. This broader conceptualisation of humour implies that the appreciation of humour does not necessarily result in laughter or smiles. A broad definition incorporating the dual views of Ruch and Martin is used as the basis for this study: we see humour as communication resulting in an emotional state of mirth or exhilaration that may be visible in its outcomes or simply appreciated cognitively and emotionally. The humour literature also suggests that the appreciation and production of humour are inseparable components when assessing humour in different circumstances (Ruch, 1993, Martin, 2007). As international tourism often involves people from different cultures, the appreciation and production of humour in destinations often need to be carefully considered. For example, Pabel and Pearce (2016) investigated tourists' views of different categories of humour used by Australian tour guides and argued for careful planning to enhance tourists' positive responses towards humour in tourism settings.

Concerns regarding the adoption of different forms of humour in tourism are often related to three fundamental theories of humour: relief theory, incongruity theory and

superiority theory (Critchly, 2002; Pabel & Pearce, 2016; Zhang & Pearce, 2016, Martin, 2007). Relief theory is often related to the positive psychological benefits that humour can bring to tourists (Pearce & Pabel, 2015). Hence, this theory is linked to how humour can release built-up nervous tension (Martin, 2007). The production of jokes can often release tourists' anxiety in unfamiliar settings (Zhang & Pearce, 2016). Incongruity theory presumes that people laugh at what surprises them as it is unexpected but nonetheless not threatening (McGhee, 1979). Hence, while relief theory focuses on the outcome of the appreciation of humour, incongruity theory focuses on the interactions between the appreciation and production of humour. In tourism settings, tour guides often need to carefully plan how humour can offer a mild but amusing and incongruous shock to tourists (Zhang & Pearce, 2016).

Compared with the previous two humour theories, the oldest and most commonly cited theory about humour refers to its role in establishing superiority (Martin, 2007). According to Critchly (2002), laughing at others was originally a response to the inferior characteristics of others. In this approach, a superior feeling of “sudden glory” for individuals was responsible for the laughter. Hence, humour “is thought to result from a sense of superiority derived from the disparagement of another person or of one’s own past blunders or foolishness” (Martin, 2007:48). To understand the superiority theory of humour, Gruner (1974) argued that it is important to find out who is ridiculed, and then how and why. The kinds of humour underpinned by superiority theory often contain both positive and negative effects for listeners. On the one hand, the enforcement of one’s superior position is beneficial for establishing self-esteem and positive well-being (Gruner, 1974; Martin, 2007). On the other hand, laughing at one’s weakness and

foolishness could potentially be dangerous and result in less satisfied or offended audience members

Additionally, the superiority which may underlie the humour also offers opportunities to study impacts and outcomes related to identity. As already noted, laughing at others was originally a response to the inferiority of others. Due to their knowledge of the site and sometimes their verbal skills, tour guides are often in a position of superiority during the interaction with tourists. Guides have the knowledge and the power in their role to play with the differences between groups as revealed in the events of history. In outlining their accounts and jokes, they are able to establish who belongs to the in-group and who is the outsider or (previous) inferior enemy (Smith, 1991, 2009; Zhang et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Nations are socially constructed and building identification with a national group helps individuals belong to a collective and distinctive culture (Smith 1991). It is the enforcement of similarity, through differentiating ourselves from others, that makes interactive superior jokes important to nation-making. For example, Holmes and Hay (1997) focus on humour in creating or maintaining solidarity within the group by comparing Maori and Pakeha humour in New Zealand. They find that humour highlights similarities within Maori culture and Pakeha culture and at the same time maintains the boundaries between these two cultures. They conclude that one of the hidden functions of humour is its ability as a boundary marker and as a type of representation of ethnic identity. Holmes (2000) further elaborates humour's power in emphasising intergroup cohesion and solidarity.

There is though a slightly darker side to the use of humour in the establishing identity. Such solidarity is often at the expense of criticising the behaviours and customs of out-

groups (Critchly, 2002; Martin, 2007). Some believe that superior jokes can amplify national conflicts through exaggerating the differences between nations, while others suggest laughing together about past stereotypes can sometimes also soften conflicts (Holmes & Marra, 2002). The importance of the tourism context, one largely designed so that people can enjoy places and one another, should be considered in reviewing these darker concerns. There is a light-heartedness to many of these tourism-based identity jokes that suggests that nothing too serious is meant by their meaning and implications. Nevertheless, as international tourism involves interactions between various nationals, strong jokes built around expressing a superior position do need to be carefully managed and examined in tourism settings. Certainly, while humour might have a potential role in adding to or amplifying image formation, closely observing the extent and power of such practices require detailed research.

Paying particular attention to the superior theory of humour, the present study aims to understand the humour- tourism relationship in England's and Scotland's signature heritage attractions to address the ways in which humour works to portray national identity for both "nations" and examine tourists' responses to such a production of humorous identity narratives.

English and Scottish: identity and humour in tourism

Both the appreciation and production of humour are developed differently across cultures. Several authors have stated that superior cultural-rooted jokes are often included in tourism settings to represent vivid and distinctive imagined communities for visitors (Fancesconi, 2011; Zhang & Pearce, 2016). In the case of Britain, Palmer (2005) finds that English heritage often addresses the felt kinship ties that bind individuals to the wider nation. In particular, she finds that unbroken tradition, relationships and family links, and the love of freedom are common themes that are used in the heritage context to define the English identity. Specifically, castles and country houses are often regarded as representatives of the nation's pride and heritage (Chambers, 2005). They are still used in contemporary times to boost such feelings. For example, Edinburgh castle was heavily used in the Scottish Independence referendum in 2014. Although the referendum did not result in Scotland becoming a politically independent nation, the example reinforces the view that the tie between Scottish cultural heritage attractions and the Scottish identity is strong (McCrone, Morris & Kiely, 1995).

While differences exist in identity constructions between the English and the Scottish, a sense of humour is, arguably, a fundamental part of all British culture (Wiseman, 2007). Feeling superior and able to laugh at other nations helps locate the sense of being British. Hence, British jokes often include strong, ironic and exaggerative comments towards other groups of people (Easthorpe, 2004). Among all of the regions within the island of Britain, the English tend to feel superior to both the Welsh and Scottish (Daiches, 2002). The English sense of superiority can be extended to the United Kingdom as a whole, although due to the turbulent and more recent troubles and associated deaths from the

conflicts involving Northern Ireland, there appears to be some restraint in making jokes about that part of the country. English superiority can be explained as being related to the nation's imperial history and the widespread use of the English language (Bryson, 1991). For example and by way of contrast, Gaelic and Welsh as languages are now restricted to a minority of speakers. Mastering the linguistic subtleties of the language, the jokes it produces and being able to laugh together at others (and sometimes themselves) symbolise the superiority of the English identity (Friedman, 2011).

The perception of the Scottish identity has been deeply affected by the historical, political and cultural relationship with the English. As a consequence, a dichotomous discourse has traditionally existed, comparing a superior and refined Englishness to an inferior and vulgar Scottishness (Daiches, 1981). For example, Davis (2002) finds that despite a shared British identity, Scottish jokes are often about the Scots themselves, mocking their fellows as “clever, shrewd, enterprising, striving, hard-headed, prudent, far-sighted, economical and thrifty” (Davies, 2002:27). Hence Scottish humour and self-deprecation are widely recognised as a peculiar component of their national identity (Fancesconi, 2011).

Ancient myths and legends, popular songs and movies have reinforced and perpetuated the identity of the English and Scottish. Such cultural products and iconic images have been systematically exploited by the tourist industry. As the ideas of Scotland and England on the one hand and the tourist industry on the other have developed, they have naturally influenced each other (Butler, 2013; Palmer, 2005; Zhang, et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2018). Hence, the humour applied in heritage attractions should perform an influential role in national identification. When linking the humour with national identification, one

should notice that while histories, heroes and cultural slang have been enforced in heritage tourist attractions to represent the uniqueness of a superior UK, non-native speakers might have different interpretations of such a superiority built through humour. If international tourists cannot appreciate such allusions, humour's positive benefits will fail and may offend or simply go unnoticed by some of the audience (Pearce & Pabel, 2015).

Building on these discussions of identity formation and humour, we seek to achieve the following aims. We aim to demonstrate how the use of superior jokes contributes to national identity and its potential effects on tourists. Also, we focus specifically on the extent to which content relating to and defining Scottish and English identity infuses the humour employed.

Method

To obtain insights into humour and national identity construction, an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted. The four sites selected were specifically identified due to their acknowledged significance as national heritage tourism attractions. As this study follows and adopts a broad definition of humour, (*humour as communication resulting in an emotional state of mirth or exhilaration which may be visible in its outcomes or simply appreciated cognitively and emotionally*), the key word “fun” was used to ensure that guided tours in those heritage sites provide a fun and enjoyable experience. In Europe, royal figures are often widely used as cultural symbols to link the glorious past to present national identity-making (Smith, 2009).

Additionally, as previous studies on English identity and tourism often highlight the importance of castles and the royal family associated with those castles (Chambers, 2005, Palmer, 2005), four castles were selected for this research. In England, the Tower of London and Windsor castle were selected as iconic attractions. In Scotland, Edinburgh and Stirling castles were chosen due to their significant contribution to Scottish identity. All four of the selected castles are regarded as national symbols of both England and Scotland. All of the castles offer a guided tour to enhance the tourism experience. An examination of the online and offline promotional materials reveals that all of the guided tours at these four castles have consistently been recognised as fun and insightful in terms of both English and Scottish history. Similar to previous humour studies (e.g., Pearce, 2009; Zhang & Pearce, 2016), the choice of dynamic cases compared with a single case provides multiple sources to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

The present study collected multiple data sources to understand the role that humour has played in establishing national identities in these four castles. First, the on-site and online promotional materials for those castles were collected to understand the representation of identity. Second, all of the guided tours were undertaken by the first author at least three times in the period from April 2016 to August 2017. The second author had been on the Scottish tours on one occasion and visited the London sites multiple times. The narratives provided by the tour guides were recorded during the visits. Participant observation was carried out to record the tourists' reactions towards the humour. Participant observation is particularly useful to explore natural interactions. Casual conversations with both tour guides and tourists were carried out during the tours. Both authors fitted easily into the setting as tourists. One author, who is Chinese, has lived in England for over 6 years, but still considers herself an international tourist. The second author, an Australian, has previously lived in England, and passes easily as just another international tourist. This joint insider-outsider role of the researchers was seen as providing familiarity for understanding identity representation in the UK and being sympathetic to tourists' responses to such representations. Third, to ensure that the present study has a wider understanding of tourists' responses to humour in national significant heritage sites, TripAdvisor commentaries on the selected castles were collected up to January 2018.

The combination of diverse verbal, textual and visual data provides rich materials to understand the humour-identity link in these distinctive heritage sites (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). All of data were analysed through Boyatzi's (1998) three-step thematic analysis, namely, attending to sampling and design issues, developing themes and codes,

and then validating and using the codes. Codes were first developed through identifying themes within the three data sets separately. The themes were further developed through a comparison within the three data sets. Codes used in previous research on identity and humour were useful (Chambers, 2005, Palmer, 2005; Pearce, 2009; Pearce & Pabel, 2015). [Specifically, we focus on terms that define individuals and also pay attention to the uniqueness of a nation.](#) To ensure the credibility of the themes, the two authors carried out cross-checks of the key codes and themes.

Castles, identity and humour settings

The four castles studied are examples of significant historical monuments. Although the exact linkage between heritage tourism and national identification has already been explained elsewhere (e.g., Palmer, 2005; McCrone et al., 1995; Zhang et al., 2015), the key idea here is to provide a brief explanation about the role that each castle has played in identity-making together with basic information about their in-house guided tour and humour application. Such explanations provide a foundation for further exploration. It was observed that in the guided tours of the four castles, while most visitors were domestic travellers, there were also many Europeans and Americans, as well as some Australians, New Zealanders and Asians. Among the four castles, although the guided tour of the Tower of London was the longest, it was observed that this tour is the most popular and humorous compared with the others. Stirling castle is not visited as often as the other locations, but the reviews and visitor numbers are not much less than Edinburgh castle. Among all four castles, the tour of Windsor castle is considered less favourably by tourists. Promotional images of the studied locations are shown in Figure 1.

(Please insert Figure 1 here)

Tower of London

The Tower of London is an “*iconic fortress, royal place and infamous prison*” (Royal Historic Palace, 2018) and has always been significantly related to England’s history. The palace was built after the Battle of Hastings in 1066, between King Harold and William of Normandy; the latter is known as the founding father of England. Inside the castle, The “Yeoman Warder” tour is the official tour delivered by a warder. It takes place every 30 minutes and lasts for around 60 – 80 minutes. The tour is always popular and around 80 to 150 people go on each tour. Although each of the warders seems to have a slightly different collection of narratives and jokes, the speech at the entrance often links this site with the Battle of Hastings, when it first became a royal palace, and stresses its current role in exhibiting the crown jewels. The narrative of the tour includes tales about famous figures in English history, notably the beheaded Queen Anne Boleyn and the two princes. According to the warder, “*this is London. You had everything palace, prison and fortress and even a zoo in one place*”. The tour guides have served in the army for over 22 years before becoming a warder; they are also known as beefeaters (see Figure 1(A)). In total, there are six locations where the warders stand and deliver the talks. The majority of warders are male and all wear a uniform. The uniform still has its original design with a bonnet with colours similar to that of the British Flag. The symbolic meaning of the uniform was explained by one warder: “*do you know what EIIR is on the front of my chest? This is evening romance. Twice. (tourist laugh). No... no this stands for Elizabeth II Regina. Long live the queen.*” Here, national symbols are expressed in a humorous way

to create an engaging experience. Many of the TripAdvisor comments about the warders are related to their sense of humour and their unquestionable loyalty to the crown.

Windsor Castle

Windsor Castle is “*home to the queen and has over 900 years of royal history*” (Royal Collection Trust 2018). Built by William the Conqueror in the 11th century, Windsor Castle is now the longest occupied palace in Europe. Queen Elizabeth II always features in the promotional materials with her classic English dress and gentle smile (see Figure 1(B)). Among all of the interesting spots, the State Apartments are often a significant attraction and are described as a journey “*following in the footsteps of Kings and Queens*” (The Royal Collection Trust, 2016). Cultural objects in the castles often communicate a sense of belonging and emotional feelings that seek to enhance identity (Palmer, 2005).

Inside Windsor Castle, the precincts tour runs to a strict daily routine. The tour departs at hourly intervals and lasts for around 30 minutes. Generally around 10-20 people go on each tour. The warders seem to have relatively similar narratives. Most of the warders are females from their early 30s to late 50s. The warders at Windsor castle did not use many jokes compared with the warders at the Tower of London. Occasionally, a few very soft jokes were delivered in a slow and gentle voice to demonstrate the gentle beauty of women. However, compared with the Yeomen tour at the Tower of London, the Precincts tour is less popular and less entertaining based on TripAdvisor comments. For example, many tourists have relative neutral attitudes towards this tour, stating, “*a Precinct Tour of the castle with a guide telling us things about different areas*”.

Edinburg Castle

Established in the 12th Century by Scottish King David I, Edinburgh Castle is a magnificent symbol for the Scots as the castle is described as a stronghold which is “*the most besieged place in Britain, providing sanctuary and security of many of Scotland’s kings and queens*” (Historic Scotland, 2017a). Like other Scottish heritage, the word “nation” often refers to Britain but at the same time differentiates Scotland from England. Scotland is repeatedly treated as a special and separate nation (McCrone et al., 1995). For example, when describing the national war museum inside the castle, the guide book says, “*the Scottish Naval and Military Museum, the first of its kind in Britain... One in five Scots who enlisted never came home (during the First World War), the greatest proportion of any of the home nation* (Edinburgh Castle, 2016). Similar sentences like, “*the first of its kind in Britain*”, are commonly used in this castle to demonstrate the superior distinctive features of the Scots within the UK. The guided tour at Edinburgh castle runs daily at hourly intervals and lasts for around 30 minutes. Generally, around 20-40 people go on each tour. The guides at Edinburgh Castle vary in age and gender. Instead of wearing a uniform, some guides were casually dressed while occasionally male guides wore a kilt. The guided tour often receives positive comments such as “*worth going*”, “*fun*”, “*knowledgeable*” and “*entertaining*”, by tourists on TripAdvisor.

Stirling Castle

Stirling Castle was also home to Scottish kings and queens from the 12th century. With a similar construction and style to its Edinburgh companion (see Figure 1 (C) &(D)), the uniqueness of Stirling Castle lies in “*its strategic importance*”. “*It also became the most*

besieged castle in the land, the focus of two of the most important battles in Scotland's history- Stirling Bridge (1297) and Bannockburn (1314)" (Historic Scotland, 2011). Stirling Bridge and Bannockburn were two shattering defeats for the English in Scotland's quest for independence. These two battles are commonly regarded as important victory days that demonstrate that the Scots are not always inferior to the English and they are commonly emphasised in heritage sites in Scotland (McCrone et al., 1995). According to the tour guide (male, in his 60s), "*Stirling Castle is the military strategic point for Scotland, while Edinburgh castle is a royal castle in the capital*". Hence, the on-site description and tour narratives were largely focused on these two battles. The guided tour at Stirling Castles runs hourly or 30 minute intervals and lasts for around one hour. The tour normally includes around 20-40 people. The guides at Stirling Castle vary in age and gender. Some male tour guides dress in a green kilt during the tour. Although occasionally tourists can see staff dressed in period costume for photo opportunities at the Tower of London, Stirling Castle regularly has interactive guides dressed in historical costume to explain the inside story of each room in the castle. Humour is very much used in these interpretive remarks. This is often viewed positively by tourists on TripAdvisor.

Study findings

The multiple sources of information used in the study permitted the researchers to address the stated aims of the work under three headings: “The kinds of humour used *in nationally significant castles*”, “*glorious Scottish and English identity in humour*”, and “*feeling superior: Scottish and English identity*”.

The kinds of humour used in nationally significant castles

This section shows how these *nationally significant* castle tours employ different kinds of humour to entertain tourists *and its potential implications for heritage tourism experiences*. The researchers also attend to and reveal how tourists respond to the jokes.

Opening jokes are important. In large size heritage attractions like castles, guides often need to stop in various locations to deliver the story. It was observed that humour is commonly adopted at the beginning of all the castle tours, particularly to frame the tour experience and focus the tourists’ attention (Zhang & Pearce, 2016). All of the tour guides at those attractions are native speakers, able to use tricks of language and nuances mostly to good but selective effect. Examples are listed below:

Example 1: (Tour narratives in Tower of London)

Warder: *Come closer. You go to the back!* (points to one western male and the tourist smiles).

Warder: *That was a test of English. Do you speak English?*

Tourist: *Yes*

Warder: *What you just said?* (Tourist laughs)

Warder: *Get closer. The tour is in English. If you’re struggling with the meaning of The word ‘closer’, you may ask your own language guide.* (Tourists laughs but a few tourists leave the tour)

Example 2: (Tour narratives – Stirling castle)

Tour guide: *Is anybody here from London?*

Tourist: *Yes*

Tour guide: *You built the biggest trebuchet ever. Especially for the battle in this castle. Even the machine's name is scary. Are you ready for this?*

Tourists: *Yes* (Tourists smile)

Tour guide: *It's called the warwolf* (the guide puts his hands up to his mouth to imitate a wolf)

(Tourists laugh)

Tour guide (with calm smile) *This (wolf imitation) can only scare the kids*

(Tourists laugh)

Examples show that guides often ask questions to deliver those opening jokes. While all the tours have a pre-prepared script, the ability to deliver responses based on tourists' reactions is important (Pearce & Pabel, 2015). The initial questions not only attract the tourists' attention but also frame the entertaining experience. Some might expect relatively dull historical tours in those settings. A humorous opening gives tourists a sense about the tour and motivates them to stay.

Within the interactive opening, expectations and tourists' information are often acquired at this stage. As shown in Example 1, the warder states that if the tourist does not understand the word "closer", they might need to ask another guide (instead of staying here for the tour). Although the joke might be classified as a little offensive, it effectively announces that tourists need to have good linguistic and cultural understanding to enjoy the tour and its associated jokes. Similarly, in Example 2, a joke specifically targets those from London, England. Here, the play on the words war wolf and werewolf are made, but a collusion between the English and the Scottish is implicit as the joke is cast as only scaring kids. The guides used their facial expressions and wolf-imitating gesture to undermine their own attempt at scaring the Londoners.

It is noticed that those jokes made about tourists often target predominantly those from a Western background. All of the four tours are conducted in English; translation services are not provided. According to all the guides *“humour cannot be easily transferred into another language”*. Through this entertaining experience, the majority of tourists commented positively to those tours. For example, a tourist on TripAdvisor commented, *“I laughed loudly at every utterance and for me the way he stabbed and sliced the air, snarled, sneered and smiled was the highlight of my trip to Scotland”*. However, humour creates boundaries between those who can master the language and those who cannot through a sense of underlying superiority (Cappelli, 2008). Although all of these castles have relatively diverse visitors from all over the world due to their significance in British history, the majority of those who participated in the guided tours were western tourists. Those who left earlier were often Asian tourists. Some tourists commented that *“the tours are excellently led and very interesting, though children may struggle, and you need good English for the English tours as the guides speak fast”* (TripAdvisor comments from English tourists -Tower of London).

Humour is known for its ability to provide comfort and control (Weiler & Black, 2015a, 2015b). Humour can also be employed to give instructions, to guide tourists' behaviour and to promote other activities. Examples are listed below:

Now also we know no smoking, eating or drinking inside the church. Photography, a sound recorder, video filming are not permitted under crown copy right law. So ladies and gents if you take photographs inside that church you are committing treason (tourists laugh). *You will end up there* (Tourists laugh). *Ok please do not do it.* (Serious look with emphasis). (Tour narratives - Tower of London)

The restaurant is that way. It isn't bad. But, if you stay here for so many years, you might want to see some changes (Tourists laugh) (Tour narratives – Windsor castle)

If you go in that direction, you can find free whisky samples. Scottish whiskies are the best. I cannot go there with you guys. They know I want to drink all of the free whiskies. (Tourists laugh) (Tour narratives – Edinburgh castle)

Here, ironic mildly self-deprecatory jokes are being used to draw attention to inappropriate behaviours and revenue generating areas such as restaurants and gift shops. It was observed that there was no single instance of a tourist violating the instructions at the Tower of London, thus providing evidence to support the idea that humour can contribute to controlling tourists' behaviour. Giving directions to different areas can also enhance tourists' stay and potentially encourage visitors to spend extra money on-site. As all of the tourists started at the entrance and finished in the middle of the attraction, clear humorous directions are often positively viewed by tourists. Some tourists commented on TripAdvisor that such advice was useful and valuable for them to further explore the attraction on their own.

For national heritage attractions, it is the development of personal meaning that matters as cultural education and promotion requires meaningful engagement (du Cros & McKercher, 1998). Humour in particular has a tradition of developing such meaningful engagement (Peace & Pabel, 2016). Below is an example of a short historical story to illustrate how meaningful engagement is made possible through humour:

We (the warders) went back to the tower and somebody realised, hang on a minute, this is the son of a king we just beheaded. He was James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth, but unlike all the others, he never had his portrait painted. We carried him back to the tower. We had to send instructions down to London Bridge to collect his head and bring it straight back here. And then it was sewn to his body by the tower surgery. Sadly ladies and gents it was too late to save him. (Tourists laugh). The portrait got to be somehow detached (Tourists laugh). (Tour narratives – Tower of London).

As shown in the example, the guide delivered the interactive jokes using “*ladies and gents*” to attract people’s attention, followed by the joke. It appeared from our observations that the more tourists laughed at the puns and jokes the more enthusiastic and engaging the guides became. The interactive and unexpected jokes provided made the history alive and interesting. Furthermore, warders are considered as “*symbols of London and Britain*” (Tower of London, 2016) and they often use “*we*” to connect past activities to their identity. This positioning helps them not only to be superior and knowledgeable residents from the tower, but also to bring the history alive. Without those stories, constructions such as castles remain silent and tourists can only focus on tangible features (du Cros & McKercher, 2014).

Among the four castles, it was observed that the tour at the Windsor castle was the least popular due to its soft humour. Hence, only a few tourists on TripAdvisor commented on the tour but numerous tourists were amazed by its tangible features and decorations. Unlike Windsor castle, many tourists to the Tower of London recognised that the interactive jokes have potential to offer educational value and contribute to authentic heritage experience. For example, a tourist commented on TripAdvisor: “*the beefeaters are funny and informative. They are superb teachers of history and represent the authentic feeling of being in Britain.*” As humour has potential to increase concentration (Pearce, 2009), historical information becomes memorable for those who attended the tours.

It was observed that the use of humour in those nationally significant castles could enhance the heritage tourism experience and provide personal engagement. Previous studies have shown the important function of heritage in enforcing identities (e.g., Zhang,

et al., 2018). As humour facilitates the process of providing meanings and engaging with audiences (Smith, 1991), it has the potential to contribute to identity-making, as shown below.

Glorious Scottish and English identity in humour

The special ways that Scottish and English identity infuses the humour were studied by the researchers. The ‘glory of history’ and its symbols are important for nation-making (Smith, 2009; Zhang et al., 2015). The royal family is a leading symbol of the nation for both England and Scotland. Those castles that carry royal stories are symbolic resources to display the national legacy (Chambers, 2005; Pretes, 2003; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001). It was observed that stories about the royal family are often delivered in a humorous way:

This is a real life castle, you will see a walking queen if you are lucky.
(Tourists laugh) (Tour narratives - Windsor castle)

In the hall I am wondering whether you can find the king's lug. Anybody who can tell me what lug means? The king's lug is the king's ear. My dad said to me, open up your lug holes when I am not listening. So a lug is a spy hole where the king could sit and hear what people were saying. If he heard anything he did not like...trouble. Yeah. So when you are in the hall today, we do listen to all your conversations. Say some nice things (Tourists laugh). (Tour narratives - Edinburgh castle)

Here I quote, "he who holds Stirling, holds Scotland." In the summer of 1304, the king of England surrounded our castle with 10,000 men. Are we afraid? (strikes a strong pose, pauses then says YES)
(Tourist laugh). (Tour narratives - Stirling castle)

Those examples are alluding symbolic value that is created through representing the glory history. Through delivering stories about kings and queens in the historical settings, emotional feelings are enhanced through interactive jokes. Castles are representatives of the nation's pride (Chambers, 2005). Through delivering the experience in an engaging

and interactive way, tourists are connected to the magnificent physical settings. Many domestic travellers positively commented the tour's power to generate their national pride. Similar examples like *"It was fun to learn about our proud Scottish roots with our kids"* and *"proud to be British."* were commonly mentioned on TripAdvisor. International tourists were also impressed by the attractions and influenced by the guide. For example, a tourist commented on TripAdvisor *"her sincere love and pride of her country and her job is astonishing. This is Scotland."* Another commented *"his passion, pride and knowledge were unbelievable. What a lovely, funny hour spent with him. It certainly was emotional and very educational our trip to the Tower of London."*

While the Scottish and English have similar ability to master the language of being the British, some subtle Scottish accents often makes the Scots different from the English. [Indeed, the different accents are clear evidence of the Scottish guides' national pride in Scotland.](#) Many tourists commented that the Scottish accents exaggerate the funny moment and enhance the authentic tourism experience. For example, a tourist visited Edinburgh castle commented on TripAdvisor: *"he was very Scottish. His Scottish accent was thick but understandable and fun to listen to.....However, his accent was so strong that our friends couldn't understand him."* Indeed, all Scottish guides mentioned the importance of keeping their Scottish accent as, *"we are in Scotland not in England"*. However, very strong Scottish accents could potentially lead to limited satisfaction with the tourism experience.

Feeling superior: Scottish and English identity

A nation's uniqueness is often expressed through privileging one's superior position over others (Pretes, 2003; Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2018). This point has been stressed in the theories of humour, [specifically the theory of superiority](#) (Crichtly, 2002). To accentuate the superiority of a nation's identity, a nation often differentiates itself from nations that are perceived as less superior (Smith, 2009). Exaggerated comments towards others are in fact are a strong feature of being British (Easthorpe, 2004). Such culturally based jokes are very commonly applied in those attractions:

Example 1:

Warder: *where do you come from?*

Tourist: *California*

Warder: *Stay at the back! (pause). Welcome back to your home country (tourists laugh). (Tour narratives - Tower of London)*

Example 2:

The queen has 24 knights ... once emperor of China was knighted by the queen. (Tourists smile) (Tour narratives – Windsor castle)

Example 3:

A lot of people do ask why we fire our gun not at 12:00 but 1:00. We just fire one time not 12. Because we are Scottish we are cheap. (Tourists laugh) I not trying to be funny, this is true. You fire this almost every day. Rather than wasting gun power for 12 times, we do one. This is called sensible not cheap, all right. (Tourists smile). (Tour narratives – Edinburgh castle)

Example 4:

I have been working here for 7 years... the land across the water is Ireland, France, Norway, Denmark and USA. (Tourists laugh). Yeah the USA, you know Americans (tourists laugh)... The land across the water is actually attached to us and part of Scotland. (Tour narratives – Edinburgh castle)

Example 5:

King William, the lion of Scotland. England has the Richard the Lionheart We got the whole thing. (Tourists laugh) Welcome the lion. The image of the red lion flag. See the whole lion not just the head. (Tourists laugh) (Tour narratives – Stirling castle)

Example 6:

Warder: *Which country are you from?*

Tourist: *France*

Warder: (cupping his ear) *Sorry*

Tourist: *France*

Warder: *I heard you the first time I am just sorry.*

(Tour narratives - Tower of London)

All of these examples show a confidence in being British, English and Scottish that is co-constructed through a comparison with other nations. Stereotypes and cultural knowledge are used to build the jokes (Cappelli, 2008; Mellinger, 1994). Here the nature of identity determines the nature of humour. The tours in both the Tower of London and Edinburgh castle used America and the country's previous history as a British colony to highlight the superiority of being British (Example 1 and 4). It was also noticed that Australia, New Zealand and France were often the target of superiority jokes due to the historical roots with Britain, especially in the Tower of London tours.

It is noticeable that while the Scottish and the English have a shared history and the cultural knowledge to be able to laugh at others, the Scottish often differentiates their identity from the English (Davis, 2002). National identification and its boundaries are often symbolic in nature (Smith, 2009). While the Scottish and the English draw boundaries between themselves and the USA (example 4), the Scots also consistently differentiate themselves from the English. In Example 5, while Richard the Lionheart was one of the most famous military leaders in England's history, the Scottish guide used metaphors to recast the images into a superior Scottish identity. Here, the English become a significant outgroup and the comparison reinforces the uniqueness of being Scottish (Smith, 1991). It was observed that there is no attempt at either the Tower of London or Windsor castle to mention English-Scottish identity differences. According to Holmes and Hay (1997), minorities (the Scottish) are often sensitive to areas of differences from

the other group in power (the English). This resistance between tourists and the guide exaggerates the differences and enhances the symbolic value of the Scottish castles; it makes the Scottish a superior and distinctive group compared with other groups in the UK.

Additionally, humour is often established around unsaid cultural understandings and values (Cappelli, 2008). While Example 3 did not directly mention the English, its structure as a typical Scottish joke related to self-deprecation or self-mocking (Davis, 2002) gives a subtle representation of the Scots being sensible people compared to the superior and fancy English. In fact, there are no self-mocking jokes about being English in the Tower of London and Windsor castle that displayed such an approach.

While humour stem from the identities of England and Scotland, a taste of British, English and Scottish culture is projected through the delivery of national specific humour. Many tourists viewed these tours positively and praised the humour. The overwhelming data from Trip advisor support this view (93% rate the Tower of London as excellent or very good –over 50,000 responses; 90% rate Windsor castle excellent or very good from 11,000 reviews; for Stirling castle excellent or very good amounted to 94% from 8000 reviews, and for Edinburgh castle 96% were in the two highest rated categories from 44,000 reviews). However, a very small number of tourists also held negative views towards the visit and the jokes. For example, a tourist commented on the tour in the Tower of London, *“it is a total waste of one hour’s time. The guide makes cheap jokes about a variety of subjects, including ridiculing members of his audience”*. Others agreed that such strong jokes are too much. One Australian tourist commented on TripAdvisor, *“the Yeoman Warder had a prickly disposition and a wry sense of humour”*.

Such negative comments, although few, indeed reveal again the superiority of humour in the British tourism context, which shows that official heritage tours need to be carefully planned and consider individuals' differences and appreciation of humour.

Conclusion

The role humour plays in tourism is still a specialist area of study. The current research has extended the current work on humour by linking national identity with humour to understand the broader implications of humour in nationally significant heritage attractions. Specifically, the research addresses the kinds of humour used and the extent to which content relating to and defining Scottish and English identity infuses the humour employed.

Theoretically, while previous studies have focused on how humour influences tourists' experiences (e.g., Pearce 2009), the current study takes a novel step to investigate the broader social-cultural implications of adopting humour by establishing the link between humour and national identity. Specifically, this study acknowledges previous work that views visiting heritage attractions as contributing actively to a sense of nationhood (Park, 2011; Pretes, 2003). In the present case, the researchers found that humour was employed to define and enhance a suite of identities - being Scottish, English and British. The symbolic value of the heritage sites was enlivened through the interactive humorous tours. Glorious British histories come alive through the humour assigned throughout the visits. As a result, humour not only has potential to provide control, comfort and concentration (Pearce, 2009), but also can enhance nation-making.

Taking previous studies' efforts further (Holmes & Hay, 1997; Zhang & Pearce, 2016), the study found that it is the superiority theory of humour that best explains identity construction in heritage settings. Identity-making in heritage settings seems to be an internal project for domestic travellers (e.g., Pretes, 2003; Zhang et al., 2019), however, through acknowledging that the production and consumption of humour requires two way

communication, the study demonstrated how interactive jokes between outsiders (international tourists) and insiders (domestic tourists and guides) collaboratively construct the unique identity of being Scottish and English. Here, the imagining of a nation (Anderson, 1991) is disseminated through jokes at heritage settings.

Also, this is a novel way to think about heritage tourism: belonging to a national group is not exclusively grounded in pride but implicitly expressed through laughing together (Chambers, 2005; Pretes, 2003; Zhang et al., 2015; 2018). Castles, as tourist heritage sites, hold the possibility when interpreted through judicious selection of humour, to become places of sharing, laughing and appreciation. Some caveats must be made about the work. For a few respondents strong jokes can also offend and exaggerate local differences. The study relies on the kinds of humour used in the United Kingdom and other forms of humour and its appreciation in other countries and continents may not work as well for the purposes being explored here. For tourist researchers, exploring how other language groups and other tours of key nationally important sites are enriched or delivered, and the extent to which humour plays a role, represent new tourism study opportunities.

Limitation and future directions

One of the main contributions of this study is its discussion of the linkage between humour and national identity. Hence, only nationally significant heritage sites were included in the analysis. Other studies could look at the social-cultural implications of adopting humour from other heritage attractions. Also, it was implicitly shown that collaborative and interactive humour is essential for enhancing tourists' experience. While this is not the main scope of the research, future studies could certainly look at co-creation theory and its potential contribution to understanding humour in tourism.

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Figures

Figure 1: Free on-site promotional images of the castles (Tower of London, 2016; The Royal Collection Trust, 2016, Historic Scotland, 2017a; Historic Scotland, 2017b).

