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Special Issue

Positioning and Identity in Digital Discourse

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POSITIONING AND IDENTITY IN DIGITAL DISCOURSE
An introduction

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Abstract – The present paper provides a brief introduction to identity, positioning and ideologies in studies on digital discourse and the digital transformation. Following an overview of research on central problems relevant to knowledge communication and knowledge dissemination, the article gives an outline of the individual case studies selected for inclusion in this special issue.

Keywords: digital transformation; ideology; knowledge transfer; point of view; positioning.

1. Introduction

The CLAVIER (Corpus and Language Variation in English Research) centre[1] has been working on corpus approaches to language variation in a discourse perspective for 15 years, organizing series of conferences and seminars intended to provide stimuli and foster debate around specialized discourse. The aim of the CLAVIER 2021 conference, held in November 2021 at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, was to look into a variety of aspects related to *Exploring Words in the Digital Transformation. Tools and Approaches for the study of Lexis and Phraseology in Evolving Discourse Domains*. This special issue gathers a selection of papers presented on that occasion, which investigate identity, positioning and ideologies in digital discourse.

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[1] https://www.fileli.unipi.it/2020/05/09/in-linea-il-nuovo-sito-del-centro-interuniversitario-clavier/ (1.6.2023).

2. Setting the scene: communication, interacting identities and evolving discourse domains in the digital transformation

Digital technologies are transformational: they disrupt and transform our lives, in a fast evolving and ever-changing world. Economic and societal effects are ubiquitous, in so far as "people, firms and governments live, interact, work and produce differently than in the past, and these changes are accelerating rapidly" (OECD 2019, blurb). The impact of the digital transformation has been profound and far-reaching on communication and the transfer of knowledge too. The extended participatory framework of the web (Jenkins *et al*. 2006; Herring *et al*. 2013) has opened the way for new communicative situations and wider impact of the ideological dimension of words, for example in the social media. Online sociality has been changing with the progress from the Web 1.0 and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) to the Web 2.0 and Social Network Communication (SNC) in Social Network Services (SNSs) (Jenkins 2006). Communication on new media – also addressing as a matter of course "audience(s) that are demanding the right to participate within the culture" (Jenkins 2006, p. 24) – goes well beyond the limits of closed communities of experts and traditional expert-layman communication. The digital transformation has stimulated the development of new and evolving discourse domains, and brought in discursive strategies that appear to alter and change accordingly (Bondi, Cacchiani 2021).

As access to knowledge and domain literacy are acknowledged as a public good for all (UNESCO 2005), scholars have a duty to make their research relevant to the society at large, hence reaching out to different audiences and assisting their personal growth, e.g. promoting understanding or encouraging critical thinking. Communicating and disseminating specialized knowledge requires creating and reinforcing common ground, while constructing, presenting and communicating knowledge (Kastberg 2010; Ditlevsen 2011) in texts that effectively adjust to the knowledge background, as well as to the knowledge- and personality-related needs of the intended addressees within the relevant communicative setting.

At a time when knowledge communication and knowledge dissemination are making a significant move from traditional genres to new online communicative formats, using the appropriate discursive strategies for reconceptualizing and reconceptualizing expert knowledge presents an enormous challenge. The multiple aspects and dimensions of this challenge have been the object of research in language studies, epistemology and computer-mediated communication for quite some time now, and, more recently, of media linguistics (Bondi, Cacchiani 2021). For instance, the

extensive literature in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) has made important contributions to the study of both 'domain-internal' (peer-to-peer) communication and domain-external knowledge dissemination, in traditional genres as well as genres remediated for online and new emergent genres, in several domains of expertise (Engberg *et al*. 2018; Bondi, Cacchiani 2021). Popularizing strategies that have received special attention for quite some time are, among others, metadiscourse, definitions, exemplifications and scenarios, repetitions and reformulations, analogy and metaphor, reader/listener engagement, simplification and explicitation (see, e.g. Myers 1989, 2003; Linell 1998; Ciapuscio 2003; Gülich 2003; Calsamiglia, van Dijk 2004, Garzone 2006). A parallel line of investigation has seen an upsurge of research on the multimodal co-construction of meaning through text-meaning interactions (Kress, van Leuween 2006; Unsworth 2008) and on its contribution to knowledge communication and knowledge dissemination, gradually shifting attention from traditional genres to computer mediated communication (e.g. Engberg *et al*. 2018; Bianchi *et al*. 2022).

As the title suggests, the aim of the present issue is to look into the different social practices originating from different settings of knowledge circulation and ultimately into the consequences of the (perceived) empowerment of non-experts and democratization of the Internet.

Generally, in communicative situations where online users can express their opinion freely, knowledge communication may be influenced and hampered by oppositional discourse practices, conspirational thinking, and by practices that contribute to group polarization (Sunstein 2008), confirmation bias (Nickerson 1998) and the search for affiliative relations (Nguyen 2020; Zappavigna 2012).

Key questions behind the construction of communities concern basically identity construction and negotiation, and how this is achieved in human online interaction as well as via channel and medium's affordances (Gibson 1977), in CMC and SNSs. (See Article 2 – Petroni, on the co-deployment of semiotic resources to build and mediate identity and user agency on Facebook and LinkedIn.) Whether we look at individuals or individual communities in their self-representation or we look at how communities are defined by difference in their conflictual relationship with other communities, identity is inextricably interwoven with positioning (Harré, van Langenhove 1991). The link between the two has long been in focus in discourse studies paying attention to the resources for negotiation of social identities and intergroup relations. In digital discourse studies this has created a long-standing focus on the relationship between identity issues and community formation (see for example Garcés-Conejo Blitvich, Bou Franch 2018). When focusing then on lexical choice in digital discourse, the construction of identity is thus inextricably linked with the identification of

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ideologies underlying digital discourse, with a focus on how lexical resources are employed to enact identities, activities, and somehow ideologies.

Although significant inroads are made into multimodal and semiotic aspects of the texts under scrutiny (see e.g. Article 5 – Sezzi; Article 2 – Petroni), the dominant methodological standpoints in the issue are corpus analysis and discourse analysis. This enables contributors to primarily address verbal aspects of positioning and status, credibility and trust (Petitat 2004; Luhmann 2014), as well as the expression of attitude, point of view and ideologies – which ultimately reflects different folk epistemologies (Gerken 2017) and social stereotypes (Lakoff 1987), and specific takes on old and new cultural keywords (Williams 2015/1976).

As will become visible, the complexity of the object requires discussion from a multiplicity of perspectives, in relation to a vast array of domains, discourses and genres. In fact, the relevant communicative settings are diverse and varied, ranging from situations in which experts have to accommodate the features of their intended audiences and construct common communicative ground for mutual understanding (Clark 1996, p. 92), to situations in which shared common ground is taken for granted. For instance, strong knowledge asymmetries impact recourse to knowledge mediation strategies on health educational websites for children (Article 5 – Sezzi); on the other hand, restricted communities like the Marginal Revolution blog (Article 4 – Cacchiani) are open to all readers, and yet, legitimate participation within the community requires discussants to be conversant with state-of-the-art theories and models in economics; or, to take another case study, communication is fully symmetric in interest-based communities on Reddit, where discussion about the activity of visiting abandoned places among members is fostered and encouraged (Article 10 – Cavalieri, Corrizzato, Franceschi).

Additionally, variation in the articles can be observed according to the kind of sensitive issues and cultural keywords (Williams 2015/1976) covered in the articles. Alongside explorations into oppositional discourse in face-to-face and video-mediated interviews about the many challenges faced by national governments in the COVID-19 pandemic (Article 1 – Facchinetti), and conspirational thinking in institutional podcasts about COVID-19 (Article 3 – Maglie, Groicher), health is discussed in institutional communication, in connection with knowledge dissemination about bullying on children educational websites (Article 5 – Sezzi). (In)equality and freedom are the object of debate on US economics blog (Article 4 – Cacchiani), while the webpages of Italian and British LGBTQ+ non-profit organizations concentrate on gender, diversity and inclusion (Article 6 – Zaupa). The multiple dimensions of economic, social and environmental sustainability in online CSRs come under scrutiny in CSR documents published on corporate

websites (Article 7 – Malavasi). Lastly, different aspects and dimensions of sustainability are also addressed through the lens of leisure and pleasure, and of promotional discourse. For instance, by focusing on discursive practices of urban exploration tourists on Reddit, vis-à-vis blogs and relatively more monologic websites (Article 10 – Cavalieri, Corrizzato, Franceschi), and by studying evaluative language on the Slow Art Day official blog (Article 9 – Nocella). Or, moving away from interest-based communities and blogs, by shifting attention to TV/YouTube commercials for environmentally sustainable food (Article 8 – Niceforo), and to wine promotion on Facebook (Article 11 – Bianchi, Manca).

3. The special issue

The proposed special issue unfolds through eleven papers. Altogether, they address our questions about identity, positioning and ideologies from different angles and complementary perspectives. Collectively, they return a cohesive picture of traditional genres remediated for online, emergent genres and new media in the digital transformation.

The opening papers focus more explicitly on the specificity of oppositional discourse and identity construction. The papers that follow explore specific case studies of digital practices that enact different forms of identity management and knowledge mediation in different digital media, positioning themselves in the context of different ideological debates.

Paper 1 – *Oppositional Discourse in the digital transformation. A contrastive analysis between face-to-face and video-mediated interviews in English* – is authored by ROBERTA FACCHINETTI. The interface between Linguistics and Conflict Studies is a relatively new but rapidly growing field of academic attention (see Evans *et al.* 2019, and references there). Indeed, the role played by language in aggression and conflict is now regularly discussed by practitioners and scholars alike in a variety of fields, including public/political debates, the workplace, the classroom/higher education, as well as the family, single communities and in cross-cultural environments.

The paper explores oppositional discourse (OD) with special attention to video-mediated communication in English. First, the author expands on work by Aijmer (2013), Jeffries (2014) and Goodman *et al.* (2017), in order to qualify the various dimensions and linguistic triggers of OD: explicit and implicit negative triggers (e.g. *no*, *not*, or *in place of*); coordinating conjunctions like *but*; contrastive/concessive conjunctions like *while* or *despite*; comparatives (*less ... than*); juxtaposition of personal pronouns (*I/we* vs. *you/they*); modal markers of commitment (e.g. *I think* and *actually*); syntactic frames of binarized opposition (*either X or Y*) or of replacive opposition (*X rather than Y*); and their interaction with 'polarized' words

(e.g. *legal* vs. *illegal*, *migrant* vs. *asylum seeker*) and 'loaded' terms in the lexicon (e.g. *aggression/attack* vs. *strike/military action/operation*).

An exploratory study is then carried out in order to test if and to what extent the digital transformation has contributed to possible changes in oppositional discourse strategies. To this purpose, the *InterDiplo COVID-19 Corpus*, developed at the University of Verona, Italy, is analyzed. The corpus covers face-to-face and video-mediated interviews carried out in English between journalists and diplomats/politicians/science experts from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, and is specifically tagged to concentrate on the question-answer interface between interviewer and interviewee. Non-linguistic and linguistic aspects are investigated using two equal modules of face-to-face and video-mediated interviews on online platforms. The findings point to differences in the actualization of oppositional discourse between the two subsets, thus suggesting that the video-mediated environment does play a role in the way interviews unfold.

It is almost inevitable, when looking into media discourse, to consider the role of technology in shaping identities, roles, knowledge, values and ideology. On these grounds, in Article 2 SANDRA PETRONI addresses the question: *Can interfaces and social profiles 'speak without words'? Social platforms as ideological tools to shape identities and discourses*, focusing on the notion if identity. User agency has been profoundly transformed since all the new digital practices and communicative exchanges are mediated, filtered and re-modelled through digital technologies thanks to the presence of the two potentialities of interactivity and connectivity. Most of the discursive practices represented in social media platforms are focused on processes of self-profiling, with personal profiles similar to "ongoing, collaboratively written, online performances" (Sundén 2003, p. 21). Additionally, pre-packaged identities and meanings are produced by multimodal discursive patterns that are generated by social network technologies. The co-deployment of different semiotic resources is regulated by the platform design, which combines multimodal artefacts uploaded by users with those pre-imposed by the interface architecture. For that matter, the paper shifts attention from the analysis of digital profiles meant as texts created by users, to technology meant as a further semiotic system with complex resources whose meaning potential gives rise to hidden signs (metadata and algorithms) regulated by normative codes. Using examples and profiles from SNSs such as Facebook and LinkedIn, Petroni puts forth a tentative framework for analysing identity construction and impression management in social networking profiles that is grounded in an integrated view of textuality (Djonov, van Leeuwen 2012; Zhao *et al.* 2014; Poulsen *et al.* 2018). Digital meaning is conveyed through texts but also via computational actions that, in turn, are triggered not only by users but also by platform affordances and the

technologies embodied by the interfaces. That is, users are only partially responsible for their identity construction: at the hidden layer, platform designers shape users' interaction; at the surface layer, users consent to the mission stated by social media.

Article 3, authored by ROSITA MAGLIE and MATTHEW GROICHER, turns to sensitive issues as presented on social media. Particularly, the focus is on *COVID-19: Exploring linguistic indicators of conspiratorial thinking in the media. A case study of Coronacast*. Health information is fundamental during an outbreak, but viral speculation can easily bury the limited information we have. This is the situation the world was facing at the end of 2019, notwithstanding the scientific community's progress in understanding the infection, and the concerted effort of the World Health Organization and other organizations to counter the infodemic and conspiracy theories (WHO 2019).

A case in point is *Coronacast*, a podcast aimed at "break[ing] down the latest news and research to help [the Australian public] understand how the world is living through the [COVID-19] pandemic".[2] Despite its aim, the podcast hosts use constructions during their daily episodes (N=475,699; P=March 2020 to March 2021), which – after cluster, collocation and concordance analysis – can be ascribed to the seven traits of CONSPIR tactic (Lewandowsky, Cook 2020). Accordingly, the study deals with questions about Contradictory logic, Overriding suspicion of official explanations, Nefarious intent to endanger people, the presumption of Wrongfulness and Persecution, narratives that are Immune to evidence, reinterpretation of Random events as part of a larger pattern. Two more traits (AC) are concerned with expressing Uncertainty in an Anxious or a Cognitive manner (van Prooijen *et al.* 2020). Using the tools of corpus linguistics, the analysis provides an evidence-based understanding of the powerful impact of the ideological dimension of words being inculcated into Australian society's belief system by emergent institutions such as podcasts. Among the prominent themes are 'suspicion of people from outside Australia' and 'suspicion of the Victorian government' – which demonstrates how nationalism was instrumentalized during the COVID-19 pandemic to increase solidarity among Australian people (see also Wodak 2021; Zhai, Yan 2022).

In Article 4 – *Talking about* freedom. *Figurative tropes on the Marginal Revolution blog* – SILVIA CACCHIANI looks into social engineering and positioning on the *Marginal Revolution* blog[3] (MR: 2012 to present), hosted by economists Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok at the Marginal Revolution University. Qualitative data analysis concentrates on the socio-

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[2] https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/coronacast/ (30.6.2021).
[3] https://marginalrevolution.com (1.7.2023).

pragmatic effects (Colston 2015) of verbal irony and figurative tropes like hyperbole, metaphor and metonymy. Core and active participants are found to make recourse to figurative tropes to control and communicate specialized knowledge, argue their opinions and align or disagree with discussants within the blogging community, while reinforcing credibility and trust (Petitat 2004; Luhmann 2014).

Because the blog is highly integrated into the entrenched ecosystem of the scientific community, the online and offline worlds are strongly intertwined and mutually constructed. Regarding online naming strategies, therefore, bloggers tend to use given name, family name, initials, or diverse combinations thereof for their blogging identities. Descriptive names are used to express participants' quirks and likings, or world views and perspectives that demonstrate alignment with other discussants. Turning to the discourse around the cultural keyword (Williams 2015/1976) *freedom*, verbal irony and related tropes do not appear to be a feature of posts about critical questions in economics. However, they are found in conversation starters that address smaller questions, quirks, and apparently unimportant anecdotes and events of the day, and can readily emerge in the comments, as the thread unfolds. Following from conventions in the offline academic community, MR interactions require credible participants to share opinions and debate issues frankly. This makes downright aggression and politeness inappropriate. On the other hand, facts, models and theories are required to argue one's standpoint, while figurative tropes like verbal irony, hyperbole, metaphor, and metonymy can be used for expressing emotions and enhancing meaning.

Communicating human rights and raising awareness on equal opportunities and key issues in the realms of educational equity, diversity, inclusion and social participation come to the fore in Articles 5, 6 and 7. Article 5 – *Bullying explained to children and teenagers. Knowledge dissemination, interpersonal meaning and participants' roles on educational websites* – is authored by ANNALISA SEZZI. In recent decades, bullying has received increased public and media attention. Whereas the digital transformation has magnified the phenomenon and led to new forms of online harassment (cyberbullying), the Web allows parents, teachers, and children alike to gain access to information and support more easily. With regard to younger audiences, web-based educational hypermedia are an important channel of popularization, and make sensitive topics comprehensible to children and teenagers; diverse forms of edutainment (combining education and entertainment; Buckingham, Scanlon 2004), interactivity, and multimodality are intended to develop awareness in the youth and eventually push them to take action.

In this context, the study concentrates on two institutional health educational websites for children and teenagers (HK: *Health for Kids*;[4] KHH: *Kids Health Hub*),[5] and on the relevant subdirectories on bullying prevention in particular. Using the lens of multimodal and discourse studies, qualitative data analysis is carried out to compare and contrast the knowledge dissemination strategies adopted in order to address a mixed audience (including bullies, victims, witnesses, teachers, and parents). Special attention is devoted to transferring knowledge via recourse to different kinds of explanation (Ciapuscio 2003; Gülich 2003; Calsamiglia, van Dijk 2004), and to the types and kinds of image-text combinations used to engage with the users and convey interpersonal meanings in terms of address, social distance and involvement (Koutsikou *et al*. 2021). Importantly, because HK caters for the needs of young addressees, recourse is made to the second-person pronoun, also in operational definitions, and to text-image combinations that construct adults as supporting caregivers. On the other hand, being addressed to an older audience, KHH provides real-life photographs, and uses the third person in definitions that are precise and objective.

In Article 6, FEDERICO ZAUPA turns to *News press releases in digital environments. A contrastive genre and corpus-based approach to promoting inclusiveness within two LGBT+ organizations*. Generally, press releases as a genre can be seen as a pre-formulation device for news reports (Jacobs 1999). Company press releases in particular have been shown to exhibit a set of standard moves and strategies (McLaren, Gurău 2005), which reveals the underlying tension between informative and promotional goals (Catenaccio 2008). However, the status of the press release as a genre has been questioned due to continuous variation in stage combinations and communicative purposes (Lassen 2006). Digital technologies have also challenged the textual structure and the participation framework of the genre (Catenaccio 2008). In the light of this, the article concentrates on non-profit organizations and examines the language and features of a pilot corpus of online news press releases retrieved from a British LGBT+ charity (*Stonewall*) and its closest Italian counterpart, the Italian LGBT+ organisation *Arcigay*. From a genre perspective, the data suggests recourse to the same (recursive) (non-linear) rhetorical moves: Heading and Subheading, Announcement, Summary, Details Account, Comment, Standpoint, Justification, Call for Action, Statement of Commitment, and Contact details. Overall, they serve informative purposes and, crucially, are primarily promotional and persuasive in nature.

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[4] https://www.healthforkids.co.uk (1.8.2023).
[5] https://kidshealthhub.ca (1.8.2023).

Turning to the discursive representation of LGBT+ communities and people, analysis into the most significant keywords, the collocational patterns of the top-15 lexical keywords in each corpus, their concordances and extended concordances, demonstrates that both Stonewall and Arcigay project themselves as committed, diversified and still cohesive communities. They promote inclusiveness and support LGBT+ people and communities, which are discursively framed as threatened by homo-bi-transphobic violence. Related to this, cultural keywords (Williams 2015/1976) that feature prominently on the Stonewall and Arcigay pages are *intolerance*, *oppression* and *violence*.

Article 7, authored by DONATELLA MALAVASI, concentrates on *The discursive construction of equality, diversity and inclusion. Insights from an analysis of CSR reports in the USA, UK and Japan.* More particularly, the paper explores the linguistic resources adopted in CSR reports to discursively construct and communicate EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) to both internal and external stakeholders (Breeze 2013; Garzone 2014; Hofer-Bonfim *et al.* 2023). Quantitative and qualitative analysis is conducted on a small sample of 2020 disclosures belonging to companies operating in three different sectors: Banking, Pharmaceuticals, Personal & Household Products and Services, and headquartered in three countries: the USA, the UK and Japan.

Frequent words and related phraseology point to recourse to a wide array of standard and rather formulaic constructions that promote EDI in order to project an image of reliable and responsible corporate citizens. Thus, all CSR reports appear to stress corporate efforts to *improve the health of employees/people*, *help/support employees/people*, *support/support for women*, and *engage people/employees*: companies take interest in offering equal opportunities to their *employees* (*our people*), and to *people* in general. The insistence on *safety* and *health* appears to be in line with concerns about the current COVID-19 pandemic. Also, in line with Jonsen *et al.* (2021), whereas all the companies appear indeed to base their EDI communication on inclusion or integration statements, North American firms seem to espouse a greater focus on diversity: they value heterogeneity and differences in organizations and in the outside world. Overall, the co-existence of discourses on equality, diversity and inclusion, moral and ethical considerations, as well as utilitarian arguments, reflect a rather comprehensive approach to EDI that is shared by the US, UK and Japanese companies, but comes to the fore more significantly in the communication of US companies.

Going green, environmental concerns and sustainability are the cultural keywords (Williams 2015/1976) behind Article 8 – *Eco-friendly language, sustainability claims, and power relations in green advertising discourse –*

authored by MARIA NICEFORO. Research in the article is grounded on the assumption that, as the global quest for sustainability and environmental commitment becomes more and more urgent, many consumers are now opting for products and brands aligned with their values (Mintel 2021). Indeed, in a survey conducted by the European Commission, 56% of average European consumers declared that "environmental concerns influenced their purchasing decisions" (EC 2021). Consequently, companies are now revising their marketing and advertising strategies in order to focus on eco-friendly claims, thus reversing the traditional image of passive consumers manipulated by advertisers (Wilke *et al.* 2021).

In this context, the article investigates eco-friendly discourse and sustainability claims in a dataset of Italian food and drinks television commercials by Italian business entities and multinational corporations. The study considers 15 commercials recently aired in Italy for a qualitative manual analysis of textual and language features, in line with traditional CDA methods (Huckin 1997): critical evaluation of environmental claims through a framework for greenwashing detection (Carlson *et al.* 1993) is also included. More particularly, key to the analysis is the ability to investigate the pairing of linguistic Claim or Explicit Message Evaluation with the analytical categories of Insinuation (how explicitly claims/messages are suggested), Foregrounding (how prominently claims/messages are presented), and Connotation (how positively/negatively claims/messages are constructed). While attention is placed on critical aspects such as power relations between businesses and consumers, the data suggests that people's health, sustainable practices in fishing, farming and cultivating, and packaging design, disposal and recycling, are systematically exploited in advertising to provide evidence of companies' commitment to sustainability, and to please conscious consumers asking for more responsible production.

Moving on to leisure and pleasure, the emergent interest in cultural heritage and sustainable tourism are the object of Articles 9 and 10. In Article 9 JESSICA JANE NOCELLA deals with *New concepts and meanings of* slow, *The case of Slow Art*. The study explores new meanings and values of the word *slow* in the context of *Slow Art Day*, a global event that takes place once a year and whose aim is to encourage both visitors and museum curators to engage with art in new and different ways. The concept of slowness is becoming a relevant and ethical topic that is often related to what is organic, local and sustainable. While the notion and impact of slowness have been studied in different areas such as food (Petrini 2003), media (Rauch 2011), medicine (Wear *et al.* 2015) and education (O' Neill 2014), museums are yet to be investigated in depth. Through the lenses of Appraisal Theory (Martin, White 2005) and corpus linguistics, the chapter provides a short-term diachronic study of the language of evaluation adopted in the *Slow Art Day*

official blog (SAD),[6] which keeps a record of the reports of the museums that take part in the yearly event. By combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the study focuses on how appraisal is used to enhance and promote the new and different semantic dimensions related to slowness and SAD events and activities: Education, empowerment and learning; Inclusiveness, also accessibility and co-working; Innovation and originality; Time to engage with art; Value of (not-for-profit) Art; Wellbeing and positive effects on SAD participants. The findings reveal that slowness is no longer related to the semantic dimension of Time, but also to those of Wellbeing and Inclusiveness, while a close study of evaluative language demonstrates that these dimensions are interconnected to one another.

The special emphasis on sustainability and "good art" is also a feature of the new form of tourism known as Urban Exploration (*Urbex*), which involves discovering TOAD places (Paiva 2008: Temporary, Obsolete, Abandoned and Derelict Places) and reporting the exploration with documentary evidence on specialized websites and blogs. This is the object of Article 10 – *On the verge between Ancient and Modern Times. A linguistic analysis of Urban Exploration practices* – co-authored by SILVIA CAVALIERI, SARA CORRIZZATO and VALERIA FRANCESCHI. The paper concentrates on online discourse on Urbex (Klausen 2017; Wadbled 2020) by analysing how urban exploration is talked about in two different online spaces, i.e. interest-based communities where discussion about the activity of visiting abandoned places among members is fostered and encouraged (Reddit), and more public, monologic spaces, such as blogs and websites, where longer texts are produced with a more descriptive/commercial purpose. To this purpose, a comparative analysis of keywords and selected key terms was carried out on two ad-hoc corpora, i.e. the *Urban Website Corpus* (UW) and the *Urban Reddit Corpus* (UR).

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis reveals the existence of a tension between the core tenets and ethical principles of urban exploration in the redditor corpus and the shift towards a more mainstream type of activity in the UW-Corpus. Crucially, the UW-Corpus appears to reflect a relatively more traditional idea of tourism. Here, the identity of the 'explorer' appears to be something temporary, to impersonate for the duration of the tourist activity, which is sometimes carried out in special organized tours that may be booked directly from the websites. On the other hand, the Reddit community shows a distinctive use of language, which signals in-group membership. This includes, among others, recourse to zero derivation for the noun *explore*, which describes the specific sets of practices related to the

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[6] https://www.slowartday.com (31.12.2020).

urban exploration of "sites of haunted memory, seeking interaction with the ghosts of lives lived" (Garrett 2011, p. 1049).

The "slow" question can be also addressed from another perspective. Slow Food is synonymous with (bio-)diversity, authenticity and culinary heritage, organic and healthy food, local and seasonal produce, as well as increased attention to the economic realities of food system sustainability and fairtrade (Sloan *et al.* 2015). Yet, the 'local' struggles have given way to international communities (e.g. the Slow Food Movement), while the globalization of foods and the development of connosseurship of local wines and cuisine outside their territory is a fact. In the light of this, FRANCESCA BIANCHI and ELENA MANCA conclude our reflection on the language of leisure and pleasure by reflecting on wine discourse in Article 11 – *Wine promotion on Facebook. A linguistic comparison of posts by producers from English-speaking countries*. Their research starts on the assumption that Facebook can be considered one of the main social marketing tools used by companies who decide to advertise their products online and who aim to keep in touch with customers rapidly and effectively. Social media in general and Facebook in particular are characterized by a high level of interactivity and visual, textual and linguistic features are strategically used to attract and involve potential customers and to get their feedback, thus enhancing the company's visibility on the market as well as the company's knowledge of the market.

The paper, therefore, analyses the language used to advertise wine and wine events through Facebook posts by producers from New Zealand, South Africa and the UK. In particular, the study applies to this set of data the same analytical methods used by Manca (2021) in her analysis on the interactive and interactional strategies employed by Australian and US wine companies to advertise their products and activities on Facebook, and also some of the analytical methods used by Bianchi (2017a, 2017b) in her studies on Facebook posts written by travel agencies to advertise their destinations. Besides describing the metadiscursive features which are mostly used on Facebook by wineries (Hyland 2005), the paper establishes that forms of interaction and the positioning of the writers depend on the medium (as one would expect), and, more significantly, on the market sector. On the contrary, the role of culture appears very limited, if not entirely absent.

4. Conclusions

Taken together, the contributions to the present issue provide ample exemplification of the type of research that is currently carried out in language studies on identity, positioning and ideologies in evolving domains and digital environments. Attention is paid to how the digital dimension adds

to face-to-face interaction, how it influences traditionally written formats or gives birth to different types of discourses by offering new media and new genres. Studies centre on how lexical choice is influenced by the new contexts and how digital debate around key ideological issues is reflected in and through words. Discourse analysis, genre analysis, multimodal approaches all contribute to the exploration of lexis and its variation according to the different contexts of use. The variety of genres and discourses discussed, the multiplicity of angles and perspective taken, and the wide array of domains covered are therefore intended to make a substantial contribution to sharpening existing knowledge and stimulating the ongoing debate among scholars in the fields of Knowledge Communication, Genre and Discourse Studies.

Bionotes: Marina Bondi is Professor of English Language at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy, where she is currently coordinator of the PhD programme in Humanities. She works on various aspects of discourse analysis and EAP, with particular reference to the argumentative features of academic discourse and to the role of metadiscourse and evaluative language. Part of her current research concentrates on knowledge dissemination in traditional genres and new genres for online. Her approach combines corpus linguistics and dialogic approaches to the analysis of language in social interaction. She has published widely on these topics and has acted as a referee for a substantial number of international scholarly journals. She is also a member of the editorial board of *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* and of the book series *Studies in Corpus Linguistics.*
Silvia Cacchiani holds a PhD in English Language and Linguistics from the University of Pisa, Italy. Since September 2019, she has been Professor of English Language at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy. She has carried out extensive research on the lexico-semantic and discourse-pragmatic aspects of evaluative language and intensifying devices in particular. Her publications are in the areas of morphology and lexical semantics, specialized lexicography and LSP (both ESP and EAP). A good part of her current research activities is devoted to fleshing out key aspects of specialized knowledge communication and knowledge dissemination in a digital world. Among her publications is the volume *Popularization and Knowledge Mediation in the Law* (2018), co-edited with Jan Engberg, Karin Luttermann and Chiara Preite. She has also co-edited with Marina Bondi a special issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (2021), on *Knowledge Communication and Knowledge Dissemination in a Digital World.*

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OPPOSITIONAL DISCOURSE
IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
A Contrastive Analysis between Face-to-Face
and Video-Mediated Interviews in English

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Abstract – This paper explores Oppositional Discourse (OD) with special attention to video-mediated communication in English. I will first qualify the various dimensions of OD as well as its linguistic triggers. Then, I will carry out an exploratory study to test if and to what extent the digital transformation has contributed to possible changes in OD strategies; to do so, a subset of the *InterDiplo Covid-19 Corpus*, developed at the University of Verona, Italy, will be analyzed. The Corpus covers face-to-face and video-mediated interviews carried out in English between journalists and diplomats/politicians/science experts from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, and is specifically tagged to concentrate on the question-answer interface between interviewer and interviewee. The subcorpus taken into consideration for the present study covers two equal sets of face-to-face and video-mediated interviews to compare non-linguistic and linguistic aspects. The data yielded by this pilot analysis point to differences in the actualization of OD between the two subsets, thus suggesting that the video-mediated environment does play a role in the way interviews unfold.

Keywords: broadcast interviews; journalism; language of diplomats; Oppositional Discourse; video-mediated communication

For language is the armoury of the human mind;
and at once contains the trophies of its past,
and the weapons of its future conquests.
(S.T. Coleridge "Biographia Literaria", 1817, Chapter XVI)

For language is framed to convey not the object alone
but likewise the character, mood and intentions
of the person who is representing it.
(S.T. Coleridge "Biographia Literaria", 1817, Chapter XXII).

1. Introduction

The second half of the 20th century has witnessed the thriving of theoretical studies on conflict, with reference to its triggering (Wright *et al.* 1998), management (Smith 1997; Zartman 1995), and resolution (Carnevale, Pruitt

1992; Raiffa 1985) particularly in the working and international environments. Such theoretical research has been paralleled on the applied level by an increasing number of training courses on the management of conflict in economic, legal and political settings, drawing particularly on sociology and psychology (Lewicki 1975; Lewicki *et al.* 1992) and with a clear focus on behavioural and ethnographic perspectives.

The key role of language in conflicting situations has been partly neglected until relatively recently; indeed, it is over the last 30 years that communication as "the essence of all forms of conflict" (Pearce, Littlejohn 1997, p. x) has garnered increasing attention and scholars have moved from the study of opposition 'in discourse' to Oppositional Discourse (OD). Research has been published on aggressive communication in adults/children disputes in the street, at school, and at home (Grimshaw 1990), in healthcare and sports environments (Rancer, Avtgis 2014), in the legal and political arena (Bull, Simon-Venderberger 2019), in mass violence (Dedaic, Nelson 2003) and from the intercultural perspective (Cohen 2001; Chiluwa 2021a, 2021b; Footitt, Kelly 2012). Handbooks (Culpeper *et al.* 2017; Evans *et al.* 2019; Kelly *et al.* 2019) and journals (*JLAC – Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 2013 -) have been published along with book series (*PSLW – Palgrave Studies in Languages at War* 2012 -) tackling foreign languages, translation, interpreting and regional language policies in war contexts. OD has now become such a prominent concern that international associations focussing on communication have developed their own 'Peace and Conflict' divisions (e.g. the *American National Communication Association* and the *International Communication Association*), sharing theoretical and applied studies on the topic.

The blooming of research on OD has partly coincided with the digital transformation that has taken the scene at global level particularly over the last 30 years and has permeated all paths and avenues of our social and personal lives. Internet may have played a role in bringing conflict increasingly within earshot and eyesight of each and every one of us, due to the growing accessibility of information from the general public at a global level, with mass communication consequently becoming a pervasive asset of digital media platforms and devices (Hafner 2021, p. 281). Hence, the online environment has turned into the soundbox of global events and cultural phenomena as well as of personal, interpersonal, inter-/intragroup and international conflicts, wars and violence. It is no surprise, then, as pointed out by Chiluwa (2021b, p. 1) that "interest in the broad subject of conflict studies by linguists and language scholars has increased over the years with the growing incidence of conflicts, wars and political violence around the world".

OD has become so frequent online that since 2016 the EU has adopted

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a specific Code of Conduct to prevent and counter the spread of illegal hate speech online; the code was agreed by the most prominent online platforms and social media companies, including Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter (now X) and YouTube in 2016; between 2018 and 2022 Instagram, Snapchat, Dailymotion, Jeuxvideo.com, TikTok, Rakuten Viber and Twitch agreed to it as well. The European Council has also published a manual to combat hate speech online (Keen, Georgescu 2016), while the UN has issued the *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech* (UN 2019), acknowledging that "over the past 75 years, hate speech has been a precursor to atrocity crimes, including genocide, from Rwanda to Bosnia to Cambodia."

Amid this growing interest in online OD, little attention has so far been dedicated to the possible differences between video-mediated and face-to-face polarized speech; more specifically, to my knowledge, no study has analyzed the impact of video platforms on the actualization of question/answer interface in conflicting dialogues. To bridge this gap, the present paper will attempt a preliminary study to check whether face-to-face and video-mediated interviews exhibit differences ascribable to the environment where they take place. To do so, in the following sections I will first delve into the different ways in which language impinges on conflicting situations, paying special attention to the increasing role of digital platforms. Then, I will analyze a corpus of interviews carried out in English between journalists and diplomats/international experts from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, concentrating on the question-answer interface between interviewer and interviewee, and I will finally compare them on the basis of the video-mediated/face-to-face environment in which they take place.[1]

2. Opposition(al) Discourse

The unwinding of discourse in conflicting situations is generally subsumed under the labels 'Opposition(al) Discourse', 'Conflict Talk', 'Polarized Speech', and 'Adversarial Talk', and is prototypically viewed within the spoken medium, although it may actualize in writing as well.[2] For the purpose of the present paper, I will refer to Oppositional Discourse (OD) as

[2] Most notably, political and religious propaganda magazines are a typical example of dichotomous/aggressive language (Patterson 2022), but academic writing may also exhibit (covert) forms of criticism that can be traced back to OD, although scientists favour hedging strategies to safeguard the free flow of information (Salager-Meyer 2000, p. 24).

to the naturally occurring use of language to induce change or doubt in an opposing party via single or multiple speech acts (e.g. questions, assertions, threats, promises). Huspek (2006, p. 1) remarks that OD

> presupposes active opposition between agents, conducted by discursive means, and waged within a public setting. (…) With oppositional discourse we are presented with dominant and subordinate groups, to be sure, but they are in public opposition that consists of openly asserted propositions, questions, counters, and other forms of discursive confrontation and presentation.

While endorsing Huspek's remarks on "active opposition" through "discoursive confrontation", the reference to "dominant" and "subordinate" groups may be debatable, since roles may be inverted within the flow of the same stretch of speech; moreover, particular norms apply and issues of accountability arise depending on the environment (e.g. the workplace). Similarly, the notion of "public setting" would require further contextualization to avoid unnecessary restrictions, considering the variety of contexts in which OD can take place: interpersonal, inter-/intragroup and international. To provide a clearer view of OD, Section 2.1 will illustrate the main dimensions of actualization of discourse, bearing in mind confrontational aspects.

2.1. Dimensions of (Oppositional) Discourse

In the actualization of discourse and, consequently, of OD, a number of co-existing variables intervene that can be subsumed under the overarching categories of 'setting', 'channel', 'domain' and 'genre'. Bearing in mind that in actual life there are more overlapping similarities than clear-cut distinctions, we can broadly characterize the setting according to the following dyads:

• Physical/Virtual: by physical we mean, for example, houses, institutional buildings, TV studios, and streets, as opposed to the virtual environment, which may be video-mediated or not; yet a caveat is needed with reference to the Metaverse, where the life settings that are traditionally considered 'physical' are paralleled online in such a way that it would be too simplistic to qualify them merely as 'virtual';

• Private/Public: individuals interacting among themselves without a significant audience or in a public arena, at local, national or international level;

• Family/Workplace;

• Audience/Lack of Audience, whereby numbers and identity of the audience may be known or unknown, thus adding a further variable to OD;

• Mediated/Unmediated, the mediator being a third party who is expected to

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be neutral in relation to the cause of the conflict.

The channel may be either verbal or non-verbal, whereby non-verbal may refer to clothing, gestures, body posture, facial expression and – more generally – display of physical presence. Yet, in spoken contexts, discourse is hardly ever exclusively either verbal or non-verbal, since it unfolds via co-occurring and co-dependent channels that make it inherently multivocal.

Discourse can occur in a variety of domains, from journalism to politics, from business to law, from medicine to biotechnology, and from education to advertising, to name the most typical ones. In turn, each domain is organized into sub-domains which can hardly be disentangled as separate hemispheres but should be viewed as a set of interconnected units and sub-units. So, for example, the political section of a news outlet cannot be separated either from the language of politics or from the broad field of journalism, not to mention the user-generated content of unmediated journalism which is given voice in the vlog/blog discussions hosted by mainstream media.

Finally, with reference to genre, of the traditional four broad categories that we may encounter in discourse in terms of its aims – descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative, which can in turn cover many more subtypes, like (factual) report, explanation, analytical/hortatory exposition, and direction – OD in particular can be actualized in a discussion (be it formal or informal), a negotiation (recorded/unrecorded), a meeting (scheduled/unscheduled) or an interview.

2.2. Linguistic triggers of opposition

Scholars have identified a set of linguistic features that notably spark opposition in conversational discourse. In the present overview, I will subsume all of them under the overarching label of 'linguistic triggers' of OD, without diversifying between lexical, grammatical or pragmatic ones. Indeed, in a number of cases, a syntactic trigger may function as a semantic trigger as well; this is the case, for example, of *and* in such contexts as "I find this difficult, and then again easy" (Jeffries 2014, p. 44), in so far as it co-occurs and co-works with the contrastive lexemes *difficult/easy*, "thus signalling an ongoing metalinguistic activity in the speaker's mind" (Aijmer 2013, p. 4). The most common linguistic triggers are:

- Negation, covering both explicit (*no*, *not*) and implicit negative triggers (e.g. *instead*, *in place of*);
- Coordinating conjunctions, most notably *but*, *(n)or* and *yet*;
- Contrastive/concessive conjunctions like *while*, *despite*, *although*;
- Comparatives: *less… than*, *more… than*;

- Juxtaposition of personal pronouns: *I/we* vs. *you/they*;
- Modal markers of commitment, such as *I think*, *I suppose*, *possibly*, *may*, *actually*, *certainly* and *obviously*;
- Syntactic frames of binarized opposition (*either X or Y)* or of replacive opposition (*X rather than Y*).

In turn, lexicon may trigger OD when it is 'polarized', that is when it expresses adversarial stance, creating binary opposition through naming choices, like *legal* vs. *illegal*, *genuine* vs. *non-genuine* and *right* vs. *wrong*. Applied to separate group categories – like natives vs. strangers – this practice leads to group divisions, with one of the two dismissed as undeserving. So, for example, referring to *migrants/boat people* rather than to *refugees* leads to the understanding that the people are denied a label that denotes their legal status (Goodman *et al*. 2017).

Some terms may be more 'loaded' than others with conflictual strength; by way of example, *aggression/attack* is more 'loaded' than *strike/military action/operation*; the same goes for *the killing of civilians* vs. *collateral damage*, *the inadvertent killing of soldiers by allies* vs. *friendly fire*, and finally *torture* vs. *enhanced interrogation techniques*. Indeed, lexical items may possess more than one meaning or have a hidden connotation, which may actually change over time and depend on circumstances. Hence "it is necessary to examine the meaning of a word or expression in the context of the conflict, where it may be loaded with different associations and meanings depending on whom you ask" (IPI 2013, p. 4).

Overall, a caveat is necessary when dealing with the linguistic triggers mentioned above. None of them, not even the virtually unmistakable particle *no*, is inherently oppositional, none of them is exclusively responsible for the activation of OD; indeed, the significance of the outcome of OD depends on the interplay between content, context, and interlocutors who, with their communicative actions and reactions, may at times need some inferencing effort (Jeffries 2014) – and this is actually part of the game, since language may camouflage more than it reveals.

Hence, the discourse strategies exploited by interlocutors also play a role in the actualization of OD. Some of these techniques are clearly identifiable; this is the case, for example, of 'evasion', where the interlocutor refuses to speculate (*let me stop you*), and of 'hesitation', where pauses, repairs, and restarts, as well as the words *well*, *but*, *I mean…* in turn-taking, signal lack of willingness to agree. Other techniques may convey more than one pragmatic effect, like 'subjectivization', whereby first-person pronouns are followed by verbs of cognition/upgraders/lexical expressions (*I think*, *in my experience*, *to our knowledge…*), that may either show the locutor's personal opinion and direct involvement or, in contrast, question what the addressee has just uttered. Similarly, the rhetorical strategy of

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'indetermination', which relies for example on *if*-clauses and approximators to convey uncertainty, points to OD when patterns of second type conditional are exploited like *if what you say were right, we would…*, thus indicating unreal situations. In turn, with embedded 'presuppositions', utterances are organized in such a way as to include words or phrases that presuppose and give for granted the speaker's assumptions. This practice is frequently actualized by means of negative-interrogative questions and verbal patterns like the following:

- *(why) do/did/don't/didn't you + realize, acknowledge, remember, forget, regret, know*;
- *are/aren't/were/weren't you + aware, sorry, proud, glad, sad of ….*

Finally, all of the above largely co-occur with paralinguistic devices (such as pitch, intensity and duration) which together determine the prosody of speech and are of paramount importance in conveying the intensity of conflictual intention in turn-taking.

2.3. Focus on Online OD

When it comes to the online environment, social media have been addressed by scholars from different perspectives as the setting that most breeds extreme speech; flaming, trolling, and slurs (Anderson, Lepore 2013; Berghel, Berleant 2018; Hardaker 2017), particularly when applied to minorities (Polak, Trottier 2020), embody and shape stereotypes of the targeted group and contribute to deepening divisions, as well as spreading, reinforcing, and re-contextualizing populist discourses.

Aggressive discourse has been largely identified in microblogging sites like Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and LinkedIn, as well as the Chinese Weibo. A recent analysis of posts on Weibo carried out by Ho (2021) has showcased ample use of metaphors to express the users' anger, distrust, and hatred towards those who left their houses during lockdown. Escapees were even dehumanized through animal metaphors to highlight their irresponsibility and call for their punishment.

The language of online gaming has also been put under the lens as a form of digital conflict; Graham (2019) in particular has studied a corpus of interactions on an online platform that broadcasts streamers as they play video games and simultaneously interact with their viewers. Messages of obscenity and swearing, as well as aggressive commands have been noticed to be ritualized to create community; indeed, while playing the game, streamers use aggressive language as a strategic tactic, to agitate the opponent and thus gain a competitive advantage and win.

Corpora have been compiled to detect and fight online hate speech; this is the case of the *Italian Twitter Corpus of Hate Speech against Immigrants*

(Sanguinetti *et al.* 2018) and of the *Dataset of Counter Narratives to Fight Online Hate Speech*, covering 5000 hate speech/counter narrative pairs, each annotated with the corresponding hate target (D'Errico *et al.* 2015; Fanton *et al.* 2021).

Since the outburst of the Covid-19 Pandemic, cloud platforms for video and audio communication services like Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams, where two or more interlocutors talk and discuss in a video-mediated setting, have flourished and fully substituted, at least temporarily, face-to-face interactions. Indeed, during lockdowns, world communication has largely passed through these channels, including OD, which appears to have increased even more, abetted by the unprecedented situational constraints (Hsu, Tsai 2022; Pascual-Ferra´ *et al.* 2021; Ye *et al.* 2021).

In his study published immediately before the outbreak of Covid-19, Graham (2019, p. 311) has posited that overall "digitally mediated interactions are not as different from f-t-f interactions as was once thought". When it comes to video-mediated OD, however, to my knowledge, no study appears to have been carried out so far to check if and to what extent the use of video platforms may affect the unfolding of dialogical discourse in conflicting situations. More precisely, does the 'mediation' of the screen make any difference in online interactions where confrontation is enacted? Is the language of interviews, particularly with reference to question/answer turn-taking, somehow affected by the mediation of the video? To address this issue, I have carried out an exploratory pilot study of video-mediated and face-to-face interviews recorded during the first year of the Covid-19 Pandemic, as illustrated in Section 3.

3. A pilot study

The *InterDiplo Corpus* has been developed at the University of Verona, Italy, to capture how the English language is used in broadcast interviews and discussions involving professional journalists and international/public figures, and how far the discursive strategies of interlocutors may be prompted by the respective lingua-cultural backgrounds, particularly when diplomats, politicians and science experts are interviewed. At the time of writing this paper (2022) the *Interdiplo Covid-19* section has been completed. This portion covers 80 interviews on the spread and the political/social/economic consequences of Covid-19; the interviews were recorded between February 2020 and February 2021, at a time when the whole world was virtually in complete lock-down and conversational dialogue could be carried out almost exclusively online via cloud platforms for video and audio communication. The interviews are grouped into four equal chunks of 20 recordings each, depending on the English-language

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nativeness or non-nativeness[3] of the participants, so that we could have an equal number of both native and non-native speakers of English interviewing and being interviewed, as follows:
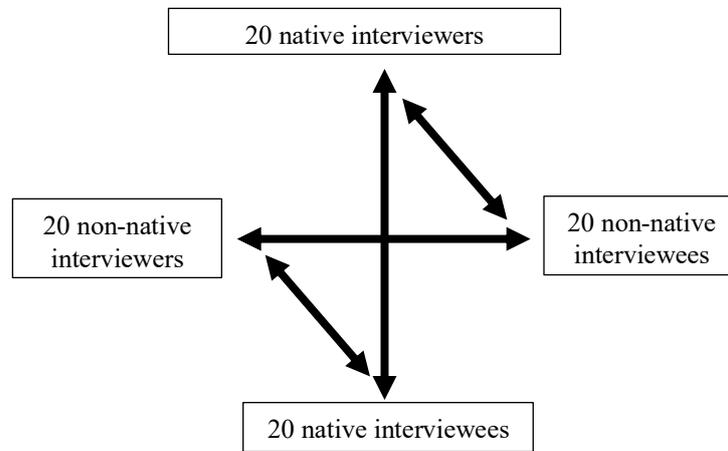
Figure 1
Structure of the InterDiplo Covid-19 Corpus.

Each interview has been saved, transcribed, converted into in XML and tagged for metadata, parts of speech and paralinguistic features (e.g. pauses, repairs, restarts, hesitations), as well as for discursive aspects such as question and answer types.[4] In particular, questions have been categorized as 'open' (leaving the interviewees free to express themselves), 'closed' (expecting a 'yes/no' answer), 'choice' (offering two options), and 'requests' (direct/indirect interrogatives and imperatives, as in *I wonder if you could talk about…, can you tell us, talk us through…*"). Following the same criterion, answers provided in reply to the different types of questions have been classified as 'open', 'closed', and 'choice'.[5]

For the scope of the present study on OD, I selected 20 interviews of an average length of 15-20 minutes each, subdivided into two subsets of an equal number of video-mediated and face-to face interviews, so as to allow comparison between the two subsets, for a total of ~40,000 tokens. Table 1 shows the subcorpus under scrutiny and provides an indication of the setting (video-mediated/face-to-face) of the interviews, the media outlet of each journalist, as well as the nationality, gender and job of each interactant.

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[3] For the concept of Nativeness/Non-nativeness in English of the speakers, we have relied on their nationality.

[4] A detailed description of the different phases of the InterDiplo Corpus compilation, with specific reference to the choice of data and annotation criteria, can be found in Cavalieri *et al.* (2022).

[5] The corpus has been tagged in such a way as to clearly match each question with its related answer.

SETTING	MEDIA OUTLET	INTERVIEWER		INTERVIEWEE		
		NATIONALITY	GENDER	NATIONALITY	GENDER	INTERVIEWEE'S JOB/ROLE
FACE-TO-FACE	1. CBS	USA	F	China	M	Diplomat - Ambassador to the US
	2. BBC	UK	M	Italy	M	Diplomat - Ambassador to the UK
	3. CBNC	Singapore	M + M	Singapore + India (2 interviewers)	M	Politician - Minister of Foreign Affairs
	4. CHANNEL NEWS ASIA	Thailand	F	Thailand	M	Politician - Minister of Public Health
	5. RTHK	UK	M	Hungary	M	Politician - Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade
	6. CGTN	China	F	USA	F	Epidemiologist
	7. CGTN	China	F	China	F	Virologist and immunologist
	8. BBC	UK	F	UK	M	Politician - Prime Minister
	9. ITV	UK	F + M (2 interviewers)	UK	M	Politician - Prime Minister
	10. FOX NEWS	USA	M	USA	M	Politician - former President
VIDEO-MEDIATED	11. GZERO	USA	M	China	M	Diplomat - Ambassador to US
	12. BBC	UK	M	China	M	Diplomat - Ambassador to UK
	13. EURONEWS	UK	F	Spain	M	Politician – EU Foreign Policy Chief
	14. BBC	UK	M	UK	M	Science expert - WHO Special Envoy for COVID-19
	15. BBC	UK	M	Sweden	M	Epidemiologist
	16. BBC	UK	M	France	F	Economist
	17. BBC	UK	M	Holland	M	Writer/historian
	18. BBC	UK	M	India	M	Politician - General Secretary of the ruling party
	19. DW	UK	M	UK	M	Politician
	20. DW	UK	M	China	M	Diplomat - Government Advisor

Table 1
InterDiplo Covid-19 subcorpus.

It is no intention of this pilot study to draw conclusions on possible relations between nationality and gender of the interlocutors on the one hand and

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incidence of OD on the other, since more data are necessary to reach convincing results. Yet considering that, when compiling the whole InterDiplo Covid-19 Corpus, an attempt was made to trace all interviews available online on the topic during the time under scrutiny, a couple of preliminary observations can be offered. In the first place, this subset – selected on account of its incidence of OD traits compared to the rest of the corpus – may point to a higher exploitation of OD features in native speakers of English among journalists. Secondly, male speakers overwhelmingly exceed female speakers both among interviewers and among interviewees, with females accounting for 35% of interviewing journalists and only 15% of the interviewees; this gap partly mirrors the data recorded in the whole Covid-19 Corpus, where female speakers amount to 44% of the interviewing journalists and 16% of the interviewees. Indeed, overall, it has been difficult to trace broadcast interviews with female science experts and politicians at the international level, not to mention diplomats, which reflects the extant professional gap between men and women in certain professions.

To detect possible differences between the video-mediated interviews and the face-to-face ones, the data have been scrutinized with reference both to verbal and to non-verbal behaviour, thus including display of physical presence, gestures and facial expressions, as illustrated in Section 3.1.

3.1. Non-verbal behaviour

In video-mediated interviews a neat difference has been observed between journalists speaking from their studio and those interacting from a different environment, presumably their homes; specifically, when in their studio, they are portrayed half length, with their hands and part of the desk clearly visible; this allows noticing that their gestures frequently accompany their questions as an integral part of their dialogical turn; in contrast, when speaking from a different location, they appear almost exclusively with close-ups on face and shoulders, making it almost impossible to monitor the movements of their hands.

The same goes for interviewees, who are never portrayed half bust and their hands are hardly ever visible. Moreover, even when they counter-react to challenging questions, they appear to convey few facial expressions; indeed, they sometimes even turn their faces away from the camera. This shared attitude of interviewers and particularly of interviewees of not disclosing their body reactions leaves the 'burden' of conveying OD almost exclusively to verbal language.

In contrast, in face-to-face interviews, portraying all interactants in the broadcast studio, hand gestures and facial mimic appear to be evident and the eyes are most frequently turned to the interlocutors; thus non-verbal behaviour accompanies and complements the verbal interaction.

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This first finding would lead us to suggest that in professional interviews involving OD, when carried out in a video-mediated setting, verbal language is almost exclusively responsible for expressing opposition, while eye-, face-, and hand-movements are somehow screened by the video, making the whole interaction somewhat apparently more impersonal or neutral from the non-verbal point of view.

3.2. Verbal behaviour: questions and answers

Tables 2.1 to 2.4 provide the raw numbers (including the percentages of the totals) of the questions and answers recorded in each interview of the subcorpus with reference to their typology ('open', 'closed', 'requests' and 'choice').

QUESTIONS	OPEN	CLOSED	REQUEST	CHOICE	TOTAL
Text 1	4	12	0	5	21
Text 2	4	11	2	0	17
Text 3	11	18	0	0	29
Text 4	8	14	1	0	23
Text 5	9	8	0	1	18
Text 6	9	9	0	0	18
Text 7	6	14	0	0	20
Text 8	12	12	0	0	24
Text 9	4	37	0	0	41
Text 10	5	32	0	0	37
TOTAL	72 (29%)	167 (67.3%)	3 (1.2%)	6 (2.4%)	248 (100%)

Table 2.1
Video-mediated interviews: Questions (raw numbers and % in totals).

ANSWERS	OPEN	CLOSED	CHOICE	TOTAL
Text 1	13	2	0	15
Text 2	8	6	0	14
Text 3	21	3	0	24
Text 4	14	3	0	17
Text 5	8	5	0	13
Text 6	11	3	0	14
Text 7	5	10	0	15
Text 8	15	4	0	19
Text 9	22	3	0	25
Text 10	16	10	0	26
TOTAL	133 (73%)	49 (26.9%)	0 (0%)	182 (100%)

Table 2.2
Video-mediated interviews: Answers (raw numbers and % in totals).

QUESTIONS	OPEN	CLOSED	REQUEST	CHOICE	TOTAL
Text 11	7	6	0	0	13
Text 12	12	9	0	0	21
Text 13	11	20	0	0	31
Text 14	12	6	0	0	18

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Text 15	17	13	0	0	30
Text 16	14	22	0	1	37
Text 17	17	1	0	0	18
Text 18	5	12	0	0	17
Text 19	11	30	0	0	41
Text 20	26	77	0	0	103
TOTAL	132 (40.1%)	196 (59.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	329 (100%)

Table 2.3
Face-to-face interviews: Questions (raw numbers and % in totals).

ANSWERS	OPEN	CLOSED	CHOICE	TOTAL
Text 11	9	3	0	12
Text 12	17	3	0	20
Text 13	15	5	0	20
Text 14	15	4	0	19
Text 15	14	7	0	21
Text 16	13	6	0	19
Text 17	9	2	0	11
Text 18	10	3	0	13
Text 19	15	12	0	27
Text 20	55	23	0	78
TOTAL	172 (71.7%)	68 (28.3%)	0 (0%)	240 (100%)

Table 2.4
Face-to-face interviews: Answers (raw numbers and % in totals).

In the first place, the data testify to an overall mismatch in numbers between questions and answers; indeed, both in the video-mediated and in the face-to-face interviews, answers are ca. 30% fewer than questions (73.3% online and 72.9% face-to-face), indicating that journalists tend to ask more than one question in the same turn. More interestingly, there appears to be a significant higher number of open questions in face-to-face interviews (40.1%), which leave floor to the interlocutor for an open response, as opposed to video-mediated interviews, where open questions are lower in number (29%). Similarly, choice questions, though extremely limited in both subsets, are almost non-existent in face-to-face interviews (0.3%), while they occur (though not particularly frequently) in video-mediated interviews (2.4%).

Considering that both types of interviews have roughly the same length, these quantitative differences appear not to be attributable to stricter time constraints in either one or the other type. Moreover, in the choice of data, an attempt was made to select similar programme formats, in order to limit the factors that may affect differences in the two types of interviews. Yet further data are needed to verify whether TV channels and programme types may impinge on the results.

Overall, it appears that, in video-mediated interviews, journalists tend to channel their interlocutor to precise answers more than in face-to-face interviews, where questions leave more floor to the interviewees to express

their standpoint without being forced to follow the interviewer's path, as in (1):[6]

(1)   But how do you intend to win them over? given the fact that they are noticing how the government seemingly is clipping the wings of the opposition [txt14_q19]

The data also show that in both subsets closed and choice questions are paralleled by corresponding closed/choice answers only to a minor degree; specifically, I recorded 67.3% closed questions vs. 26.9% closed answers, and in the face-to-face subsets 59.6% closed questions vs. 28.3% closed answers, while choice questions are even down to zero in all their corresponding answers. Indeed, interviewees largely avoid closed questions in favour of open ones, frequently followed by further expansions, as in (2):

(2)   Q: even you have to recognize reality, Donald Trump has declared that he doesn't believe in the credibility of your organization today, Gordon Brown described Trump's move as 'self harm', an act of sabotage, he said many would see it as do you see it in that way?
A: I really do not want to use any words to do criticize any president of any country that is part of the international system. The way in which the international system works is by consent and by cooperation, when you've got a giant emergency like we have at the moment the most important requirement is that all leaders work together to make sure that the well-being of 7 point 8 billion people is maximized, if one head of state decides that he wants to move away from that global consensus that's not a problem just for the World Health Organization, it's a problem for the world and it's a particularly serious problem if it is the leader of the organization that provides the majority of funding to our system. [txt14_q/a15]

Moreover, checking n-grams containing *not* as a typical oppositional adverb, the most frequent 3-word n-gram turns out to be *I'm not* (27 occurrences) in face-to-face interviews, while in video-mediated ones *I'm not* is superseded by *that's not* (19 vs. 12 occurrences). Such first result would point in the direction of oppositional talk being conveyed in a more impersonal, less subjective way in video-mediated interviews, being somehow 'masked' by third-person subjects (and largely pointing at facts). This dovetails with the considerations made in Section 3.1 on non-verbal behaviour in video-mediated interviews.

    In contrast, in face-to-face interviews there appears to be more personal involvement particularly of the interviewees, who – as pointed out above – are left more free to express their opinions by a higher number of open questions.

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[6] Punctuation in examples is mine.

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Undoubtedly, this aspect would require more in-depth investigation on a broader corpus, taking into account the background of the speakers as well and their professionality; indeed, some of the interviews are with diplomats, who – by profession – tend to avoid personalization and work more as facilitators and mediators leaving themselves aside. In turn, science experts strongly rely on data in their answers and, because of that, they appear to be much more direct and forceful in counterreacting to challenging questions than diplomats, favouring clusters like *that's not true*, *this is/was not*, *absolutely no/not*, as in (3):

(3)   absolutely not, I would like to say it a second time, absolutely not [txt14_q/a5]

With reference to the answers provided by politicians, despite conflict being "congenial" to their language (Bull, Simon-Vendernbergen 2019), in the corpus, when answering questions that may trigger further conflict, politicians take up a conciliatory position and avoid rebutting forcefully to provocative questions:

(4)   Q: people want to know what happened, forty five thousand people died who've tested positive, what do you think the mistakes were?
        A: We mourn every one of the of those who lost their lives and and our thoughts are very much with the with their families.
        Q: do you and you take
        A: and and and do it and I take full responsibility for everything that government did. [txt8q/a4-5]

This tendency appears to be common both in video-mediated and in face-to-face interviewees, confirming that the professional background does impinge on the way answers are given.

From a discourse-strategy point of view, all interviewers follow a practice that is widely acknowledged in journalistic interviews (Clayman, Heritage 2002; Piirainen-Marsh 2005), by embedding presuppositions in their questions both online and face-to-face, taking opinions for granted as facts in the introductory part of the question, to control the direction of talk, as in the following:

(5)   I mean obviously there's been a lot of criticism about the fact that the Chinese government initially was not forthcoming about the explosion of these cases (…) Are there any any lessons the Chinese government has learned from the early missteps that were made in responding to the coronavirus? [txt1_q5]
(6)   What do you have to say to China when it comes to its campaign of disinformation and withholding information when it has come to this pandemic? [txt3_q7]
(7)   Why are you so obsessed with immigration? [txt15_q3]

The strategy of giving for granted an opinion and presenting it as a given fact embedded in the question has been recorded in statements as well, since interviewers frequently close their turn with a statement rather than with a question, loading it with presuppositions:

(8)   You have as China a massive problem now. [txt2_s9]
(9)   Thailand has been issuing very inconsistent statements and incomplete instructions regarding quarantine for COVID-19. [txt14_s1]

Overall, from all the categories of interviewees, diplomats appear the ones who are particularly good at unveiling such fallacies and rebutting the ball into the journalist's side of the pitch, as in (10-11):

(10)   Q: But this would be the EU's moment to start playing that role but it seems to be on the back foot. Why is that?
       A: Well it's your opinion. [txt13_q/a25]
(11)   Q: Do you admit that the EU has failed?
       A: I'm sorry to say but you have a vision of the world which is a little bit dramatic. [txt13_q/a31]

Due to space constraints, in the present paper only these preliminary findings could be dealt with, but a separate study is under way on each linguistic trigger identified in Section 2.2, crossing the data with gender and nationality of the participants, as well as with the formats of programmes from the different TV channels.

4. Conclusions

This study has yielded information on both similarities and differences between video-mediated and face-to-face OD, with special reference to the genre of broadcast interviews. In terms of similarities, in both subsets of the corpus analyzed, interviewers largely exploit embedded presuppositions as a strategic device, presenting opinions as facts in their questions; the practice, which is typical of media interviews, channels the interlocutor in the direction desired and runs the risk of causing more confrontation. In turn, to avoid falling into the trap laid by their interlocutors, interviewees tend to answer closed questions with open answers, thus treading different reasoning paths from the ones offered by their interviewers. Diplomats, who are trained in the art and science of negotiation, are the ones most likely to reply in this way, transforming potentially violent conflict into non-violent processes.

       In terms of differences, the video somehow screens or hinders non-verbal movements, so far as interviewees convey few facial expressions, do not show their hands, and move their eyes away from the camera. Similarly,

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in video-mediated interviews, interactants rely on such clusters as *that's not* more than on *I'm not*, thus pointing in the direction of disclaiming responsibility and resorting to facts rather than to subjective stance in their answers. This would suggest that oppositional talk is conveyed in a more impersonal, less subjective way in video-mediated interviews. In turn, in such interactions, interviewers appear to be more 'imposing' on their interlocutors, favouring closed and choice questions rather than open ones, while in face-to-face interviews a higher number of open questions has been recorded.

The observations reported in this exploratory study need to be substantiated by further research; indeed, for want of space, little attention could be paid to possible differences between genders, since female speakers, particularly among interviewees, were very limited in number. Moreover, more data are needed to look into possible differences in reactions for the interactants who do not share the same lingua-cultural background, since, as pointed out by Haugh and Chang (2019), the same criticism does not necessarily convey the same 'indexical value' in different people, and consequently it does not occasion the same response. This aspect, along with the need to analyze thoroughly the interrelation between the profession of the interviewees and the type of answers provided, will need to be intersected with a detailed study of the typical pragmatic aspects triggering OD, diversifying between face-to-face and video-mediation, thus also calling into question such theoretical perspectives as multimodal conversational analysis, politeness theory, and critical discourse analysis.

Bearing in mind what still needs to be done, this preliminary analysis already points to OD as an evolving type of discourse with interesting and partly unexpected traits; the more we understand it in its facets, the more we will be able to tackle potentially aggressive language and engage in constructive communication.

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CAN INTERFACES AND SOCIAL PROFILES 'SPEAK WITHOUT WORDS'?
Social Platforms as Ideological Tools to Shape Identities and Discourses

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Abstract – User agency has been profoundly transformed since all the new digital practices and communicative exchanges are mediated, filtered and re-modelled through digital technologies thanks to the presence of the two potentialities of interactivity and connectivity. Most of the discursive practices represented in social media platforms are focused on processes of self-profiling. Additionally, pre-packaged identities and meanings are produced by multimodal discursive patterns that are generated by social network technologies. The co-deployment of different semiotic resources is regulated by the platform design, which combines multimodal artefacts uploaded by users with those pre-imposed by the interface architecture. So far, digital profiles have been almost exclusively investigated as new multimodal and multimedia digital texts. Our focus, instead, is on technology meant as a further and complex semiotic resource, and its meaning potential gives rise to hidden signs (metadata and algorithms) which are regulated by normative codes. What we are proposing in this theoretical contribution is a tentative framework that is grounded in an integrated view of textuality. Digital meaning is conveyed through texts but also via computational actions that, in turn, are triggered not only by users but also by platform technologies embodied by the interfaces. If we apply a further level of analysis, as suggested by the framework proposed, we realise that users are partially responsible for their identity construction. *De facto*, algorithmic relations mostly shape their agency, and this implies a new approach to the study of meaning-making processes in digital settings.

Keywords: algorithms; multimodal discourse; self-profiling; social network platform; user agency

1. Introduction

In digital environments, user agency has been profoundly transformed thanks to the evolution of the two potentialities of interaction and interactivity (Adami 2015; McMillan 2009; Shyam Sundar 2012; Yun 2007) and of connectedness and connectivity (Hsu, Lin 2016; van Dijck 2013a, 2013b). Moving from real contexts to digital ones implies the presence of mediating technologies, embodied by interfaces, which in turn re-model the nature of user agency in terms of agentic value, identity, and behaviours. All the new digital practices and communicative exchanges are mediated and filtered

through the new digital technologies.

Additionally, most of the discursive practices represented in social media and network environments give rise to processes of self-presentation and self-profiling, in particular in those social networks where personal profiles have become the main text type (Petroni 2019). However, face construction (Goffman 1959), meant as a person's public image or online profile, is affected by digitality and mediated – or rather negotiated – by the platform's affordances (Gibson 1977). Social network profiles are, in fact, partially generated by users and partially moulded according to almost fixed templates provided by the networking platforms.

The co-deployment of different semiotic resources, in fact, is regulated by the interface design which combines multimodal resources present in the artefacts uploaded by users with those pre-imposed by the interface architecture. The 'game' of visual design along with technologies allows platform owners to encourage users to create profiles and share their identities. They become visible thanks to the potentiality to establish connections, create affiliation, and gain appreciation. In doing so, users consent to give away their personal data by filling in programmed profiles that will be simultaneously processed into metadata to be sold as assets and marketized. Often users are completely unaware of this mechanism. Pre-packaged identities and meanings are therefore produced by discursive patterns created partly by users but markedly by social network technologies and platforms, where multimodal templates play a crucial role.

This theoretical study will focus on the role that interface design plays within social network profiles and try to unveil how meanings are not necessarily conveyed through multimodal resources – in particular, the verbal mode. The technological potential equally, if not substantially, contributes to producing meaning. All the issues so far raised will be investigated according to a holistic critical perspective founded on social semiotics (van Leeuwen 2005), critical Internet studies and new media studies approach (Beer 2009; Mager 2012; Moschini 2018, 2022; Moschini, Sindoni 2021; van Dijck 2009, 2013a, 2013b; van Dijck, Poell 2013, van Dijck *et al.* 2018; Thrift 2005) within the multimodal framework (LeVine, Scollon 2004; Kress, van Leeuwen 2001, 2006; van Leeuwen 2009).

The aim is to present how social platforms and their interface design allow users to construct online identities through their technological functionalities within different layers of meanings. So far, digital profiles have been almost exclusively investigated as new multimodal and multimedia digital texts (Zappavigna 2012) created by users thanks to the co-deployment of different modes (verbal, visual, sound, etc.) and media. However, we claim that also technology should be considered as another pivotal semiotic resource whose meaning potential gives rise to 'hidden' signs (metadata)

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regulated by normative codes (van Dijck 2009). For this reason, a holistic view is necessary for research in digital discourse. In our view, we can no longer investigate digital meaning-making processes produced by users without including and reflecting on the meaning produced by the computational and algorithmic act(ion)s the platform technologies perform.

2. Digital and social scenarios

In the beginning, there was the Internet. Web 1.0 was the *locus* where Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) (Danet 1998; Herring 1996; Thurlow *et al.* 2005) took place and where users could interact. Its primary property was being hypertextual. Landow (1992, p. 3) defined hypertext as "[t]ext composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms link, node, network, web, and path" and in his definition many peculiarities emerge. In fact, we can identify multilinearity, nonsequentiality, granularity, reticularity, connectivity, and interactivity: all these features are qualities of hypertexts (Bettetini *et al.* 1999, Bolter 2001), and what allows them to be actualised is the presence of links.

The concepts of connectivity and interactivity were in their infancy. In fact, during the '90s, connectivity, or "secondary sequentiality", refers to how diverse portions of content are connected in a hypertext during individual navigations. This aspect involves both web designers and users. On the part of the designer, we have the hypertext project that determines the nature and function of links. These play a metatextual role inasmuch as they reveal the project itself (Harrison, Hammerich 2002; Petroni 2011). On the part of the user, we have the path/s chosen by him/her according to his/her personal way of decoding, interpreting, and encoding the hypertext.

According to Bettetini *et al.*, interactivity is *de facto* the prerequisite for connectivity since interactivity allows connectivity to be realized. Without any possibility of interaction between hypertext nodes and users, hypertext cannot exist – or only partially like, for example, in closed hypermedia – because it works as a potential hypertext or simply as a text composed of one or more pre-established paths that are those developed by its designer.

With the passage from the Web 1.0 to the Web 2.0, from CMC to Social Network Communication (Jenkins 2006; Kaplan, Haenlein 2010; Papacharissi 2011; van Dijk 2009), interactivity and connectivity have been evolving towards multifaceted processes that have substantially affected not only how we encode and decode meaning, but also how we perceive user agency and online sociality. For this reason, a clearer distinction between interaction and interactivity on the one hand, and connectedness and

connectivity on the other, becomes necessary to better understand the cultural, social, and economic facets of this new digital space. With the advent of Web 2.0, Henry Jenkins claims that: "[a]udiences, empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between old and new media, are demanding the right to participate within the culture" (2006, p. 24). He foresees a new scenario of democracy and participatory culture in contrast to the traditional scenario where the technologies were the prerogative of corporations.

The necessity to resolve the ambiguity between the terms interaction and interactivity is urgent. In CMC, following Goffman's studies (1959), interpersonal communication is conceived as the *interaction* among users via the mediation of technology, the so-called human-to-human interaction (Adami 2015; McMillan 2009; Shyam Sundar 2012; Yun 2007;) and that is at the basis of the main processes of meaning production and human exchanges in digital contexts. When communication takes place in terms of "human-to-system" interaction (Adami 2015; McMillan 2009), we should talk of *interactivity* and identify it with the affordance of the medium. This shapes, on the one hand, how its intended receivers can relate to it and to any other subject involved in the process and, on the other hand, their agency in terms of agentic value, identity and social positioning.

This distinction poses some issues about the 'real' democracy and freedom with which users can control their activities and act upon media content as 'produsers' (Bruns 2008), as creators who are also users and distributors. Both interaction and interactivity are carried out through interfaces that mediate the relationship users establish with the medium and its interactive tools, i.e. links. The interface then is a semiotic space in which all forms of interaction and interactivity are mediated by technologies. These are not only instruments for the actualisation of exchanges or text production, but also actors and mediators among participants (Petroni 2011). But we will discuss the role of interfaces later on.

Turning to the second crucial distinction to make, we refer to the evolution of connectivity (van Dijk 2013a, 2013b). With shareability and participatory potential, which derive from interactivity, being the two main facets of social network platforms, connectivity represents both the possibility to establish connections among users, endorse community building and affiliation as new forms of sociality, and the technological affordance that has made these connections possible. The distinction then is between the social value of *connectedness* (or collectivity) and the valuable resource of *connectivity* (van Dijck 2013b, p. 4), with this last being able to codify information into algorithms and, in turn, provide patterns of online automated sociality. For this reason, terms such as 'social', 'friends', 'followers', 'trend' 'liked', 'collaboration', etc., that is labels of a

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participatory culture that finds its roots within the idea of human connectedness, have been modified into online practices such as 'friending', 'following', 'trending', 'liking' etc., that are enacted and regulated computationally through the connectivity functionality.

Similarly to interactivity, connectivity automatically inscribes forms of algorithmic sociality into permanent codes. The social media utopia hailed by Jenkins as a new participatory, democratic, self-regulating culture is actually a "culture of connectivity" where " [...] commoditizing relationships – turning connectedness into connectivity by means of coding technologies – is exactly what corporate platforms, particularly Google and Facebook, discovered as the golden egg their geese produced. [...] Under the guise of connectedness, they produce a precious resource: connectivity." (van Dijck 2013b, p. 16), i.e. a shift from the accumulation of social capital[1] (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) to economic capital through the exploitation of data deriving from profiled – or rather pre-packaged – identities and behaviours.

3. Online sociality and user agency

Digital identities translated and moulded into social profiles are the fuel of social networking sites (SNSs). Users can access social media and networks only if they create and inhabit their own profile. Most of meaning making processes on SNSs take place within one's profile since this is connected with a group/community. The digital scenario so far described has shown how digital affordances have shaped the way we interact online and establish relationships. But they can also affect the socio-cultural and economic scenarios.

When networking is applied to forms of social organization, any area of human activity and society is affected and re-designed accordingly (Poell *et al.* 2019; van Dijck 2013a, 2013b; van Dijck and Poell 2013; van Dijck *et al.* 2018). In doing so, interactivity and connectivity technologies play a crucial role in community building. For many years, in CMC environments, we have talked of virtual communities as places characterised by stability, coherence, embeddedness and belonging, and inhabited by users joined by

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[1] Bourdieu describes social capital as "[t]he aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248). In Bourdieu and Wacquant, social capital is defined as ''the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'' (1992, p. 14).

friendship, common interests, beliefs, value (Baym 1995; Dubé *et al.* 2005; Herring 2008; Preece, Maloney-Krichmar 2003; Rehingold 1993).

Instead, today the power of connectivity, or rather the potential residing behind the connectivity algorithm has re-shaped the concept of 'community sociality' (Smelser, Baltes 2001) into a 'network sociality' (Wittel 2001),[2] like for example in Facebook, LinkedIN or Twitter. If networks are "appropriate instruments for a culture of endless deconstruction and reconstruction" (Castells 1996, p. 470), it is evident that community sociality is transformed into a sense of disembedded intersubjectivity, integration and disintegration. Network sociality implies social relations that are based on quickly assembling, collecting and recontextualising information and data.

For this reason, social relations are 'informational' and sociality is strongly embedded in technology and embodied in connectivity potential. Network sociality is not rooted in a shared history but it is characterized by a multitude of experiences and biographies which, in turn, are instantiated by the user profiles. In social media networks, people are removed from their original place to be recontextualised in largely disembedded social relations and connections on a global scale that are endlessly under construction. Bridging the concepts of social capital and sociality together, it is necessary to distinguish between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) that correspond to community sociality and network sociality, respectively. Bonding social capital is positively accumulated when individuals are tightly connected and in an emotionally close relationship. Bridging social capital, on the contrary, regards weak ties, which are not tight connections between individuals whose information may be useful for third parties (platform's owner) not emotionally involved.

In this view, online sociality has increasingly evolved into a coproduction between users and technologies, where humans interpret social platforms as *loci* of self-expression, self-presentation and community building while platform's architectures are developed to design and control users' real identity, preferences and behaviours, i.e. their agency. In constructing their identity, users become both 'content providers' and 'data providers' (Poell *et al.* 2019; van Dijck 2009; van Dijck *et al.* 2018). When uploading content, they offer personal information and metadata through their profile to the SNS owners, very often without being aware of doing so. Metadata are composed of information regarding name, email address and sometimes gender, age, and nationality that is aggregated by algorithms to be

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[2] Sociality is the degree to which individuals tend to associate in social groups and form collaborative societies with a sense of "strong and long-lasting ties, proximity and common history or a narrative of the collective" (Wittel 2001, p. 51).

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re-used for targeted advertising or interface optimization. Once users sign the site's service agreements (Terms of Use), and users are obliged to do this if they want to register and access any social media or network platform, they no longer have control over data unless they know how to modify their profile default settings.

If, on the one hand, user agency can entail the new role of 'produser' and 'co-creator', on the other hand, what interests most is their role of data providers. As van Dijck (2009, p. 49) states, "[u]ser agency thus comprises content production, consuming behaviour and data generation; any theory highlighting only the first of these functions effectively downplays the tremendous influence of new media companies in directing users' agency."

4. Platform technology and its discursive 'double'

Creating profiles and accounts and taking part in social networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn mean, on the one hand, connecting with friends and professionals and sharing portions of one's personal and/or professional life; on the other, these actions definitely re-contextualize users' identities in these new contexts. Features such as photos, videos, gadgets, music, friends' lists, and links to others' social networking profiles are identity markers which replace actual interplay. According to Jenkins, these features are "perhaps, among the most elaborate examples of impression management that one can imagine" (2010, p. 264).

SNSs are the *loci* of self-expression and self-presentation but thanks to the 'logic' of social networking technology (van Dijck, Poell, 2013) these discursive practices are often transformed into self-branding (Petroni 2019): the more you are hyperconnected, i.e. having many friends, many likes, many connections, the more your profile is successful. But successful for whom? Apparently, for the profile's owner, *de facto* for the platform's owner. This is the reason why any identity becomes goods to be offered according to a marketing ideology (Poell *et al.* 2019; Thurlow 2013; van Dijck *et al.* 2018).

Van Dijck *et al.* (2013, 2018) identify four technical mechanisms which represent the foundations of social network platforms, and they are programmability, popularity, connectivity and datafication. *Programmability* is "the ability of a social media platform to trigger and steer users' creative or communicative contributions, while users, through their interaction with [...] coded environments, may in turn influence the flow of communication and information activated by such a platform" (2013, p. 5). The first part of the definition refers to the interrelated systems that are at the basis of programmability: computer code, (meta)data, algorithms, protocols, defaults and the platform architecture that are entangled in programming.

Programming is strictly related to interface design but what we see derives from the cooperation of the different facets of programming.

Following Galloway (2004, p. 165), code "draws a line between what is material and what is active, in essence saying that writing (hardware) cannot do anything, but must be transformed into code (software) to be effective". Programming language codifies meaning into action, and computer code (meant as mode in social semiotic terms) executes its commands which will be reified, for example, into call-to-action buttons within the interface. Code also mirrors the platform's computational architecture but also inscribes social and cultural practices into machine language, as LinkedIn does when coding connections between users/professionals.

Data are any kind of 'raw' information (texts/signs) provided by users and processed by software – verbal text, image, sound, but also personal information such as name, gender, dates etc. Metadata are structured, pre-planned records that classify and catalogue data. Therefore, metadata describe, explain and locate data so that they can be easily managed, retrieved and re-used or re-contextualised (e.g. retweets). The technology reproduces the ability the human brain has to classify and categorize one's experiences, feelings and perception of reality. Users, too, can provide metadata when they tag something or when they accept cookies.

As van Dijck explains (2013b, p. 30), an algorithm, "in computer science, is a finite list of well defined instructions [speech acts] for calculating a function, a step-by-step directive for processing automatic reasoning that orders the machine to produce a certain output from given input". The Facebook 'You may know' notification, whose effect is to trigger user's friending practice, and hence to help/persuade him/her to increase the number of friends to gain further information, is an algorithm able to translate, or rather resemiotize (Lemke 2002; Iedema 2003), the acquired data into a discursive social practice thanks to computational data analysis. By adopting a social semiotic framework (van Leewuen 2005), we can state that algorithms are processes of transduction since they remake meanings across modes, e.g. from writing (user data and metadata) into action.

Protocols are technical sets of rules which users are obliged to respect "if they want to partake in the mediated flow of interaction" (van Dijck 2013b, p. 31).

Defaults are "settings automatically assigned to a software application to channel user behaviour in a certain way. Defaults are not just technical but also ideological maneuverings" (van Dijck 2013b, p. 32). Protocols and defaults can be considered as parameters for creating genre (Jones 2015), 'institutionalized template for social interactions' (Orlikowski, Yates 1998) since they constitute the language programming scripts that are composed of

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sets of instructions aimed at carrying out an action. They channel users into other discursive practices such as filling in a registration form or updating a profile. Privacy policy settings are an example of how defaults build our relations, interactions, participation and text production on SNSs and configure practices and actions of inclusion or exclusion.

Programmability is the hidden dimension of technology, the "technological unconscious" (Beer 2009), the information apparatus that only partially is made visible by interfaces. The other three mechanisms are grounded in programmability.

Popularity, in fact, depends both on algorithmic and socioeconomic components. The logic of online popularity resides, for example, in links for 'Most viewed' profile on LinkedIn, or friend stats on Facebook. "Platform metrics are increasingly accepted as legitimate standards to measure and rank people and ideas; these rankings are then amplified through mass media and in turn reinforced by users through social buttons such as following and liking" (van Dijck, Poell, 2013, p. 7).

Each platform has its distinct algorithm for boosting the popularity of people, things, or ideas, which is mostly quantitative rather than qualitative. The Like-button aims to brand a social experience or event but the underlying technology immediately adds it to an automated 'Like-economy' (Petroni 2019). Algorithms can resemiotize meaning since they are able to infer, interpret those meanings (data such as preferences, values, and beliefs) previously expressed by users and then assembled into metadata in order to re-produce new texts to consume and/or actions to carry out.

As for *connectivity,* van Dijck and Poell refer to it as the socio-technical affordance of networked platforms to connect content to user activities. Connectivity always mediates user agency and establishes how to construct connections. It also depends on mathematical algorithms apt to construct identity by aggregating sorting, calculating data and embedding "rules of conduct" to "direct how citizens [users] act" (Thrift 2005, pp. 172-173). Paraphrasing Foucault (1988), these affordances are the new "technologies of the self" which establish rules of conduct, work at a distance, and shape users' thoughts, actions and values. The result is a "new algorithmic identity" (Cheney-Lippold 2011, p. 165) that is built on other categories of identity inferred by known or unknown beings.

Datafication refers to "the ability of networked platforms to render into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before: not just demographic or profiling data yielded by customers in (online) surveys, but automatically derived metadata from smartphones such as timestamps and GPS-inferred locations" (van Dijck, Poell 2013, p. 9). Every user interaction – rating, paying, watching, dating, searching, but also friending, following, liking, posting, commenting and retweeting – can be "captured [as

data], algorithmically processed, and added to that user's data profile" (van Dijck *et al.* 2018, p. 34). In doing so, platform owners can appeal to users' basic emotions and interactions and, at the same time, can profile their demographic, behavioural, and relational characteristics.

Datafication is strongly related to the other three mechanisms so far described – programmability, popularity, and connectivity. Datafication processes remain invisible and this poses questions about the real link between data and users and about how monitoring and steering can be manipulated (Mejias, Couldry 2019). Users are only sometimes aware of these mechanisms, and what they intend to show of themselves online cannot correspond to what is inferred by other users when personal data are re-contextualised via algorithms.

As a consequence, the overall logic of social platforms affects social agency and the shaping of social relations accordingly. Although users are constantly and seemingly encouraged to manage their online reputation and to "tend their Doppelgängers" (Lanier 2010, p. 71), their real 'double' is, instead, represented by the pre-packaged identity configured through discursive phenomena generated by fixed templates and fuelled by databases and algorithms.

5. Social network interface design: a "holistic and non-logocentric" framework[3]

What is the role of interface design in these processes today? As stated above, interactivity implies planning and developing interactive systems that are usable, dependable, intuitive, and that support and facilitate human activities: the well-known user-friendly interfaces. An interface is not pertinent to the information universe only. It can be found in "any instrument that helps us interact with the world around us in ways that are most fitting to our physical and sensory makeup – thus enacting a mediation function between us and the world." (Ciotti, Roncaglia 2007, p. 181; my translation).[4] In the case of graphical interfaces, however, this mediation is instantiated by multimodal artefacts.

In any socio-cultural communication, multimodal resources never produce neutral signs since they act upon connotative meanings being affected by the ideologies embodied in them (Jones, Hafner 2012). Even

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[3] Cf. Zhao *et al.* (2014, p. 370).

[4] Note that even a fork and a knife are interfaces, but with a very clearly defined social and cultural connotation, which can be localized only in Western countries and not found, for example, in China.

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when interfaces play their operational role, allowing users to connect to someone or something, but also to save a file, change a font, delete a message, etc., they follow normative discourses resemiotized by institutionalised protocols which reflect social power relations and the interests and values both of their designers and users (Arola 2010; Fuller 2008).

The way through which multimodal contents and actions are presented on social network sites and how users perceive and become affected by them depends both on the deep technological configuration and on the surface multimodal textual composition[5] (Iadema 2003; Jewitt *et al.* 2016; Kress, van Leeuwen 2001, 2006; Machin 2007). The first one is defined here the 'deep layer',[6] that is the interface software architecture described in the above section, while the second is named the 'surface layer', that is instantiated by the interface as an artefact. The two layers mirror professional design conventions, as well as the designers' knowledge of the social practices which the interface is designed to support (Djonov, van Leeuwen 2012, 2013, 2018; O'Halloran *et al.* 2010; Moschini 2018, 2022; Zhao *et al.* 2014).

What we are going to propose here is a framework that is grounded in a holistic and integrated view of textuality. Meaning is conveyed through texts but also via actions which, in turn, in digital settings are triggered not only by users but also by networking technologies embodied by the interfaces. These are governed by a hidden discursive technological apparatus that involves other descriptors that are different from those commonly used in the social semiotic and multimodal approach. Therefore, we have looked at media studies and critical Internet studies but also semiotic technology (Djonov, van Leeuwen 2012, 2013, 2018; Poulsen *et al.* 2018; Zhao *et al.* 2014), in the attempt to draw a tentative framework (Table 1) which is able to detect the complexity of meaning-making productions in digital settings.

The table shows how the two layers work simultaneously and, given the artefact, what the resources involved for making meaning at each layer are, in combination with the agency and practices involved accordingly. By identifying these processes, the effects that derive from them unveil the ideological potential the interface design has within the two layers.

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[5] According to multimodality, *composition* refers to the textual/organizational metafunction, the visual syntax, which focuses on spatial relations amongst the elements on a page/screen and on the three interrelated systems which govern the spatial organization: *salience*, how certain elements foreground to catch viewer's attention; *information value*, how elements relate to each other and to the viewer (centre/margin, right/left, top/down); *framing*, how framing devices connect/divide elements.

[6] Consider also the concepts of "visible and invisible interface" presented by van Dijck (2013b, p. 31).

From the social semiotic perspective, design refers "to the situated process in which a sign maker chooses semiotic resources and possible arrangements for semiotic entities to be produced to meet particular social functions or purposes. Design is seen as based on a rhetorical (a rhetor's) assessment of the requirements of such an entity; that serves as the starting point for the meaning-making process of design" (Jewitt *et al.* 2016, p. 73).

LAYERS	ARTEFACT	SEMIOTIC RESOURCES	AGENCY AND PRACTICES	IDEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL
Deep layer ('Hidden')	Social Network platform, e.g.: Facebook LinkedIn Others	Programmability: Code Protocol Default Algorithm Metadata	Algorithmic agency: Transduction/ Resemiotisation >> out of user's control	Datafication
Surface layer	Profile template	Design: Layout Font Colour Image Writing	Human agency: Uploading Posting Hyperlinking Friending Following, etc. >> under user's control	Popularity: Interactivity Connectivity

Table 1
Framework for the analysis of social network profiles.

In SNSs we have two different sign-makers with different requirements: the platform designer and the user. The former establishes standardizing expectations for the latter about how profiles have to be designed. In software interfaces, users are given the possibility to choose and work with the traditional resources of composition – i.e. layout, font, writing, image and colour – that are visually available on the layout template and also through its spatio-temporal, or syntagmatic, organization (e.g. PowerPoint interface; Zhao *et al.* 2014, p. 361).

Conversely, social networking software deters users from exploiting the meaning potential of these resources. In fact, social media profiles are actually pre-programmed templates generally composed of 'boxes', frames, unchangeable forms where users can decide what content to embed, generally photos, videos, short narratives (posts), or hyperlinks, and how or if to interact with other users (making connections with friends in Facebook or with professionals in LinkedIn, for example). Layouts, colours, and fonts are not included in the user's prerogatives.

Users can build their identity only through pictures and posts that can be added only in pre-determined places of the interface (see Facebook profile template in Figure 1/A). Thus, from a multimodal perspective, if information value and framing are totally under the control of platform designers, salience

is 'shared' between designers and users. Looking at the figure, in fact, it is evident that by default only at the top of the page users can upload their photos and add pre-established personal information. This obviously means that the designers want users to foreground their photos, along with the background image. However, users can freely choose what catchy representation of their public self to show. The bigger central zone is always represented by a timeline format (Figure 1/B) where users interact by posting and uploading verbal and/or visual texts and/or hyperlinks, pieces of their life, only in vertical chronological order, with the most recent posts always foregrounded. The notification section (Figure 1/C), derived from users' interactivity, connectivity and popularity, is also organized in a timeline format. In doing so, verticality becomes the pre-imposed spatio-temporal representation of meaning making and, above all, of the self.
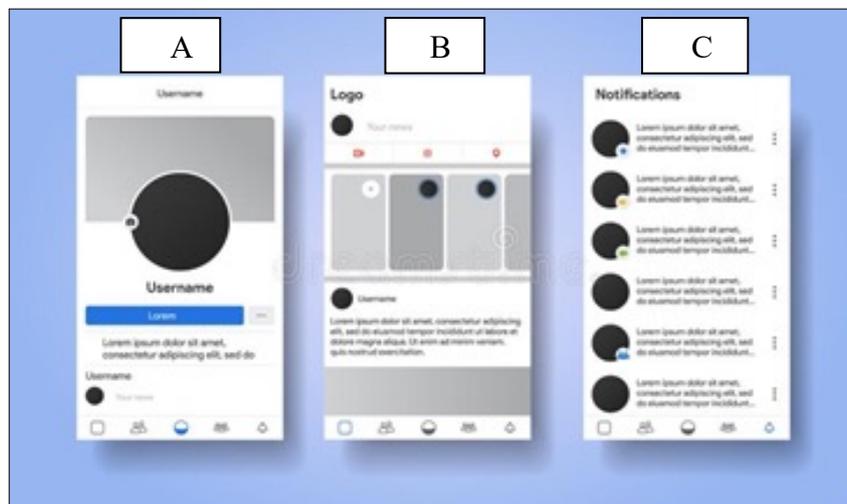
Figure1
Facebook profile (source: Facebook official stock images).[7]

Another example of verticality that is automatically inhabited by the connections users create with their friends is the 'Most viewed' section on LinkedIn (Figure 2). All these frames contribute to personal storytelling and narrative self-presentation.

The evolution of social network interface design corresponds to the shift from the database-structured platform to narrative-structured platform (Manovich 2001). With the advent of the Web 2.0, the first interactive architectures of digital media were non-linear, multi-sequential and database-shaped. They had, in fact, to instantiate the 'hidden' database management system that allowed the platform designer to organize collections of data (verbal, audiovisual and numerical texts) deriving from the interactivity

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[7] https://www.freepik.com/free-photos-vectors/facebook-profile (5.2.2022).

affordance. Therefore, the first social network interfaces did not tell stories in chronological order, but showed a spatial visual ordering of information.

The new timeline configuration has reversed this perspective and enabled (or constrained) users to narrate their lives, their stories, and their selves in a spatio-temporal ordering. Telling one's Self is more engaging – both for the profile owner and the viewer – than presenting the Self in a multi-sequential way. The timeline format requires continuous updating actions which, in turn, implement the quantity of data managed by the platform that are immediately resemiotised, or rather transducted, thanks to the algorithmic connections residing in the deep layer (datafication). Programmability, along with its tools, shapes the resources of the surface layer and sets up patterns of interactivity reified into action, such as posting and uploading. In addition, standardized presentation formats facilitate the work of algorithms: the more data are homogeneously patterned, the more algorithms detect models of behaviour and control them.
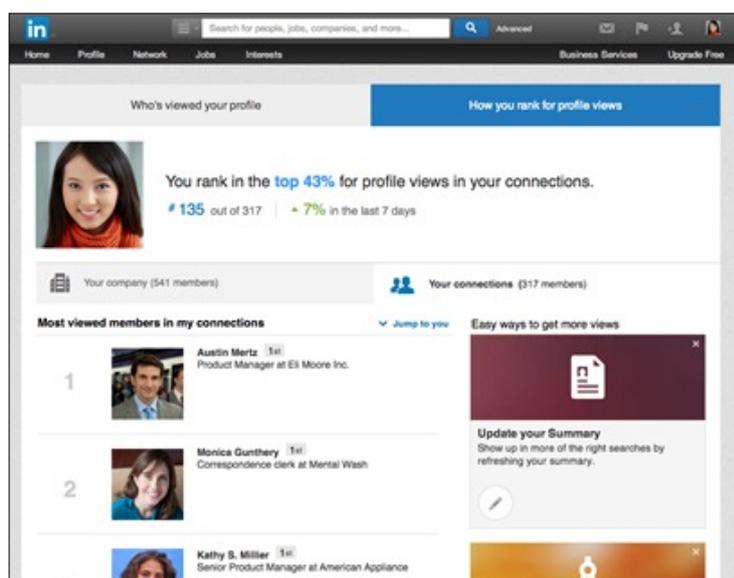
Figure 2
Most viewed section on LinkedIn profile (source: Official LinkedIn Blog).[8]

If, on the one hand, the templates can seem static, on the other hand, what makes them more lively and dynamic is interactivity and connectivity: the interface encourages users to act with their friends and these, in turn, contribute to inhabiting the users' profile: one's identity becomes part of the other's. As Arola argues, users are what they post and what others post about them (2010, p. 9), but above all, they are what the template allows them to

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[8] https://blog.linkedin.com/2014/05/21/make-the-most-of-whos-viewing-your-profile-with-how-you-rank (5.2.2022).

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do. Although users can construct their identity when they upload content or write narratives, they have little control over a large part of their representation.

Identity discourse is already pre-established in the frames of the template, and the main rhetorical strategies residing in the interface discourse and design are manoeuvred by those algorithmic affordances that Fogg defines as 'persuasive technologies' (Fogg 2003, 2009; Petroni 2016). Notifications, alerts, like and share buttons, rss feeds, etc., are *de facto* multimodal reifications of hidden discourses at the surface layer that are elaborated by code and algorithms. These persuasive technologies, too, are designed to engage users in enacting and changing attitudes and behaviours.

6. Concluding remarks

The analysis of discrete discursive phenomena, such as interfaces and template, without focusing on how they function within these complex systems of semiosis is no longer reasonable. This contribution provides a tentative framework whose aim is to conflate different descriptors rooted in different fields of study. This has allowed us to adopt a critical approach to the study of digital meaning making processes that can take into consideration the hidden dimension of technology, its discursive 'double'.

Some surveillance scholars (Haggerty, Ericson 2000, 2006; Jones 2017) talk about the "data double" referring to the obscure function of algorithms to collect and assemble data differently and for different purposes through surveillance technologies.[9] The way interface technology works entails a kind of surveillance over users through the pre-programmed profile templates. The code and algorithms channel users' behaviours and actions while they consent to being under surveillance, with the exception of those few people who operate actively on platform settings in order to protect their privacy.

Thus, who is the sign-maker when designing a profile on SNSs? What the users can do with their social media profiles is simply to fill in empty pre-packaged boxes with small, but endless, portions of their social, personal or professional life. In 'designing' their profile at the surface layer, they accept

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[9] To define these technologies, Haggerty and Ericson (2006, p. 4) claim: "Surveillance technologies […] operate through processes of disassembling and reassembling. People are broken down into a series of discrete informational flows which are stabilized and captured according to pre-established classificatory criteria. They are then transported to centralized locations to be reassembled and combined in ways that serve institutional agendas."

the mission stated by social media.[10] Vice versa, platform designers at the hidden layer design code and algorithms to implement the functionalities of interactivity and connectivity with the aim of accumulating and aggregating personal data and re-using them in other contexts and for different purposes. In doing so, they shape users' interactions and exert control over their identity.

The human agentic value is essentially remodelled onto an algorithmic agentic value that is materially embodied in a profile-shaped template. This point becomes crucial if we conduct research on the discourse of social network profiles. Limiting their discursive analysis to the surface layer means disregarding the meaning making processes deriving from the deep layer, which profoundly contribute to users' identity construction.

As Arola (2010, p.4) claims, in the world of interactivity and connectivity, we need "to rethink the ways in which we might bring design to a discursive level, for while we might be losing the means of production, this should not keep us from questioning and embracing design's potential." Rethinking design's potential of interfaces or templates means understanding how the resources of the deep layer produce meaning. For this reason, it is necessary to start envisaging new frameworks of analysis for the new systems of semiosis that are embodied by software and technology.

Manovich in 2001 looked at databases as systems able to produce meanings and theorized the opportunity to identify a 'discourse of database'. But his call has remained unheard. In the past, we have speculated on media by researching a discourse, a semiotics, an aesthetics, and an ethics of each single medium. Now, there is the urgency of finding theoretical frameworks where and thanks to which we can investigate sign-making processes, networked signification and programmed social practices represented by collections of networked data modelled into the discourse of software and technology.

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[10] Facebook's mission is to "Give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together" while LinkedIn's is to "Connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful".

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member of some international editorial boards and she has participated in national and European research projects. The last one was a three-year Erasmus plus European project (2016–2019), KA2 Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education, *EUMADE4LL (European Multimodal and Digital Education for Language Learning).*

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COVID-19: EXPLORING LINGUISTIC INDICATORS OF CONSPIRATORIAL THINKING IN THE MEDIA[1]
A case study of *Coronacast*

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Abstract - Health information is fundamental during an outbreak, but viral speculation can easily bury the limited information we have, notwithstanding the scientific community is making huge progress in understanding the Covid-19 infection and the World Health Organization (WHO) and other organizations are making a concerted effort to counter the infodemic and conspiracy theories (WHO 2019). A case in point is *Coronacast*, a podcast aimed at "break[ing] down the latest news and research to help [the Australian public] understand how the world is living through the pandemic". In order to see whether its aim was met, the podcast hosts' discourse during their daily episodes was examined through a cluster, collocation and concordance analysis to identify the possible presence of the CONSPIR tactic (Lewandowsky, Cook 2020). This tactic includes 7 traits of conspiratorial thinking characterized by Contradictory Logic, an Overwhelming Distrust of official explanations seen as Nefarious Intent to endanger people, and a conviction that Something Must be Wrong. Moreover, according to this tactic, the hosts would speak of themselves as Persecuted Victims, their narrative would be Immune to Evidence, and they would reinterpret Random Events as if they were woven into broader, interrelated patterns. Finally, this study added two more letters to the CONSPIR acronym – AC – as it examined whether the two podcast hosts express uncertainty in Anxious or Cognitive ways. This analysis seems to open the way for a better evidence-based understanding of the powerful impact of the ideological dimension of words being inculcated into Australian society's belief system by emergent institutions such as podcasts.

Keywords: corpus linguistics, Covid-19 conspiracies, dis/misinformation, media psychology, uncertainty.

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the fear and uncertainty it has triggered have created an ideal breeding ground for conspiracy theories (European Commission 2021), resulting in hesitancy to vaccinate and outright rejection of protocols to contain the spread of the disease (Earnshaw *et al.* 2020). On a broader scale, conspiracy theories have also been shown to increase political

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[1] Although this research was jointly conducted by both authors, Matthew Groicher is responsible for sections 1, 3.3, 4.2, 5; Rosita Maglie for sections 2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1.

apathy (Uscinski, Parent 2014), reduce trust in government institutions (Einstein, Glick 2015), and increase the likelihood of engaging in counter-normative behaviour (Jolley *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, conspiracy theories can cause intergroup difficulties and increase stigmatization of certain groups of people (Jolley *et al.* 2020), and accelerate the process of radicalization by reinforcing the "othering" of outgroups (Bartlett, Miller 2010). Conspiratorial thinking, or the "tendency to accept conspiratorial explanations", is considered the most important variable in predicting belief in conspiracy theories. This empirically documented trait varies across individuals, i.e., people tend to believe in conspiracy theories in varying degrees depending on how pronounced their level of conspiratorial thinking is (Lantian *et al.* 2020). In the medical field, belief in conspiracy theories and misinformation has led to a "dark renaissance" of vaccine-preventable diseases based on the erroneous belief that the diseases are false, or the vaccines are dangerous (Grimes 2020).

Social media and the internet have played an important role in the spread of misinformation (i.e., unverified information with no legitimate source) and disinformation (i.e., intentionally misleading information) (Tran *et al.* 2020) during the Covid-19 pandemic. Social media presents users with the opportunity to access a wide variety of facts and opinions, but can also provide a platform for the spread of rumours and other fake news, including moral panic theories (Baker 2001; McEnery *et al.* 2000 McEnery 2006), and conspiracy theories (Del Vicario *et al.* 2016). Unfortunately, many people do not have the knowledge or literacy to discriminate between fact and fiction in the news they hear and see online (Scherer, Pennycook 2020). Older adults for instance, tend to share misinformation more often than younger adults because they have lower digital literacy skills and are therefore less able to identify reliable online sources (Brashier, Schacter 2020).

Clearly, we need an approach that helps us identify conspiratorial messages. Discourse analysis and corpus linguistics can play a critical role in determining how such belief systems are discursively constructed (Demata *et al.* 2022). Identifying the linguistic features of conspiratorial thinking can help us in this endeavour. Thus, to test this hypothesis that a message exhibiting many or all of these characteristics is likely to contain elements of conspiratorial thinking, this study focused on a specific example of communication during the pandemic: *Coronacast*, an Australian podcast, aimed at "break[ing] down the latest news and research to help [the Australian public] understand how the world is living through a pandemic" (Australian Broadcasting Commission 2021). This podcast is aired by the Australian Broadcasting Commission and is hosted by Dr. Norman Swan, a former paediatrician and well-known medical journalist, and Tegan Taylor, a health and science journalist. Due to the presence of such a prominent figure

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as Dr. Swan, and the fact that both hosts are health journalists, the podcast appears to be a source of trustworthy information that can help people find answers rather than feed their anxieties, a precious commodity in the face of the uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus pandemic. An in-depth analysis of the individual lexical items of these hosts over an extended period of time should show whether this is objectively true.

Lewandowsky and Cook (2020) have outlined seven traits that characterize conspiratorial thinking, summarised in the acronym CONSPIR (Figure 1).

Figure 1
CONSPIR categories (Lewandowsky, Cook 2020).

- The first characteristic is the Contradictory nature of this type of thinking. Conspiracy theorists can believe in multiple contradictory ideas at the same time due to their intense commitment to disbelieving the official account, regardless of whether or not their belief system is incoherent.

- Overriding Suspicion, the second characteristic, refers to the scepticism they hold towards the official account of events. This suspicion causes them to disregard and deny any ideas that go against their beliefs, considering them a part of the conspiracy.

- The third characteristic is the belief that there is Nefarious Intent behind the motivations of presumed conspirators.

- The idea that Something Must be Wrong represents the fourth trait, and conspiratorial thinkers hold onto this idea even when their more specific theories become untenable.

- As the fifth characteristic, conspiracy theorists often consider themselves to be Persecuted Victims and courageous heroes, both targeted by, and fighting against the perpetrators of the conspiracy.

- Immunity to Evidence is the sixth characteristic, and conspiratorial thinkers tend to believe that all contradictory evidence must be part of the conspiracy. Stronger evidence against the perceived conspiracy merely indicates a stronger desire to remain undiscovered by the imagined perpetrators.

- The seventh and final characteristic is that they tend to Re-interpret Random events as being connected to the conspiracy.

These characteristics help make the conspiracy theory extremely resilient (Lewandowsky, Cook 2020). The CONSPIR tactic has proven to be an effective tool in linguistics. It has already been used by one of the two authors to detect Covid-19 conspiracy theories in the Spotify podcast *The Vaccine Conversation*[2] (Maglie 2022) and was therefore used as an approach for this study.

Moreover, one of the key drivers of conspiratorial thinking, as outlined by Douglas *et al.* (2017), is uncertainty. The need to decrease uncertainty can push people to accept conspiratorial explanations, especially in stressful or novel situations when there is a lack of information. Van Prooijen *et al.* (2020) emphasize the distinction between Anxious and Cognitive Uncertainty.

- Anxious Uncertainty (uncertainty as an anxious emotional experience), associated with an intuitive thinking style, is usually generated following threatening and consequential events and has been found to be an important driver of conspiracy beliefs.

- Cognitive Uncertainty (uncertainty due to lack of information), on the other hand, tends to associate with analytical thinking and as such has not been associated with increased conspiratorial thinking.

The authors of this research argue that since it has been demonstrated that anxious uncertainty can fuel conspiratorial thinking, the presence of a large number of phrases that evoke anxious uncertainty could be another warning sign that an information source supports or even instigates conspiracy theories. In contrast, if the source contains mainly cognitive uncertainty, it should not have a similar effect. In so doing, this research not only built on the foundation laid by Lewandowsky and Cook (2020) and the CONSPIR traits they analysed, but examined two additional characteristics: Anxious and Cognitive Uncertainty. The addition of these two types of uncertainty expands the original acronym to CONSPIRAC.

Specifically, this study investigated whether a cluster-based analysis (Moisl 2015) can identify linguistic structures that can serve as indicators of conspiratorial thinking in publicly disseminated news, in order to detect this type of news in the media. If common linguistic styles used by conspiracy theorists can be identified, they may be useful in increasing media literacy and critical thinking about the messages we read or hear online. Furthermore, since these messages may not always be intentional, learning more about the types of statements that fuel conspiratorial thinking and uncertainty could help reporters, journalists, and others who are responsible for relaying

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[2] https://immunityeducationgroup.org/podcast.

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reliable information to the public, to avoid using these types of speech. For this reason, the following research questions were addressed:

- Can a cluster-based analysis locate segments of text that contain characteristics of conspiratorial thinking? And if so,

- Which linguistic structures indicate traits of conspiratorial thinking in the corpus?

- Does the corpus contain a significant number of segments that express anxious uncertainty or cognitive uncertainty? And if so,

- Which linguistic structures are used to indicate different types of uncertainty?

2. Materials and methods

This research was carried out through a combination of techniques taken from corpus linguistics and psychological analysis. Corpus methods offer systematic means for pinpointing repeated and unique linguistic patterns in text and talk (Baker 2006, 2010; Baker, McEnery 2015; Leech 1991; McEnery, Wilson 2001) useful for identifying common and more singular representations of CONSPIRAC tactics. The corpus was created from the transcripts of the Australian podcast *Coronacast*.[3] At the time of corpus compilation, *Coronacast* contained 329 episodes (3.3.2020 to 30.6.2021), each of which had a duration of roughly ten minutes.

To create a sizeable corpus (Flowerdew 2004), it was decided to download transcripts of episodes of *Coronacast* from the first available transcript (2.4.2020) until the one-year anniversary of the declaration of the pandemic (11.3.2021). This resulted in a corpus of approximately eleven months' worth of episodes (235 episodes), containing 473,730 words. The analysis presented over the course of this work is based upon three established analytical perspectives on corpus data: wordlist, cluster extraction (i.e., groupings of 3 words frequently observed together) and manual analysis of concordance lines, each of which was conducted using *WordSmith Tools*, version 7 (Scott 2016). Additionally, the details page of each episode was examined for links to scientific articles or other resources as well as the presence of expert guests. This was done in order to acquire more information on the reliability of the news provided, and investigate the hosts' tendency to consider the existing literature valid, contributing to the evaluation of the category Immune to Evidence.

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[3] https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/coronacast/ (30.6.2021).

Using the WordList function of WordSmith Tools, it was possible to visualize a list of all words present in the corpus, as well as their frequencies. Only words with a frequency of 400 or more were considered for this study. Words of interest were selected based on relevance to the theme of Coronavirus (*COVID*, *COVID-19*, *virus*, *disease*, *coronavirus*, *vaccine/vaccines*, *spread*, *test*). In addition, other words were selected based on their common usage in phrases to express opinion and knowledge or lack thereof (*think*, *know*), phrases that express contradictory information (*but*, *don't*), phrases that refer to relationships between groups of people (*we*, *they*, *us*, *them*, *people*), and phrases that refer to potential dangers (*risk*). These words were used as node words for the cluster analysis. The final list of words included in this study is shown in Table 1.

WORD	RAW FREQUENCY	% OF TEXT	WORD	% OF TEXT	RAW FREQUENCY
they	4891	1	*Them*	0.2	905
we	4736	1	*Us*	0.2	844
but	3968	0.8	*COVID*	0.2	775
people	3269	0.7	*coronavirus*	0.2	761
virus	2000	0.4	*spread*	0.2	723
think	1616	0.3	*vaccines*	0.1	645
vaccine	1588	0.3	*risk*	0.1	550
don't	1321	0.3	*disease*	<0.1	471
know	1262	0.3	*test*	<0.1	400
COVID-19	1100	0.2	TOTAL WORDS		473,730

Table 1
Words analysed.

To perform the cluster extraction, each selected node word was analysed using Wordsmith Tools Concordance function, in order to identify the three-word clusters present for each word. This study concentrated on three-word clusters because longer clusters are "more phrasal in nature and correspondingly less common" (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 992). All concordance lines containing clusters with a frequency of 30 or more were analysed for the presence of traits of conspiratorial thinking, with the exception of the word *people*, which was found to have a relevant cluster with a frequency of 24. For this reason, it was decided to analyse all existing clusters for the word *people*. When clusters were identified, the words *test*, *spread*, *us*, *coronavirus*, and *don't* were excluded from the analysis. Neither *test* nor *spread* had clusters with a frequency of 30 or more, and while *coronavirus* and *us* had a small number of clusters above the desired frequency, none were considered relevant. It was decided not to include *don't* in the analysis because it was already present in clusters with other node words examined and thus did not introduce any new information into the analysis. The remaining words formed the base for the analysis of the clusters and concordances. The concordance lines of each cluster were searched for

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indications of the CONSPIR categories outlined by Lewandowsky and Cook (2020) and Anxious or Cognitive Uncertainty. This resulted in a total of 9 categories that a given segment of text could fall under: Contradictory Beliefs, Overriding Suspicion, Nefarious Intent, Something Must be Wrong, Persecuted Victim, Immune to Evidence, Re-interpreting of Randomness, Cognitive Uncertainty, and Anxious Uncertainty. Identified segments of text were recorded and categorized in the corresponding CONSPIRAC category.

Clusters that were found by the program, but that only contained two words, or clusters that were irrelevant for the purpose of this study were not included. For example, the cluster *"Norman Swan we"* was not included in the analysis of *we*, even though there were 64 concordance lines that included that cluster, as *Norman Swan* corresponds to the segment of text that introduces that host talking.

The next step, manual analysis of concordance lines, combined quantitative and qualitative approaches, allowing for a greater understanding of the meaning of words in the context in which they were used (Baker 2006). One disadvantage of using concordances is that although they allow for an examination of words in their original context of use, the contextual information is confined to the few words surrounding the words or clusters (Harvey 2012, 2013). For this reason, the analysis was extended to the entire paragraph/text the clusters were found in. For each identified cluster, all concordance lines were manually analysed. If, based on this analysis, the authors found indicators of one of the CONSPIRAC categories, the entire paragraph in which it appeared was examined to find more contextual information. This made it possible to confirm the suitableness of the categorization.

Finally, a central theme was identified for each text segment, which was more specific than the CONSPIRAC category, with the aim of individuating the target of the conspiratorial thinking. The segments were then sorted both by common theme to identify the frequency of their occurrence within the corpus as well as by date to create a diagram of the prevalence of these themes over time.

3. Results

Out of a total of 236 episodes, 50 (21.19%) included links to verifiable sources directly on the page for each episode, while 16 of the episodes (6.78%) included the presence of an expert guest. For example, the episode from 3.4.2020 had two references linked. The first was a news article in *The Conversation*, a news provider that claims to offer "research-based news and analysis" (The Conversation Media Group Ltd. 2021), while the second was a research article in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, used to support the

argument in favour of a short, sharp lockdown. As an additional example, on 14.4.2020, the podcast had Professor Ian Hickie, the co-director at the Brain and Mind Centre at the University of Sydney, as an expert guest to speak about mental health issues. Only one of the examined episodes had both resources and an expert guest [23.2.2021].

3.1. Frequency of clusters and CONSPIRAC categories

The ten most frequent clusters in the corpus are shown in Table 2, and the ten clusters which most frequently indicated characteristics of CONSPIRAC in Table 3.

CLUSTER	RAW FREQUENCY
of the virus	278
and I think	206
the people who	200
people who are	200
that they are	187
and they are	185
they are not	179
I think that	138
that we are	138
so I think	124

Table 2
Top ten most frequent clusters.

CLUSTER	CONSPIRAC TRAITS
we don't know	36
just don't know	17
you don't know	15
I don't know	12
and I think	9
I don't think	8
people coming in	8
the risk is	6
don't know where	6
the Pfizer vaccine	6

Table 3
Top 10 clusters representing the CONSPIRAC categories.

The most frequently used cluster by far was *"of the virus"*, with 278 instances. Interestingly, and perhaps more importantly, based on the analysis of concordance lines, none of these clusters was included in a context that indicated a trait of conspiratorial thinking. In fact, the only cluster in this list that was used frequently enough to be analysed in concordance lines that indicated conspiratorial thinking was *"and I think"*, which was found to indicate these traits 9 times (Overriding Suspicion=5, Something Must be Wrong=4) out of 206 instances in the corpus. *Think* is the node word most

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often used in these high-frequency clusters, being present in 3 out of the 10 in Table 2.

Focusing on the clusters that were used with CONSPIRAC traits (Table 3), there is once again a cluster far ahead of the others: *"we don't know"*. This cluster was used 36 times in sentences that were of interest to this study. Upon closer examination, this cluster was used 25 times in sentences indicating Cognitive Uncertainty, 10 times in those indicating Anxious Uncertainty, and once in a sentence indicating Overriding Suspicion. Even a cursory glance at Table 3 will reveal that *"don't know"* is the most popular 2-word sequence used in segments that indicate conspiratorial thinking, being present in half those listed.

Several CONSPIRAC categories emerged as being prevalent over the rest (Table 4). The most represented characteristic of those examined was Uncertainty, predominantly Cognitive Uncertainty, with 61 instances. Cognitive Uncertainty was primarily indicated by the two clusters *"we don't know"* (25 occurrences [o.]), and *"just don't know"* (11 o.). Anxious Uncertainty was roughly half as frequent as the cognitive variety and was mainly indicated by the cluster *"you don't know"* (12 o.). The second most frequent trait was Overriding Suspicion, and the cluster that was most often associated with suspicion was *"people coming in"* (8 o.). The final relevant trait was Something Must be Wrong, with 47 instances in the corpus. The clusters present in sentences that indicated this characteristic were various, and no single cluster particularly stood out from the rest. The node word that stood out, however, was *vaccine*, which was included in 15 of these clusters.

TRAIT FREQUENCY	
Contradictory Beliefs	0
Overriding Suspicion	53
Nefarious Intent	1
Something Must be Wrong	47
Persecuted Victims	8
Immune to Evidence	0
Re-interpreting Randomness	0
Anxious Uncertainty	33
Cognitive Uncertainty	61

Table 4
Frequency of CONSPIRAC categories.

The categories of Contradictory Beliefs*,* Immune to Evidence and Re-interpreting Randomness were not found to be indicated by any of the clusters analysed. Only the cluster *"and what they"* was found to indicate Nefarious Intent, and only eight showed indications of the speakers referring to themselves/their group as Persecuted Victims or brave heroes. The latter

category did not seem to be associated with any one cluster more than others, but the node word *people* was the one most frequently used in sentences of this type (4 o.). Consequently, 4 out of 9 CONSPIRAC categories were unable to be analysed due to their low frequency in this corpus.

3.2. Prevalent themes

Based on the in-depth analysis of the contexts in which each cluster of interest was inserted, several common themes emerged.

3.2.1. Overriding Suspicion

For the category Overriding Suspicion, the emergent themes were *suspicion of people from outside Australia* (13 instances), *vaccine-related suspicion* (8 instances), and *suspicion of the Victorian Government* (Victoria is an Australian state) (8 instances). Figure 2 shows the changes in frequency of the prevalent themes for this category over the period examined.

The most prominent theme is clearly *suspicion of people from outside Australia*, as indicated by the following examples (clusters italicized):

(1)   [T]here could be [virus circulating] because you've got *people coming in* from overseas. [Coronacast, 25.12.2020]
(2)   We are bringing in *people from overseas* with coronavirus, this is going to occur and it's going to occur in all jurisdictions […] this is now going to be part of Covid life moving forward. [Coronacast, 4.12.2020]

This theme seems to be present from June 2020, about four months after the beginning of the pandemic, to the end of the period examined. This message is, therefore, frequently repeated throughout the entire period the corpus covers.

The second most frequent themes were *vaccine-related suspicion* and *suspicion of the Victorian Government*. Vaccine-related suspicion is indicated by segments such as:

(3)   [W]e were talking about *the Oxford vaccine* yesterday and how maybe there should be more transparency around that process. [Coronacast, 15.9.2020]
(4)   [T]he worry here is that *they are going* to push for emergency use authorisation [of the Pfizer vaccine], presumably earlier than the other vaccines, but the question is, is it too early to know absolutely for sure that they are safe?[4] [Coronacast, 11.11.2020]

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[4] Square brackets are used in the examples to clarify the meaning of the phrase due to lack of context available in the quotation.

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This suspicion seems to come into play towards the middle of September 2020, and wane over time, with no examples present near the end of the period examined. A similar phenomenon is observable with the instances of *suspicion of the Victorian government*, which emerges in mid-July 2020, and seems to end by October 2020. Some segments exemplifying this theme are:

(5) *I think we* need to call upon Victoria to be much more transparent about their numbers [of healthcare setting transmissions.] [Coronacast, 21.8.2020]

(6) I suspect some data are being hidden from us [by the Victorian government] and *we don't know*. [Coronacast, 24.8.2020]
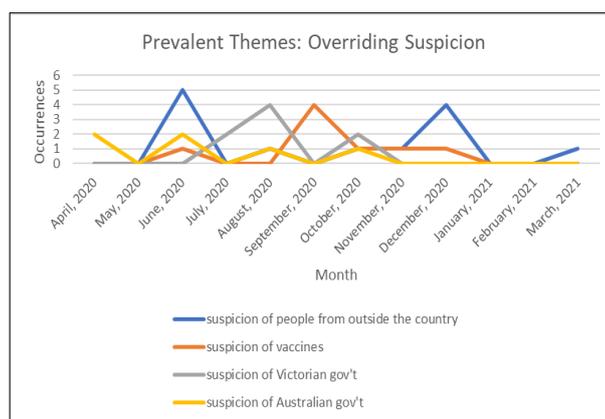
Figure 2
Frequency of the prevalent themes for Overriding Suspicion over time.

3.2.2. Nefarious Intent

Only one of the clusters analysed was found to be included in a sentence expressing nefarious intent: *"and what they"*. This cluster was included in a segment of text that accused Oxford-AstraZeneca of withholding information about their vaccine trials.

(7) *And what they* did in this press release was really naughty. They gave an average of 70% but it was an average over two separate trials. You can't do that, you cannot average two separate trials with different objectives, different doses and so on and say your average was 70%, and you can only assume that what they were trying to hide was that the full dose trial which was the larger of the two was actually quite disappointing." [Coronacast, 25.11.2020]

3.2.3. Something Must be Wrong

Moving on to the next relevant category, Something Must be Wrong, two themes emerge (Figure 3): *something must be wrong with the vaccine*,[5] and *something must be wrong with the way the pandemic is being managed*. The former is the most frequent, and is indicated by 18 text segments, including the following clusters:

(8)   *But we are* hearing that some people in Norway, some very frail, elderly people have died, a larger number than you'd expect, after getting this vaccine. [Coronacast, 18.1.2021]

(9)   *[T]he Pfizer vaccine* has some question marks around allergic reactions in some people. [Coronacast, 26.1.2021]

This message seems to begin in September 2020, and become stronger towards the beginning of December, ending abruptly in the new year with no examples present after February 2021.

The theme that *something must be wrong with the way the pandemic is being managed* is not very strong, being indicated by only 6 segments of text. It appears to be mostly present towards the beginning of the pandemic (May 2020) and seems to wane and disappear by November 2020. Some examples of this trait are:

(10) I think it's a really good question *and I think* there is a clear double standard [regarding safety measures for people found positive for covid inside the country and those arriving in the country]. [Coronacast, 2.9.2020]

(11) You can see why states want to protect the resources of their health departments and protect the people that live in there, *but it* [border closure] *does* seem like quite a blunt instrument to control spread when you think about the size of the states that we have at Australia. [Coronacast, 26.11.2020]

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[5] The instances considered referred to all vaccines, it was not an objective of this particular study to compare the suspicion facing different vaccines, although it would be an interesting topic for a future study.

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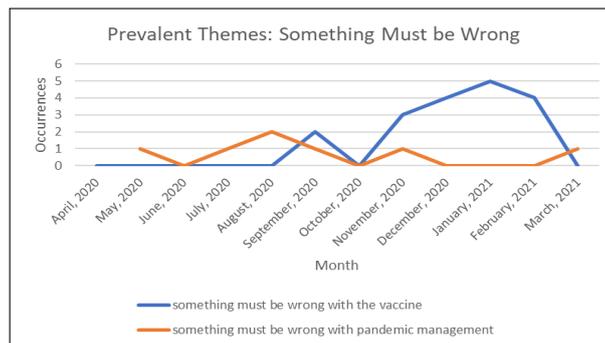
Figure 3

Frequency of the prevalent themes for Something Must be Wrong over time.

3.2.4. Persecuted Victim

This category was sparsely represented in the corpus, with only 8 instances being found. However, examination of the few instances present revealed the possibility of identifying a theme: *we are victims because other countries are hoarding vaccines*. Four segments of text carry this theme, including:

(12) [I]t's every country for themselves. That has been the failure of the pandemic so far, and you've got countries out there like Singapore and others hunting to actually buy up stock in advance in *the vaccines that* to them look most promising, and there is no guarantee that we will get stock. [Coronacast, 22.7.2020]

Three of these segments are from the same episode, and the phrase "vaccine nationalism" is used in both episodes containing instances of this theme. In the episode from July 22, the host repeatedly states that "it's every country for themselves".

3.2.5. Anxious Uncertainty

The next category is that of Anxious Uncertainty, from which emerged a singular theme (Figure 4): *uncertainty about unknown spread of the disease*. This theme was indicated by 26 segments of text, such as:

(13) That's a lot of virus circulating in Victoria where *you don't know* where it's going, who it's circulating amongst and where it's going to pop up next. [Coronacast, 3.8.2020]

(14) It has already spread to somebody else, so in other words another secondary or tertiary spread, *we don't know* how far the chain goes with this particular person, but it has already spread to somebody else. So the virus is out there in greater metropolitan Sydney. [Coronacast, 24.12.2020]

(15) [W]hether there was a super spreader or it was just a behavioural breach because there wasn't social distancing, *we don't know*. But it just shows you

how fragile our protection against this virus has become. [Coronacast, 14.7.2020]

(16) So any person anywhere in Western Australia with the slightest symptom "cough, cold, sore throat, fatigue, even fatigue and diarrhoea" has to be tested because it could be circulating and *you don't know* it, and if you are not getting tested, you could find out too late [Coronacast, 17.7.2020]

This theme seems to be present from the end of May 2020 to the end of December 2020, with the heaviest concentration in July and August 2020.
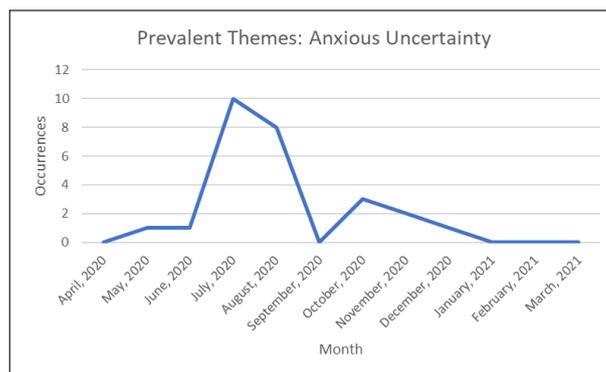
Figure 4
Frequency of the prevalent theme for Anxious Uncertainty over time.

3.2.6. Cognitive Uncertainty

Cognitive Uncertainty was the most frequently represented category and was almost twice as frequent as Anxious Uncertainty. The example of cognitive uncertainty focused on three main themes (Figure 5): *vaccine-related uncertainty*, *virus-related uncertainty*, and *uncertainty about unknown spread of the disease*. The first theme is the dominant one, and is indicated by 30 text segments, including:

(17) *[W]e don't know* yet. But there are trials going on to see whether BCG immunisation can actually protect you against COVID-19. [Coronacast, 13.5.2020]

(18) We're going to have to wait until all the data are analysed because some [vaccines] may well be better in older people than others but *we don't know* that yet. [Coronacast, 27.11.2020]

(19) I think that the lack of antibodies, *we don't know* what that means and we won't know what that means until we've looked at reinfection rates and the results of vaccine trials and whether or not it really matters whether you've got antibodies in your bloodstream or no. [Coronacast, 9.10.2020]

This particular theme appears to emerge slowly in April 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, increase in frequency by November/December 2020, and remain consistent until the end of the period examined.

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Virus-related uncertainty is the second most frequent theme in this category, with 16 examples found.

(20) *[W]e don't know* whether having the antibodies means that you are immune to a second infection [Coronacast, 8.5.2020]

(21) It's a very good question [whether people with COVID-19 need to be isolated from one another] which *I don't know* the answer to […] there is low risk of harm I imagine. [Coronacast, 7.4.2020]

This theme seems to have an opposite pattern to that of *vaccine-related uncertainty*, as it appears prevalent from April to November 2020, after which it wanes significantly.

The final emergent theme for this category was *uncertainty about unknown spread of the disease*, which appeared in 9 examples, and is expressed in segments such as:

(22) So there is now 14 cases in this cluster. *They don't know* where it comes from, but they think it has to be from the airport in some shape or form. They can't see where else would have come from. [Coronacast, 1.3.2021]

(23) [T]here are still cases where *they don't know* where the case came from, although that number will shrink as time goes on as they investigate and find the source. [Coronacast, 24.6.2020]

This theme appears in three different moments spread out throughout the period examined, as shown in the Figure 5 from the end of May to the middle of August 2020, from the end of December 2020 to mid-January 2021, and finally once more in March 2021.
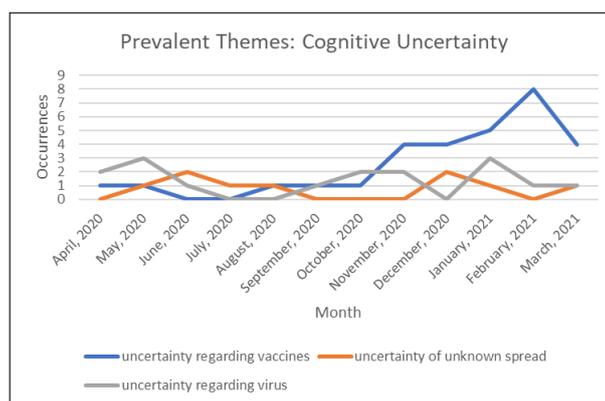
Figure 5
Frequency of the prevalent themes for Cognitive Uncertainty over time.

4. Discussion

4.1. CONSPIR categories

Based on the analysis of CONSPIR categories, the *Coronacast* podcast does not appear to significantly reinforce conspiratorial thinking. In fact, only two out of the original seven CONSPIR categories occurred frequently enough to be thoroughly analysed. These two categories were Overriding Suspicion, and Something Must be Wrong. The other categories of Contradictory Beliefs, Nefarious Intent, Persecuted Victim, and Re-interpreting Randomness were either infrequent or absent in the corpus. Since these are major aspects of conspiratorial thinking, this podcast does not appear to be a strong instigator of conspiratorial beliefs.

It has been argued that a certain level of conspiratorial thinking may actually be beneficial, as it can encourage governments to be more transparent, or even uncover real conspiracies (Swami, Coles 2010). It could, therefore, be hypothesized that the questioning of the government and its strategies, and of vaccines and the processes related to them, may be an attempt to increase communication transparency. Perhaps the most telling characteristic of conspiratorial thinking, Nefarious Intent, is almost completely absent. In fact, the only segment of text encountered which expresses any degree of nefarious intent regards the behaviour of Oxford-AstraZeneca with the reporting of their vaccine trials. While the host does accuse Oxford-AstraZeneca of withholding information, this comment seems to be an attempt to criticize the vaccine producer's methods of reporting vaccine efficacy, rather than to create vaccine fear. Although the hosts of *Coronacast* are willing to criticize and draw attention to potential governmental flaws, their strategies, and vaccines, they never go so far as to suggest they may have the intent to cause harm.

Also lacking completely are examples of Contradictory Beliefs and Re-interpreting Randomness. The hosts seem to take great care to relay information as it is received, and to correct themselves when it is revealed that previous information or interpretations were incorrect.

It is worth noting that contradictory statements are not likely to be uttered in the immediate vicinity of one another. Therefore, a limitation of the methods used in this study is that an analysis of the clusters in the text would be unlikely to reveal contradictory beliefs. It would be necessary to collect various statements pertaining to the same subjects over time and compare them to see if they eventually contradict themselves, without providing a legitimate reason, such as the emergence of novel, previously unknown information.

The hosts do not seem to jump to conclusions based on random events,

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rather they follow the information as it is uncovered, expressing themselves based on the literature available at the time. The tendency to rely on scientific research is also indicated by the large portion of episodes (27.6%) that were linked to sources of information such as government websites or scientific articles, or which brought in expert guests.

Despite some comments indicating suspicion or criticism of vaccines, the hosts are very pro-vaccine, as they express repeatedly. Furthermore, when the dates in which these comments were made are considered, we can see that vaccine-related suspicion seems to die out around December 2020, about the time when vaccines started being rolled out. Statements that something might be wrong with vaccines do, however, continue until the end of February 2021 near the end of the period examined (Figure 3). It is possible that they may continue after this period, but considering the increased successful administration of vaccines, it is likely that vaccine-related uncertainty has only continued to decline.

Since only 8 instances of the category Persecuted Victim were found in the corpus, the hosts do not seem to consider themselves or their groups as victims, or to suggest they may be the only ones combatting nefarious forces. The only repeated theme, that Australians might be victims since other countries are buying up all the vaccines, was present in only two episodes, making it difficult to consider it a repetitive message.

Perhaps the most relevant instance of suspicion was that regarding people from outside the country. The message that people from outside the country were bringing in Covid-19 was prevalent throughout the entire period examined, a frequently repeated message (Figure 2). While it is true that, since Australia is an island nation, the virus would necessarily have to be brought into the country from the outside, the way this message is phrased often makes it seem as if foreigners are to be viewed with suspicion as potential carriers of the virus. The fact that it is regularly repeated may cause people to be more likely to believe this message is true (Fazio *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, the action of identifying an outgroup responsible for current problems can be linked to the social motives that drive moral panic theories (Baker *et al.* 2008) and conspiracy theories (Douglas *et al.* 2017). Therefore, this tendency seems to relay the message "People from outside Australia are the problem, not us. Be suspicious of them". This tendency was commonplace during the Covid-19 pandemic, as leaders from various countries instrumentalized nationalism to increase solidarity among their own people, leading to resentment of those from foreign nations (Wodak 2021; Zhai, Yan 2022). Consequences of surging nationalism and suspicion of foreigners were evidenced by the increase in discrimination against people from China in particular, but responses to the outbreak disproportionately

affected migrants and people of colour all over the world (Devakumar *et al.* 2020).

To answer our research questions concerning the localization of linguistic structures containing characteristics of conspiratorial thinking, analysis of the clusters and concordance lines in the corpus found examples of CONSPIR traits, however, these were not reliably associated with any specific three-word clusters. The only cluster that seemed potentially linked to a tendency to express suspicion was *"people coming in"*, which was present 24 times in the corpus, 8 of which expressed suspicion towards people entering Australia from outside the country. It is possible that this type of analysis used with a different corpus may reveal diverse results, given that the source for this study seemed to provide reliable information. As demonstrated in a previous study (Maglie 2022), a possibility for future research could be to examine a more obviously conspiratorial source to see if there is a more frequent use of similar linguistic structures. The concordance line analysis was more successful than the cluster analysis, evidenced by the fact that this method allowed us to pick out 109 instances of language that fit the CONSPIR categories, which increased to 203 instances when the AC categories were also considered. It seems that it is necessary to combine quantitative and qualitative methods to effectively find and identify these types of speech, as language is a complex phenomenon, requiring context to be able to reliably identify the subtleties of discourse. Overall, the lemma *think* appears to be the most important node word in terms of use in CONSPIR phrases. This is unsurprising, considering *think* is the verb people most frequently use to express their thoughts and opinions, and this is where conspiratorial thinking would be likely to emerge.

4.2. Uncertainty

Analysing the text segments that expressed uncertainty, in accordance with our research questions, also painted *Coronacast* in a generally positive light. In fact, the vast majority of the instances of uncertainty were categorized as Cognitive Uncertainty, as opposed to Anxious Uncertainty. As previously discussed, Cognitive Uncertainty is not considered a driver of conspiracy beliefs, whereas Anxious Uncertainty is. The hosts try to express uncertainty, which has been a constant during the Covid-19 pandemic, in a way that transmits the message, "We don't have this information at the moment, but we're working on it." They indicate that the information will arrive eventually with phrases like "there are trials going on" (example 17), or "We're going to have to wait until all the data are analysed" (example 18). Even the simple adverb *yet* (examples 17, 18) implies that in time there will be answers to these questions.

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When discussing the possibility of the virus spreading unchecked, this message acquired a more anxious tone. The majority of instances of uncertainty about this topic were expressed in an anxiety-inducing manner. The use of phrases such as "the virus is out there" (example 14), or "it just shows you how fragile our protection against this virus has become" (example 15), are likely to evoke feelings of nervousness and anxiety in listeners, causing more fear as to "where it's going to pop up next" (example 13).

A secondary phenomenon that emerged when analysing Cognitive Uncertainty was the way that virus-related uncertainty was high at the beginning of the period examined and diminished over time, which seems logical considering coronavirus is a novel disease about which we acquired more information over time, reducing uncertainty. The opposite was observed when considering vaccine-related uncertainty, which began slowly but became quite prominent towards the end of the period examined, coinciding with the mass administration of vaccines. It therefore seems that vaccine-related uncertainty was expressed in an increasing degree throughout their development. It could be hypothesized that this uncertainty will likely decrease in the coming months, as the effects of mass immunization are observed, and the vaccines are given to more and more people.

Looking at clusters, *"you don't know"* or *"you just don't know"* were more frequently associated with Anxious Uncertainty, whereas *"we don't know"* was more commonly used to express Cognitive Uncertainty, providing information without emotion-evoking phrases. Since *we* is a collective pronoun that includes the speaker, it could refer to all Australians, including the hosts, but occasionally seems like it may refer only to the scientific community (examples 18, 19). For example, in example (19)*,* it is clear that the scientific community, not the average citizen, will be looking at the results of vaccine trials and reinfection rates. *You*, while also used collectively, is frequently used to refer to people in general (i.e., it is an impersonal construction), potentially excluding the speaker, and in this case seems to be used to speak about the Australian public (examples 13, 16).

You almost seems to tell the public "Watch out, because you don't know where the virus is or who might have it". It instils suspicion and fear, rather than only conveying information. The words "you could find out too late" (example 16) are particularly fear inducing, conveying a sense of panic, as if there might be a time limit before disaster strikes. We can also see a possible instance of blame here, as "if you are not getting tested" (example 16), which again uses *you* to collectively refer to the public, implies that a large part of the population may not be behaving as they should be, according to the hosts.

This implicit differentiation creates a divide between the general public and the scientific community, subtly indicating the former as the reason for the unknown spread which they should fear. While the analysis of clusters was unable to locate a pattern in the language used in *Coronacast* for the original seven CONSPIR traits, it was able to draw out this peculiarity in the usage of *"we don't know"* vs. *"you don't know"* when speaking about the virus outbreak and uncertainty. It would be interesting to see if this tendency to implicitly differentiate between the general population and the scientific community is also present in other sources of health information, and whether or not those sources use language that contains traits of conspiratorial thinking.

To respond to our research question regarding the types of language used to indicate uncertainty, the most relevant lemma for the AC categories was *know*. When used in conjunction with *we*, this verb seemed to frequently refer to the scientific community and favoured Cognitive Uncertainty, creating the image of a search for answers to the many questions we all have during these trying times. When used with *you*, however, it appeared to take on a more anxious tone and to refer more frequently to laypeople, and create a feeling of anxiety about the spread of the disease and fear of new outbreaks (Anxious Uncertainty). The way the hosts speak about what they know appears to be key in determining the tone of the uncertainty they express. Since uncertainty and doubt are some of the key motivators that push people to turn to conspiracy theories (Douglas *et al.* 2017), it is vital to avoid creating more anxiety and confusion when issuing health information. As such, these findings could be useful to those who have the responsibility of distributing this information.

As a final note, the analysis of the podcast's use of resource materials, as well as recent research by Maglie (2022), raises the question of a potential additional trait of conspiratorial communication: Indeterminacy. This trait is explained as the "reference to studies or to research that cannot be easily or exactly identified". It seems to be a habit of this type of communication, referring to *research* or to *sources* without providing specifics of those sources. For instance, Maglie (2022) refers to another podcast, *The Vaccine Conversation*, in which the host, Dr. Bob, frequently speaks about having *data* without providing a verifiable source of this information. While this was not a problem in *Coronacast*, it could be an interesting subject for future research. The addition of this trait would create a new acronym: CONSPIRACI. This updated acronym includes the two types of uncertainty examined in this study, as well as Indeterminacy. It should be noted that, although the letter A is also included in Maglie's research, there it represents a different characteristic, that of Semantic Approximation, used to suggest that podcasters' opinion differs to some degree from the official account,

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which is seen as deceptive and therefore criticized (Maglie 2022).

5. Conclusions

This study has examined a large corpus made from the transcripts of a single podcast over the course of nearly a year of the Covid-19 pandemic. The application of a text analysis focused on clusters allowed us to examine such a large quantity of text in a relatively short amount of time. This was done with the objective of isolating specific patterns in the language used by the hosts indicating traits of conspiratorial thinking. These traits were defined using the acronym CONSPIRAC, derived from a combination of conspiratorial thinking categories proposed both by Lewandowsky and Cook (2020) and by the authors. It was found that among the three-word clusters examined, specifically those including the node word *know* were frequently used to express uncertainty. The anxious uncertainty expressed by the hosts seemed to focus on the spread of the disease, inciting fear in listeners. The frequent repetition of this message may resonate with those who tend towards a more conspiratorial thinking style, making them more susceptible to conspiracy theories. There also seemed to be a slight difference in the use of *we* vs. *you* in these clusters, pointing towards an unconscious tendency to differentiate between the scientific community and laypeople. This division, however subtle, may implicitly make scientists and other health authorities part of an out-group who are the only ones who possess information, leading to suspicion and resentment from a fearful population that becomes more likely to turn to conspiracy theories to reduce uncertainty and feel safe.

Despite these criticisms, the podcast examined, *Coronacast*, generally appears to do a good job relaying information, and with a few minor adjustments, can easily avoid those types of messages encouraging conspiratorial thinking.

The type of analysis performed does appear to have limitations, in that some of the CONSPIRAC categories were not easily found through a cluster analysis. Further research would be necessary to see if some adjustments of this method could be more effective in finding these types of language.

The hope is that this information can be useful for research into the topics of conspiratorial thinking, conspiracy theories and misinformation. Hopes are also high that these findings can be useful in making people less susceptible to the effects of misleading messages and conspiracy theories in the media, as well as helping information providers to better communicate information in a way that does not encourage the belief in or the formation of conspiracy theories. In this research we have seen how certain ways of speaking can confer specific ideas, sometimes independently of the intended

message. This is most obvious when it comes to expressing uncertainty. While it is clear the Covid-19 pandemic is a situation in which uncertainty is widespread and unavoidable, the way we express this uncertainty in media, which can reach enormous numbers of people, is vital to the prevention of the spread of conspiracy theories.

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TALKING ABOUT *FREEDOM*
Figurative tropes on the *Marginal Revolution* blog

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Abstract – The present paper looks into social engineering and social positioning on the *Marginal Revolution* blog (2012 to present), hosted by economists Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok at the Marginal Revolution University. The focus is on the socio-pragmatic effects (Colston 2015) for speakers of verbal irony and figurative tropes like hyperbole – which rely on contrast – metaphor and metonymy – which rely on comparison – and other, less represented tropes. As a follow-up to Cacchiani (2019), we concentrate on the discourse around the cultural keyword (Williams 2015/1976) *freedom*. Qualitative data analysis suggests that core to active participants make recourse to figurative tropes for a number of effects. Their goal is to control and communicate specialized knowledge, argue their opinions, align or disagree with discussants within the blogging community, and ultimately reinforce their credibility. More particularly, verbal irony and related tropes do not appear to be a feature of posts about questions that are clearly critical in economics. On the other hand, they are found in conversation starters that address smaller questions, quirks, and apparently unimportant anecdotes and events of the day, and can readily emerge in the comments, as the thread unfolds. As regards socio-pragmatic effects, when present, figurative tropes appear to serve the purposes of emotion expression and elicitation, rather than cater for the personality-related needs of the interlocutors or express downright aggression.

Keywords: blogs; economics; figurative tropes; pragmatic effects; verbal irony.

1. Introduction

Working along the lines of research in the extended participatory framework (Herring, Stein, Virtanen 2013; Jenkins *et al.* 2006) of the Web, we understand blogging as social action, meant to communicate knowledge, as well as personal and community perspectives. In this context, the present paper concentrates on the socio-pragmatic effects of verbal irony and other figurative tropes on the *Marginal Revolution*[1] blog (henceforth, MR) – primarily a scholarly blog (Puschmann 2013):

> MR began in August of 2003 and there have been new posts daily since that
> time. In numerous reviews and ratings over the years Marginal Revolution has

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[1] https://marginalrevolution.com/ (1.7.2023).

consistently been ranked as the best or one of the best economic blogs on the web, but it is more (and less) than that, also representing the quirks of its authors.[2]

The blog is hosted on the Marginal Revolution University integrated platform[3] by Professor Tyler Cowen and his co-author, Professor Alex Tabarrok, of George Mason University. Their stated purpose is to foster debate about economics as a tool to understand facts and "take small steps toward a much better world". Specifically, examples for analysis were manually selected from a small collection of posts and associated comments about the cultural keyword (Williams 2015/1976) *freedom*.[4] As a follow-up to Cacchiani (2019), the paper continues discussion about verbal irony and related figurative tropes within topic-centric (Puschmann 2013) blogging communities (Schmidt 2007). Our research question is one about their particular socio-pragmatic effects: How do figurative tropes affect the ways in which relatively active ratified participants negotiate and control specialized knowledge and domain expertise, their role, position, status and personal credibility (Petitat 2004)?

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief introduction to figurative tropes and socio-pragmatic effects (Colston 2015, 2017). Section 3.1 is a qualitative study of naming strategies, while Section 3.2 concentrates on posts and comments about *freedom*. The chapter closes with some final remarks in the Conclusions.

2. Figurative tropes and socio-pragmatic effects

2.1. Figurative tropes

This section provides working definitions of the most common tropes found in our data, as stand-alone figures, anomalous figures with embedded subtypes, or blurred/mixed figures. In accordance with Colston's (2015, pp. 110-143) extensive critical review of the issue, we argue that understanding figurative tropes and the meanings they convey involves shared common ground, or knowledge and conceptual structures that are shared between S(peaker) and H(earer) – including recent co-experience, community membership, the particular context, and mechanisms for deriving salient meaning (e.g., conventionality, familiarity, frequency, prototypicality).

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[2] https://marginalrevolution.com/about (1.7.2023)
[3] https://www.mruniversity.com (1.7.2023).
[4] The Marginal Revolution blog was last accessed on July 1 2023. The examples under scrutiny were retrieved from blog posts and comments published between 2012 and the first six months of 2023.

A first set of figures comprises *customized and standard idioms*, *proverbs* and *aphorisms* – which depend heavily on their fixedness and basis in the particular culture for their comprehension (Colston 2015, p. 130).

With *verbal irony*, shared common ground enables H to compute differences between the particular utterance *u* and the ironic interpretation (Colston 2015, p. 108) via *relevant inappropriateness* – where relevance and inappropriateness are not coextensive. That is, an utterance *u* is ironical if

1. *u* is contextually inappropriate.
2. *u* is (at the same time) relevant.
3. *u* is construed as having been uttered intentionally and with awareness of the contextual inappropriateness by S.
4. S intends that (part of) his or her audience recognizes points 1 to 3.
5. Unless H construes *u* as being unintentional irony, in which case 3 to 4 do not apply. (Attardo 2007 [1993], p. 159)

Another figure that relies on contrast is *hyperbole*, in that S states something counterfactual to the actual referent situation:

1. S finds an event/situation of greater/lesser magnitude than is normal, or the event/situation clashes with his/her expectations and desires.
2. In *u*, S attempts to make the violation more prominent. S points out the discrepancy to H by inflating its actual magnitude, in line with the psychological principle whereby larger things are more noticeable than smaller things.

Other types of contrast effects can be created by *understatements* – which "typically present referent events in terms that are lesser in magnitude, quantity, and prevalence than is actually the case; […] the perception of the referent events [may] shift accordingly" (Colston 1997, in Colston 2015, p. 35).

Finally, as far as comparison, similarity and contiguity are concerned, *metaphor* and *simile* involve linguistic juxtaposition, or the ability to symbolically connect targets and vehicles (Colston 2015, p. 41), based on conceptual mappings "from a propositional or image-schematic model in one domain to a corresponding structure in another domain" (Lakoff 1987, pp. 113-114). *Metonymy* aligns elements within one domain, with *synecdoche* exemplifying the shift from whole to parts.

2.2. Pragmatic effects

We use the term *pragmatic effect* to refer to the "additional complex meaning […] accomplished by a speaker's use of figurative language" Colston (2015, p. 5). Whereas some figures tend to exclusively associate with particular functions, others have been shown to produce a larger set of effects. The

other way round, we can identify general pragmatic effects, or more global pragmatic effects that are germane to most if not all figures (Section 2.2.1), and effects that are specific to single figures and figure families (Section 2.2.2).

Very broadly, Verbal Irony and Hyperbole are used for Persuasion, for Meaning Enhancement and for Highlighting Discrepancies. Verbal Irony and Understatement can manage face issues and minimize face-threats (Sperber, Wilson 1986), for Social Engineering and Politeness, as they downgrade the strength and type of negativity expressed. Tension Reduction and Catalyzation effects can also enhance the degree of social interaction and Alignment, minimize cognitive dissonance and reinforce community membership. Conversely, when used to convey (strong) negative emotions, Rhetorical Questions, Hyperbole and Verbal Irony can achieve Impoliteness.

2.2.1. General pragmatic effects

General pragmatic effects comprise Ingratiation, Mastery, Persuasion, Social Engineering, Catalyzation, and Efficiency (Colston 2015, p. 66-71).

Ingratiation is an oblique compliment that, if successful, increases intimacy, appreciation, camaraderie. The bonding mechanism works as follows:

1. S displays his assumption that H is able to interpret the figurative utterance.

2. H understands the figurative utterance as intended and appreciates S's assumption about H's ability to achieve that rich interpretation, possibly in a privileged exchange that leaves out other people in the context of utterance. (Colston 2015, p. 67)

Mastery is another general pragmatic effect. It refers to S's capacity to use all levels of sophisticated figurative language to master (i.e. display control of) the situation. (Colston 2015, p. 67). Briefly, mastery refers to the ways in which figurative language can achieve social positioning for S.

Third, *Persuasion* refers to the ability of figurative language to "provide some kind of meaning enhancement in a typically relatively compact package" (Colston 2015, pp. 67-68), e.g., meaning enrichment in metaphors, or highlighting discrepancies between expectations and reality in hyperbole.[5]

Social Engineering is closely related to, and often undistinguishable from, mastery display. The term "[covers] a wide range of social positioning

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[5] *Figurative Outing* refers to the opposite effect: figurative language may backfire, and H effectively sabotage S's attempts at achieving positive pragmatic effects (Colston 2015, p. 68).

maneuvers, [… which] allow speakers to engineer, to a point, the social status of the people around them" (Colston 2015, p. 69).

Catalyzation refers to the role that figurative language can have in inviting, lubricating, or invigorating conversation. It can interact with ingratiation and invoke H's deeper understandings, enable shared meaning, and reveal attitudes toward relevant content.

Efficiency is a feature of all figurative language, which enables speakers to rapidly pack and readily concentrate much meaning in a relatively compact format. (Colston 2015, p. 70).

2.2.2. Pragmatic effects specific to single figures or figure families

Unlike general effects, *specific pragmatic effects* are initiated only by individual figures, figure families and forms. The term applies to Expressing Negativity, Enhancing Meaning, Highlighting Discrepancies, Objectification, Identification, Humor, Emotion Expression/Elicitation, Extollation, Politeness and Impoliteness, Tension Reduction, Machiavellianism. Their presence and strength vary with the figure's context (social, semantic and other contexts), and with any accompanying pragmatic effect (Colston 2015, pp. 71-85).

Expressing Negativity, as in complaints, derision, condemnation, etc., is one of the most frequent pragmatic effects. While it can be accomplished by many figures, it appears to be one of the dominant effects carried out by aggressive forms of *verbal irony* (e.g. sarcasm), *hyperboles* that signal disappointed expectations, and *synecdoches*, which can debase a person by aligning them with one of their lesser or related attributes (Colston 2015, p. 72).

Another pragmatic effect is *Enhancing Meaning*. While all figures enhance semantic meaning in various ways, *metaphors* are especially strong at concisely conveying rich semantic and schematic meaning. They can readily achieve all pragmatic effects and blend with other figures.

Highlighting Discrepancies, we have seen, is mainly the job of *verbal irony* figures and of *hyperbole* (Section 2.1).

Objectification is achieved, among others, by relatively *fixed* culture-dependent expressions, such as *idioms*, *proverbs* and *aphorisms*. It is closely related to *Extollation* (i.e. praising certain virtues) and can add to Persuasion. Both *fixed expressions* and culturally-embedded *contextual expressions* can variously contribute to *Identification*, or alignment.

Humor is obtained by many kinds of figurative language. It is a pragmatic effect germane to intentional and unintentional *irony*. Similarly to irony, humor relies on a set of knowledge resources. Most notably, from bottom to top: Language; Narrative Strategy, which may place irony at various points along the textual vector; Target, i.e. the 'victim' of irony;

Situation or the overall macro-script serving as the background for the events described in the utterance; Script Opposition and Overlap; and Logical Mechanisms for modelling incongruities and their resolutions (Attardo 2017).

Other pragmatic effects that are produced by many kinds of figurative language are *Emotion Expression* and *Elicitation.* Take *synecdoche*, which may express S's negative attitude towards the referent; or *hyperbole* and *verbal irony*, which can reveal surprise as well as negative emotions; and *metaphor*, which may express and elicit all sorts of emotions.

Politeness may contribute to general pragmatic effects such as Social Engineering and Ingratiation. It is also used to downgrade Expressing Negativity, and is typically obtained by figures that show consideration for the addressee, e.g. *euphemisms* and *indirect requests* (Colston 2015, pp. 77-78). Conversely, figures like *verbal irony* and *ironic restatements*, *rhetorical questions* and *indirectness* can be used to withhold Politeness and convey *Impoliteness*, at the service of Expressing Negativity and more subtle effects (e.g. manipulating a person's behavior or scolding them) (Colston 2015, pp. 78-81).

Importantly, profanities and *dysphemisms*, Humor, and general social bonding mechanisms such as Ingratiation or Catalyzation can help obtain *Tension Reduction*, thus breaking down excessive formality (Colston 2015, p. 81). A completely different effect is *Machiavellianism*, which puts the Hearer at a disadvantage, and may arise when S is deliberately deceptive (as known to the Overhearer), but H is not aware of his/her duplicity; or, S's utterance is deliberately vague and no clarification is given to assist with the current interpretation.

3. Social positioning on MR

After having looked at figurative tropes and pragmatic effects, our attention can now be turned towards figurative tropes as mechanisms for social maneuvering on MR.

MR is a heterogeneous community (Mauranen 2013) of scholarly experts, professionals and enthusiasts, commenters and lay spectators. They interact towards the community joint enterprise, to share and debate domain expertise and context-specific information (Puschmann, Mahrt 2012), for a multiplicity of purposes. For instance, reinforcing authority/credibility and enhancing visibility (Luzón 2012), furthering research (Kuteeva 2016), and/or disseminating knowledge (Cacchiani 2019). Scholarly communication comes under public scrutiny (Puschmann 2015: 'context collapse').

On MR, mutual engagement and relative interactional (a)symmetry vary significantly. As it turns out, a relatively small core group are actively engaged discussants and commenters, but most community members are

passive or legitimate peripheral participants (Lave, Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). Also, of all discussants, Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok have a privileged role: on the footing side, they are the authors, principals and animators; on the participation side, they address ratified participants and bystanders (other registered bloggers) as well as overhearers (unregistered readers) (Goffman 1974, 1981). They keep the blog running, select topics and start discussion (Cacchiani 2019). Accordingly, this section concentrates on the multiple ways in which core members and (relatively) active discussants use verbal irony and other figurative tropes for general and specific pragmatic effects, in order to influence and shape what is believed to be collectively known, interlocutors' roles, status, credibility (Petitat 2004), and social positioning (Colston 2015).

3.1. Naming strategies and figurative tropes

MR is "integrated into the entrenched ecosystem of the scientific community" (Kjellberg 2010, in Puschmann, Mahrt 2012, p. 174). Core/active discussants are (highly) established and (well) known peers that engage in internal and external scholarly communication. Though with varying degrees of transparency, full names (1), given names, short forms and/or initials (2) make real identities easily identifiable – among experts, at least.

(1) *Richard Berger*, *Ian Maitland* (business professor), *(Not That) Bill O'Reilly* (i.e., not Bill O'Reilly, the best-selling author and now disgraced political commentator, but most likely William O'Reilly, lecturer in history) (from Cacchiani 2019)

(2) *Cliff, Dan*, *Derek*, *Luis*, *Ricardo* (for Ricardo Hausman), *Alan W* (given name + initial), *byomtov* (Bernard Yomtov); *JWatts* (addressed as *Joan* by other bloggers); *CG* (adapted from Cacchiani 2019)

Shifting between nickname/pseudonym and name strongly reflects the close link between real and online social communities. E.g., *Super Destroyer* (5) is also addressed as *Steven* by other users.

   Less established community members may want to use pseudonyms to hide their offline identities. Active discussants, however, may use pseudonyms for other reasons. For instance, to signal their likings and opinions, e.g. *Thiago Ribeiro* or *Art Deco* (3). Another example is overstatement in names that express what the persona sees as highly desirable attributes. Consider metonymy in *JK Brown* and *Thor* (4), which epitomize strength, a yearning for radical change and a desire to speak out loud, via antonomasia.

(3) *Thiago Ribeiro* (Brazilian football player); *Art Deco* (art movement)

(4) *JK Brown* (Quentin Tarantino movie, leading role, and leading
      blaxploitation action movie actress Pam Grier); *Thor* (hammer-wielding god,
      super-hero in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Marvel movie series, and
      leading actor Chris Hemsworth) (Cacchiani 2019)

Similar examples are descriptive names such as *A Black Man* (expressing
ethnicity) and *Woke* (for a user that is especially alert to racial prejudice,
sexual discrimination and social inequalities in general) (5). In a slightly
different manner, *Lord Action*, *Super Destroyer* and *The God of Thunder* (6)
express the bloggers' belief in strong action plans, and possibly overstate
his/her commitment and status within the blogging community, via recourse
to the extremely high degree (*Super*), to honorifics and the expression of
social roles (*Lord*), and to the highest element in the hierarchical metaphor
system known as The Great Chain of Being (*God*) (Lakoff 1987).

(5) *A Black Man*; *Woke*
(6) *Lord Action*; *Super Destroyer*; *The God of Thunder*

Given that the blog's mission is to promote progress and equality, posing as
alert to inequalities, keen on changing the world and able to appreciate beauty
and excellence amounts to an attempt at improving personal status, while
contributing to identification and alignment, which are social bonding
mechanisms (Colston 2015).
      Descriptive names like *Troll Me* and *Quantitative Sneezing* (7) provide
bloggers with an equally high degree of perceived anonymity while playing
with different types of verbal irony.

(7) *Troll Me*; *Quantitative Sneezing* (Cacchiani 2019)

With *Troll Me*, an overstatement (Cacchiani 2019), the blogger poses as a
snobbish expert who takes a high standing within a community that s/he
appears to challenge. Verbal irony ultimately mitigates the potential for
aggression and opposition. The user appears to express negativity, promote
impoliteness and encourage face-threatening behaviors by inciting others to
try their best at intentionally angering and frustrating him/her (Oxford
English Dictionary, OED: TROLL, *v*. draft additions March 2006). Yet, in
keeping with conventions in the offline academic community, on MR peers
only share and debate issues frankly, without engaging in such malpractice.
In this context, promoting what runs contrary to shared values and accepted
social conventions realizes an insincere speech act and, for that matter, is
understood as an instance an ironic inversion that shades into corrective
irony. Troll Me's ability to challenge and control online malpractice is likely
to command admiration among core participants within the blogging
community – which is key to reinforcing associative affiliation and

promoting Troll Me's status.

      Quantitative Sneezing is a slightly different example, where metaphor, metonymy and verbal irony mix up with understatement, for efficiency and meaning enhancement. As extensively argued in Cacchiani (2019), this improbable word combination is a ludic instance of highly incongruous and inappropriate self-doubting and self-deprecating irony. It encourages us to construe the blogging persona as a non-expert that is willing to learn and understand. The blogger has a positively playful and pleasantly humorous take on his/her own patently limited expertise. This cannot be the case, given that active MR participation minimally requires intermediary to advanced knowledge of models and theories that underlie discussion of the issues presented. Quantitative Sneezing positions himself/herself as marginal and marginalized while acknowledging the superiority of other community members. S/he appears to be less than s/he might actually be. As a matter of fact, the name describes the blogger as not up to the task: s/he would be only able to use some sort of quantitative data analysis (and certainly not inferential statistics) to prove or disprove little 'sneezes'. 'Sneezes' can be interpreted metaphorically as unimportant claims and pet theories, or useless research on obscure and bizarre topics that are given more effort than they are worth. Additionally, they can be interpreted metonymically as a form of personal synecdoche, from which we infer self-deprecation. The pragmatic effect of this form of self-doubting is ingratiation, which is intended to act as a bonding mechanism and promote associative affiliation, for social engineering and positioning within the blogging community.

3.2. Figurative tropes in MR threads

This section provides a qualitative investigation into the uses and functions of figurative tropes and verbal irony in posts (Section 3.2.1) and comments (Section 3.2.2) around the word *freedom*.

3.2.1. Figurative tropes in MR posts

Generally, posts on critical questions – such as freedom of religion, economic freedom, diversity and economic growth – require discussants to be conversant with state-of-the-art models and theories. Verbal irony, hyperbole and the expression of (strong) emotions are off-the-mark. As a way of illustration, consider (8) and (9), which provide extracts from research articles and clearly align with the conventions for the genre (Bondi 2021).

(8)   ***The relationship between religious, civil, and economic freedoms***
        by **Tyler Cowen** May 20, 2021 at 12:52 am in Data Source Economics Law
        Political Science Religion
        From <u>Christos Makridis</u>:

This paper studies the relationship between religious liberty and economic freedom. First, three new facts emerge: (a) religious liberty has increased since 1960, but has slipped substantially over the past decade; (b) the countries that experienced the largest declines in religious liberty tend to have greater economic freedom, especially property rights; (c) changes in religious liberty are associated with changes in the allocation of time to religious activities. Second, using a combination of vector autoregressions and dynamic panel methods, improvements in religious liberty tend to precede economic freedom. Finally, increases in religious liberty have a wide array of spillovers that are important determinants of economic freedom and explain the direction of causality. Countries cannot have long-run economic prosperity and freedom without actively allowing for and promoting religious liberty.
Via the excellent Kevin Lewis.

(9)   ***Does Diversity Reduce Freedom or Growth?***
        by Alex Tabarrok October 16, 2016 at 7:22 am in Economics Political Science Religion
        The founding father of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, credits 'social discipline' for the phenomenal economic rise of his country (Sen, 1999). Countries such as Singapore apparently demonstrate that autocratic measures are probably necessary, particularly in culturally fractionalized societies for creating the social stability necessary for economic growth (Colletta et al., 2001). Such thinking informs the so-called "Asian model" (Diamond, 2008). […] This paper addresses the question of whether or not social diversity hampers the adoption of sound economic policies, including institutions that promote property rights and the rule of law. We also examine whether democracy conditions diversity's effect on sound economic management, defined as economic freedom, because the index of economic freedom is strongly associated with higher growth and is endorsed by proponents of the 'diversity deficit' argument (Easterly, 2006a).
        … Using several measures of diversity, we find that higher levels of ethno-linguistic and cultural fractionalization are conditioned positively on higher economic growth by an index of economic freedom, which is often heralded as a good measure of sound economic management. High diversity in turn is associated with higher levels of economic freedom. We do not find any evidence to suggest that high diversity hampers change towards greater economic freedom and institutions supporting liberal policies.
        Paper here. The data is a panel from 116 countries covering 1980-2012 so this doesn't rule out a negative long-run effect but it is prima facie evidence that diversity need not reduce freedom or growth.

The shift from scholarly journal to other kinds of internal communication, however, may come with recourse to figurative tropes that can express or elicit emotion, as in (10), about the online publication of videos from an academic conference.

(10)   ***Videos from the Stanford academic freedom conference***
        by **Tyler Cowen** November 16, 2022 at 3:14 am in Education
        Here they are, *so many figures well-known to MR readers*. The Peter Thiel talk was quite *interesting*, you can think of it as his concessions to *Greta*, with a new twist on the great stagnation and its causes. *My* ten-minute *talk* is in here, following Niall Ferguson and John Cochrane, and it *was my favorite* of the conference *(not always the case)*. *I had great fun trolling Steven Pinker, most*

of all. [italics, SC]

As can be seen, self-deprecation is used for social maneuvering and mutual positioning at multiple points in the post. First, projecting a positive self-image is framed within the highly positive appraisal of *interesting* contributions to the Stanford academic freedom conference by named presenters that are regularly discussed on the blog, and are blog participants (*so many figures known to MR readers*). Somewhat jocularly, the expression of self-esteem is mitigated by *(not always the case)* in *My ... talk ... was my favourite (not always the case)*. Mentioning *Greta* (Thurnberg) enables the animator to metonymically refer to the values and beliefs she stands for – which is a way to establish and reinforce common ground and promote identification and alignment. The immediately following combination of verbal irony and hyperbole – *I had great fun trolling Steven Pinker, most of all* – can also be seen as a way to encourage alignment with Steven Pinker's values, and kindle readers' interest. Yet again, this is a form of self-deprecating irony and humor. The author is actually being excessively modest and belittling himself. Altogether, Tyler Cowen is socially engineering his position and the position of other commenters within the blogging community. Hyperbole and verbal irony contribute to meaning enhancement and persuasion. One related intended effect is to express and elicit highly positive emotional reactions and value judgments. As an academic (super-)peer, Tyler Cowen cannot have engaged in deliberately antagonistic behaviors against Steven Pinker, to the extent of badgering him. More simply, he stood a chance to debate topics with Steven Pinker, Harvard University academic, New York Times columnist, and best-selling author of non-fiction that Tyler Cowen reveres, comments and reviews regularly on MR.

Verbal irony is also a feature of posts that address smaller questions, anecdotes and events of the day. They serve as good conversation starters that can arouse and satisfy the curiosity of experts and lay bloggers and occasional readers alike. For instance, how Brexit might affect freedom of movement for British hounds in (11a). Other posts involve establishing some kind of common ground with the readers, e.g. (12a), about freedom to do business with first ladies. Crucially, such small issues show great potential for applying theories and methods to bigger practical problems and debating critical issues as the post unfolds. For instance, the risk of importing rabies and pests from abroad in (11b), a comment to (11a), or debating segregation, law and order, and the effects over time of the Civil Rights Act in (12b), in the thread from (12a).

(11a) ***I'm so American, I can't even tell if this British speech is parody***
     by **Tyler Cowen** June 20, 2020 at 1:00 am in Law Travel

Here is the story, the speech appears in a box in the corner:
A Brexiteer Tory MP has urged the government to let his dogs keep their freedom of movement rights after Britain leaves the EU.
Bob Stewart, the MP for Beckenham, said his *"French-speaking" hounds* crossed the Channel regularly on their EU *"pet passports".*
Millions of Britons are set to lose the ability to live and work freely on the continent at the end of the year as a result of the UK's departure from the bloc.
I am an advocate of canine cosmopolitanism, rather than canine nationalism. Is everyone?
Speaking in French, Mr Gove added: *"We always defend the rights of dogs."*
Is that true? Under the previous pre-Brexit regime, a pet passport was sufficient. But now:
Under the worst case-scenario of a no-deal Brexit, taking a pet to the EU will likely require a four-month advanced process that includes microchipping, a rabies vaccination, a blood test and a three-month wait to travel after the blood test.
Developing… [italics, SC]

(11b) ***I'm so American, I can't even tell if this British speech is parody***
by **Tyler Cowen** June 20, 2020 at 1:00 am in Law Travel
[…]
Tim Worstall, June 20, 2020, at 5:50 am
As Dzlodzaya says, not parody. Rather, a light and rather English way of making a more serious point. English dogs going to the Continent has never been much of a problem. But as an island, and long rabies free, Britain long had restrictions upon dogs – any animal that can carry rabies actually – coming the other way. The decline of rabies as an edamic (sic) disease, better vaccines and so on, mean that it's possible to gain that "pet passport" to show that it's vaccinated and so gains free movement.
But, of course, the paperwork for this is subsumed in all the other agreements with the EU. No one's quite got around to sorting it out as yet. And it's really a domestic UK issue anyway.
As to "free movement" in the other sense, no one is about to insist upon visas to visit either way. It's the "right" to live and work that is under discussion. The difference between a visa and a work permit that is. Noth (sic) can be described as free movement but only the second is "free movement" when discussing Brexit.

(12a) ***Freedom of association for me but not for thee***
by Tyler Cowen November 23, 2016 at 3:42 am in Law, Philosophy, Political Science
Last week, *fashion designer Sophie Theallet* announced she would *refuse to sell or donate clothes to the next first lady*, *Melania Trump*.
Here is more from Veronique de Rugy. [italics, SC]

(12b) ***Freedom of association for me but not for thee***
by Tyler Cowen November 23, 2016 at 3:42 am in Law, Philosophy, Political Science
[…]
Art Deco, November 23, 2016, at 11:36 am
Are you against the Civil Rights Act then?

> The initial purpose was to break a culture of insult against a poor and politically patient social stratum. It has proved metastatic. Keep in mind that the regime in the Southern United States between 1877 and 1971 was not libertarian. State law required segregation in various venues. Also, segregation was not the most problematic component of the ancien regime in the South. The condition of the police and the courts was.
> *Ricardo*, November 23, 2016, at 1:56 pm
> "Keep in mind that the regime in the Southern United States between 1877 and 1971 was not libertarian. State law required segregation in various venues."
> Your timing is off. See Gavin Wright's research on the topic. Excerpt:
> "The starting point for understanding conflict over public accommodations is the proposition that racial segregation was fundamentally a calculated business policy by profit-seeking firms. Segregation in such facilities as lunch counters, restaurants, and hotels was rarely required by law, and when statutes or municipal ordinances did exist, enforcement was generally at the discretion of proprietors. Indeed, as of the 1960s many municipal segregation laws had been repealed, since by that time federal courts firmly supported the principle that state-enforced racial discrimination was unconstitutional."
> http://web.stanford.edu/~write/papers/ParadoxR.pdf

As far as (11a) is concerned, the post combines equal portions of humor, self-doubting and self-deprecation with forms of aggressive verbal irony, which verges on derision and criticism. At a closer look, it is evident that irony, humor and objectification in a contextual expression, interact within the title – *I'm so American, I can't even tell if this British speech is parody* – to express negative evaluation and wage criticism against the UK Parliament, align, identify and bond with bloggers, and ultimately engineer roles and relationships within the community. In the spirit of MR's mission statement, the animator condemns and criticizes what appear to be situationally inappropriate and incongruent questions and answers at question time. Brexit and UK parliament responsibilities serve as a background to target the observed incongruency between expected important questions and the House of Lords' key responsibilities (i.e. Brexit's implications for UK citizens wishing to work and live in the EU), and actual daft questions and answers about the free movement of Bob Stewart's *"French-speaking hounds"* (a highly incongruent word-combination) across the EU, their pet visas and pet passports: *[He urged] the government to let his dogs keep their freedom of movement rights after Britain leaves the EU*. Mr Gove replies, *speaking French*, that the government *always defends the rights of dogs* – where *always* is used to obtain hyperbole. This exchange is deemed a *parody* in the post title, vis-à-vis what should be actual government business. Negative evaluation is conveyed by shuffling around humans and animals on the Great Chain of Being (Lakoff 1987), and from exclusively claiming mobility rights and cosmopolitanism for the hounds of nationalist MPs *Bob Stewart* and *Mr Gove*, who have been championing Brexit for people. Also, rather contradictorily, why should Mr Gove, a Brexiteer, sponsor Brexit and rather

contradictorily speak French in the UK parliament? Mastery display contributes to the overall effect, along with incongruous word combinations in the post (*I am an advocate of canine cosmopolitanism, rather than canine nationalism*), where contrasting of *canine* versus *human* and *cosmolitanism* versus *nationalism* encourages irony resolution via script opposition and overlap. Last, based on the assumption of shared opinions, the final question *Is everyone?* further reinforces expressing and eliciting negative emotions, while also encouraging identification within the community.

Let us now consider (12a): a fashion designer's refusal to sell or donate clothes to Melania Trump – most likely the next First Lady in line at the time of publication of the post – is presented against the background of discussion about freedom of association. As extensively argued in Cacchiani (2019), the post shows forms of congruent and incongruent irony (Attardo 2017). Humor based on script opposition and overlap emerges from bringing together the noble banner of equality and fundamental human rights (*Freedom of association for me and for thee*) and what may be seen as unimportant aspects of human life (*sell[ing] or donat[ing] clothes to … Melania Trump*).

Association is an incongruent item. *Freedom of expressive association* is recognized as a human right and is protected under the First Amendment to the American Constitution. It includes freedom of speech, right to assemble, and free exercise of religion, including the right to wear religious clothing. However, the text addresses issues related to 'freedom to business associate', i.e. freedom to enter into an agreement with an entity, while consenting to the confidentiality clause.

Another marker of verbal irony is *for me but not for thee*. Congruent irony is based on paronymy in *me* and *thee*. On another level, the animator remodels a precept from Genesis, xii, v. 8: *Let there be no strife between me and thee*, to express opposite meanings: what originally highlighted a condition of liberty as empathy and care, turns out to describe adversary antagonism and conflict. Just as extollation of liberty and peace in *no strife between me and thee* (i.e. 'everybody') turns into its opposite in *freedom for me but not for thee*, which excludes good for others, their shifting referents are fashion designer Sophie Theallet and the then future First Lady of the United States, Melania Trump.

Overall, language mastery and objectification are used for building common ground and encouraging identification. Other effects are persuasion, efficiency and meaning enhancement. The targets of verbal irony are both the situation itself and Melania Trump. The immaterial question is whether or not a fashion designer (as it were, 'freedom to business associate') is deemed to affect Melania's 'freedom of expression'. As a last note, we wish to add that the point at issue is not immaterial for Melania: earlier in Donald Trump's presidential campaign trail Melania had been branded *The Silent Partner*; yet,

her ability to 'make a statement' in public appearances has proven to be limited to 'visual communication', or wearing the dress to impress. Derision expression is produced assuming minimalist mechanisms, or a less-than entirety personal reference to Melania's freedom of expression, reduced to a small part of the referent (designer clothing).

3.2.2. Figurative tropes in MR comments

Ratified participants on MR are mutually accountable. They share expertise, exchange views and argue the pros and cons, merits and demerits of specific policies, models, etc., in a matter-of-fact way (13).

(13) ***I'm so American, I can't even tell if this British speech is parody***
  by **Tyler Cowen** June 20, 2020 at 1:00 am in Law Travel
  […]
  Dzoldzaya, June 20, 2020 at 04:33:58
  As an Englishman, I can inform you that it's not parody – he's concerned with the issue, but feels able to make jokes like 'French-speaking dogs', because he's addressing a member of his own party. Questions by ruling party members in parliament are often used to 'set up' a speech by the PM/person taking questions, and are generally congenial and non-confrontational.
  dearieme, June 20, 2020, at 11:01:36
  'French-speaking dogs' may even have involved an allusion to the old joke about why you must never buy a collie from a Welshman.
  […]

Following offline academic conventions, objections and disagreement are negotiated via objective arguments grounded in survey evidence, facts, the law, models and theories adopted in the relevant literature – in other words arguments that provide objective evidence and justification for the propositional content of the claim (14). On these grounds, core/active participants can afford to be frank. For example, Soap McTavish's rebuttal (*Not true in Israel*) vis-à-vis PHinton's understatement (*Not sure it's much different*).

(14) ***The Causal Effect of Economic Freedom on Female Employment & Education***
  by **Tyler Cowen** April 3, 2023 at 2:18 pm in Data Source, Economics
  […]
  Soap McTavish, April 3, 2023 at 9:36 pm
  Not true in Israel.
  PHinton, April 3, 2023 at 10:14 pm
  Not sure it's much different. geektime.com (first search result) says women in high-tech in Israel is 33.4%, including tech positions and other positions such as marketing and sales. [italics, S.C.]
  this (sic) year, MSFT is 34% women globally according to company data. The US figure is probably higher for the US.

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There is no need to show consideration for the personality-related needs of other commenters and peers. Consider Erik's rebuttal to Troll Me (15: *Yes it does*), which conveys dissonance and disagreement. What cannot go unnoticed is that Erik does not bother to argue his position in any way. Unsubstantiated claims, however, do not work towards reinforcing the blogger's credibility.

(15)   ***Freedom of association for me but not for thee***
         by Tyler Cowen November 23, 2016 at 3:42 am in Law, Philosophy, Political Science
         […]
         Troll Me, November 23, 2016, at 3:03 pm
         A rights based society does not allow identifiable subgroups to be discriminated against.
         Erik, November 25, 2016, at 8:39 am)
         Yes it does. [italics, S.C.]

Though rare, hyperbole in extreme case formulations (*nonsense* and *anyone with eyes to see*) can be used to reinforce the expression of negativity and highlight discrepancies, as in (16), where evidence for the strong claim is provided via reference to shared common ground (*as the history of the Jim Crow shows*).

(16)   ***Freedom of association for me but not for thee***
         by Tyler Cowen November 23, 2016 at 3:42 am in Law, Philosophy, Political Science
         […]
         byomtov, November 25, 2016, at 9:18 am
         Ian Maitland: But it illustrates why rational business people can be expected to oppose discrimination – because it is not in their rational self-interest. I am not prettifying their motives, just noting the predictable results of markets. Oppose discrimination – because it is not in their rational self.
         Nonsense. What it proves is that **sometimes** business people find it in their interests to oppose discrimination. And sometimes they don't, *as the history of the Jim Crow shows quite clearly to anyone with eyes to see.* [bold in the original; italics, S.C.]

One final point concerns verbal irony, which can be used to express negativity and stealthily avoid the appearance of negativity (Colston 2015, p. 77), as in (17) and (18). In (17), John Smith uses irony to land a criticism on Thiago Ribeiro (*A rare insightful point*); expressing negativity is then reinforced via a combination of irony, mastery display and objectification in a customized expression (*Some are born gay, some are born Melania*), based on *Some are born great* – in turn originating in the lines *Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.*

(Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, II, V, 149-150). As regards (18), Woke's comment is the target of irony and the object of criticism in The Other Jim's apparently incongruent (Attardo 2017) reaction (*no worries here*) to what is hyperbolically described as Woke's highest achievement in the thread (*Woke has peaked*).

(17) ***Freedom of association for me but not for thee***
by Tyler Cowen November 23, 2016 at 3:42 am in Law, Philosophy, Political Science
[…]
Thiago Ribeiro: And can Melania Trump be something other than Melania Trump? Isn't she what nature and society have done to her? (November 23, 2016, at 5:45 am)
The Original Other Jim, November 23, 2016, at 7:25 am
A *rare insightful point* by Thiago. *Some are born gay, some are born Melania*. [italics, S.C.]

(18) ***Forbidden Questions***
by **Alex Tabarrok**, October 25, 2022 at 7:25 am in Current Affairs, Science
[…]
A policy of deliberate ignorance has corrupted top scientific institutions in the West. It's been an open secret for years that prestigious journals will often reject submissions that offend prevailing political orthodoxies—
[…]
John Smith, October 25, 2022, at 7:37 am
Woke has peaked… no worries here. Amirite TC? [italics, S.C.]

4. Conclusions

This paper focused on the socio-pragmatic effects of verbal irony and other figurative tropes for ratified participants on MR. Admittedly, further investigation into the issue would be required. Nevertheless, based on the discussion in Sections 2 and 3, we can bring some major points home.

Insofar as the blog is highly integrated into the entrenched ecosystem of the scientific community, the online and offline worlds are strongly intertwined and mutually constructed. Offline status, roles and relationships affect online identity and communication styles; the other way round, engineering relative status and position of online discussants while reinforcing their credibility within the blogging community has a bearing on shaping real identities. Consequently, as far as online naming strategies are concerned, it is no surprise that several bloggers use given name, family name, initials, or diverse combinations thereof for their blogging identities. Yet, descriptive names are also used to express participants' quirks and likings (3: *Thiago Ribeiro*, *Art Deco*), or world views and perspectives that demonstrate alignment with other discussants and community values (5: *A*

Black Man, *Woke*; 6: *Lord Action*, *Super Destroyer*, *The God of Thunder*). This is where figurative tropes are found to mix up and interact. For instance, names for relatively active participants like *JKBrown* and *Thor* (4) overstate and realize meaning enhancement via metonymy. Another example is *Troll Me* (7), where verbal irony and overstatement interact to magnify blogger's status within the community. The other way round, *Quantitative Sneezing* (7) makes recourse to irony and understatement for ingratiation: s/he is not a regular to online debates, and describes himself/herself as marginal and marginalized on MR.

No doubt, online naming can hide offline identities. Yet, shifts between signature names and names used to address bloggers in online conversations demonstrate offline familiarity with the real name-bearer, as well as close interaction between online and offline worlds. E.g. *Joan* for *JWatts* (2), and *Steven* for *Super Destroyer* (6). Membership within the offline academic community guarantees immediate identification of the referent.

We have been focusing on posts and comments published by the animators, as well as comments by relatively active to core participants within the blogging community. (For more on the discursive strategies adopted by relatively less active commenters, see Cacchiani 2019.) As regards social engineering and positioning in the discourse around *freedom*, several factors were shown to affect selection and use of figurative tropes.

Setting aside individual communication styles, we should minimally draw a line between animators' posts and other messages within the thread. Within posts, we must consider domain, topic and genre. When animators publish parts of academic research papers on critical issues, the conventions for the genre are remediated for online (8-9). Yet, other posts may depart significantly from academic prose, move towards the informal end of the orality spectrum, and use figurative tropes (verbal irony and, to a lesser extent, hyperbole, metonymy and metaphor) for a number of general effects (ingratiation, mastery and efficiency, social engineering and catalyzation) and specific purposes (from expressing negativity to aligning and identifying with other discussants). For example, when mentioning his obsession with Steven Pinker (10), Tyler Cowen uses figurative tropes to represent a peculiarity of his character and behavior, for ingratiation and identification, meaning enhancement and persuasion. Figurative tropes are also used with unimportant questions and events of the day, to attract attention (11a, 12a). Both examples rely heavily on mastery display and meaning enhancement for effect. In (11a), freedom to sell and/or wear designer clothes starts discussion about segregation and the Civil Rights Act (11b); in (12a), free canine movement starts discussion on environmental policies (12b) and freedom of movement, a human rights concept.

Turning to the comments, my results suggest that, when present,

figurative tropes are not used to cater for the personality-related needs of the interlocutors, nor to express downright aggression. Commenters are not interested in realizing pragmatic effects such as extollation and politeness, nor impoliteness, tension reduction, and machiavellianism. Figurative tropes appear to serve the purposes of emotion expression and elicitation. Importantly, MR conventions require credible participants to share and debate issues frankly. This explains short rebuttals like *Yet it does* (15), and relatively aggressive forms of verbal irony (i.e. sarcasm) that stealthily convey negativity (17: A *rare insightful point by Thiago. Some are born gay, some are born Melania*). Which is to say, we do not expect discussants to downgrade disagreement with their peers. However, MR conventions also require that credible bloggers argue their standpoint using methods, theories and facts – which is consistent with conventions in the offline academic world. Hence, core discussants are found to express strong disagreement and non-alignment (e.g. using hyperbole which highlights discrepancies and contrast, and expresses negativity), while also providing evidence and pursuing alignment and identification with part of the community (e.g. via contextual expressions, for objectification), as in (16): *Nonsense. What it proves is that […] sometimes business people […]oppose discrimination. And sometimes they don't, as the history of the Jim Crow shows quite clearly to anyone with eyes to see.*

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BULLYING EXPLAINED
TO CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS
Knowledge dissemination, interpersonal meaning and participants' roles on educational websites

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Abstract – In recent decades, bullying has received increased public and media attention. On the one hand, recent digital transformations have exacerbated the phenomenon leading to new forms of online harassment (cyberbullying). On the other hand, the World Wide Web has allowed parents, teachers, and children to access information and provide and receive support more easily. Particularly concerning younger audiences, educational websites serve as an important channel for popularization. Not only do they make topics in various disciplines comprehensible to children and teenagers, but they also tackle challenging issues to develop awareness in the youth and eventually encourage them to take action. These web-based educational hypermedia are rooted in "edutainment" (combining education and entertainment), interactivity, and multimodality, which are exploited to make sensitive issues more accessible to young audiences. In this context, the present paper concentrates on two health educational websites for children and teenagers (*Health for Kids* and *Kids Health Hub*), specifically examining their subdirectories on bullying prevention. The analysis explores how these two subdirectories disseminate knowledge about bullying and address the different participants in this phenomenon (bullies, victims, witnesses, teachers, and parents) from a multimodal and discursive perspective. Special attention is devoted to transferring knowledge via recourse to different types of explanation, and to the role played by image-text combinations in engaging users. These strategies are shown to reflect the type of information conveyed and the different roles represented.

Keywords: discourse analysis; health communication; multimodal analysis; participants' roles; popularization for children.

1. Introduction

Bullying has garnered significant attention over the past decades, becoming a pervasive phenomenon in our culture and evolving alongside societal advancements. It profoundly affects the psychological well-being and overall health of children across all age-groups, from preschool and kindergarten children (Saracho 2016) up to adults (Rai, Upasna 2017). According to Olweus (1993, p. 9), "a person is being bullied when he or she is exposed,

repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students". To classify behavior as bullying, three criteria must be met: (1) it involves aggressive behavior intentionally aimed at harming someone, (2) it is repeated over time, and (3) it occurs in an interpersonal relationship marked by a power imbalance (Olweus, Limber 1999, p. 31). Furthermore, bullying takes various forms: physical bullying encompasses actions like hitting or pinching, as well as other forms of physical abuse; verbal bullying is characterized by spreading rumors, gossiping, or insulting; emotional bullying involves isolating and excluding others from the group; and cyberbullying originates from online communication and electronic means.

In order to prevent and stop bullying, some measures can be taken but most importantly children, students, teachers, and parents must be educated on what bullying is and its warning signs. While anti-bullying programs have been thoroughly implemented in schools, educational websites play a pivotal role outside the school's walls to raise children's awareness and increase their knowledge.

In general, the paramount importance of the Internet in popularization for children can be detected in many fields. Knowledge dissemination for the youth is multifaceted and manifests in diverse ways. However, it is worth noting that it "has yet to be extensively investigated in terms of genres or domains" (Bianchi *et al.* 2022, p. 6). From a linguistic, discursive, and comparative perspective,[1] several studies have focused on science and ecology (Bruti 2022; Bruti, Manca 2019; Cesiri 2020; Diani, Sezzi 2020; Manca, Spinzi 2022; Myers 1989, 2003), art (Fina 2022; Sezzi 2019, 2022), tourist promotion (Cappelli 2016; Cappelli, Masi 2019), EU institutions, children's rights, politics (Diani, Sezzi 2019; Perruzzo 2021, 2022; Silletti 2017; Turnbull 2022; Vignozzi 2022), legal knowledge (Cacchiani 2022; Diani 2015; Engberg, Luttermann 2014; Peruzzo 2021; Sorrentino 2014), literature (Bianchi 2018; Bianchi, Manca 2022), and grammar (Cappelli 2022). Additionally, knowledge dissemination embraces different forms, from non-fiction to websites and TED talks (Masi 2022). However, health knowledge dissemination does not appear to have received much attention until the COVID-19 upsurge led to the need of informing children on the virus (Diani 2020; Denti, Diani 2022; Nikitina 2022).

Generally, research shows that the popularizing strategies used in knowledge dissemination for adults are also found in knowledge dissemination for children (see, for example, Diani, Sezzi 2019). In addition, different engaging strategies have been detected such as *wh*-questions and polar questions, imperatives, exhortatives, exclamations, colloquial features,

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[1] As far as we are aware, there are few studies on the translation of informative books for the youth (Puurtinen 1995; Reiss 1982), for example on history (Sezzi 2015, 2017), and of non-fiction picturebooks (Masi 2021; Wozniak 2021).

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and personal forms to address the reader (Bruti, Manca 2019; Diani 2015; Diani, Sezzi 2019; Sezzi 2015, 2017, 2019; Silletti 2017). The multimodal analyses stem from studies on textbooks (Unsworth 2006) and mainly centre on the ideational or representational meaning (see, for example, Diani, Sezzi 2020; Diani 2020), i.e. how people, places and things and the relations between them are represented in the images (Kress, van Leeuwen 2020).

In this context, the goal of the present paper is to investigate how bullying, which strongly impacts people's physical and mental health, is dealt with in the subdirectories of the educational websites *Health for Kids* and *Kids Health Hub*. The study opens with a description of the corpus under consideration (Section 2). The methodology adopted for the qualitative analysis is discussed in Sections 3. Section 4 focuses on the popularizing strategies and the interpersonal meanings conveyed on the subdirectories on bullying, one for children and one for teenagers. Section 5 presents some concluding remarks.

2. The corpus

The websites for children under investigation are two generic websites on health: *Health for Kids* and *Kids Health Hub*.

Health for Kids[2] (HK) is a UK-based intistutional website aimed at teaching children aged 4 to 11 about being healthy and taking care of their health. Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) and the Diva Creative team developed the website with the assistance of pupils from Leicestershire primary schools. As seen on the website's homepage, it covers a wide range of health-related issues, organized into four main categories: "Healthy"; "Illness";[3] "Feelings"; "Getting Help". These areas are accessible via content section icons in the form of emojis in the header menu bar. The website also includes a "Games" section and a link to a separate webpage for Grownups.

HK features a cast of cartoon-like speaking characters who interact with the child-user, often by means of speech bubbles (see Buckingham, Scanlon 2004, p. 276; Stenglin, Djonov 2010, p. 192). These fictional characters inhabit various adventure settings in which they are represented as playing: in "Health", the setting is a forest; in "Feelings", the setting is a pirate island and its underwater world; the setting for "Illness" is a space planet; the section "Getting Help" has a fairy-tale landscape. The underlying metaphor is that knowledge acquisition is akin to an adventure. The website primarily relies on visual as it is addressed to young children (see Diani

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[2] www.healthforkids.co.uk (1.1.2023).

[3] For an analysis of the ideational interplay between the visual and verbal elements on the *Health for Kids* webpage dedicated to "Illness", see Diani (2020).

2020), and it combines education and entertainment, exemplifying the concept of "edutainment" (Buckingham, Scanlon 2004).

Kids Health Hub (KHH)[4] was established by the Central Alberta Child Advocacy Centre (CACAC) as an online platform with the objective of enhancing the well-being, mental health, and resilience of children and adolescents. It achieves this by educating families and professionals who work with them. KHH caters to different age-groups and different adult figures: "Kindergarten – Grade 2", "Grade 3-5", "Grade 6-8", "Grade 9-12", "Parents/Caregivers", "Teachers/Professionals". The webpage on bullying is in the "Grade 6-8" area, accessible from an anchor (a clickable element) at the top of the homepage. This directory shows a picture of middle school students smiling at the web user and provides access to six subdirectories in the "Learn-More-About" rectangle: "Health and Wellness", "Relationships", "Identity", "Mental Health Concerns", "Self-Care", and "Wellness Sessions". Each subdirectory is introduced with a stylized picture evoking their content and by a short description of the related sub-sections, accessible through the anchor "Read More". The images on the website consist of photographs and graphic images, featuring a flat style more suitable for teenagers.

The qualitative data analysis in this study is limited to the HK and KHH webpages that define and explain what bullying is.[5] In particular, information about bullying can be found in the "Grade 6-8" area of the *Kids Health Hub*. This provides an opportunity to examine how bullying is described on two webpages, one for children (HK) and one for young teenagers (KHH), enabling us to identify similarities and dissimilarities based on the distinct age-groups.

3. Methodology

The qualitative analysis that we shall carry out considers both verbal and visual aspects, given that these websites are inherently multimodal. As a first step, we will account for the categories and strategies used to disseminate knowledge among children adopting a discourse analytical approach. The strategies are divided into three main categories – *explanatory strategies*, *concretization strategies*, and *reformulation strategies* – based on Ciapuscio (2003), Gülich (2003) and Calsamiglia and van Dijk (2004). (See also Cavalieri, Diani 2019, on popularizing health texts.)

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[4] www.kidshealthhub.ca (1.1.2023).
[5] https://www.healthforkids.co.uk/feelings/bullying, https://kidshealthhub.ca/2022/02/03/bullying-3/ (1.1.2023).

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Explanatory strategies include *definitions* and *denominations*. *Definitions* can be either *intensional* (or connotative) and *extensional* (or denotative).

Intensional definitions are classified into three main types: "synonymous definitions", "in which we provide another word whose meaning is already understood that has the same meaning as the word being defined" (Copi *et al*. 2016, p. 96); "operational definitions", in which a term is correctly applied to a case if and only if the performance of certain operations in that case leads to a designated result (Copi *et al.* 2016, p. 95), and definitions "by genus and difference", which concern the connection between "genus", which delineates the overall class to which the object belongs, and "difference", how the object differs from other members of the group (Copi *et al.* 2016, pp. 98-100).

On the other hand, *extensional definitions* determine the extension of a term, in that they, for example, enlist the members of the class of objects to which the term is referred to (Copi *et al.* 2016, pp. 98-100): they include definitions "by example" that, as their name suggests, offer examples of the objects denoted by the term; "ostensive definitions" in which the extension of the term to be defined is pointed to or indicated by a gesture, and "semi-ostensive definitions" in which the gesture or the pointing is simultaneously "accompanied by a descriptive phrase whose meaning is assumed known" (Copi *et al.* 2016, p. 108).

Definitions are usually coupled to *denominations*, which provide the specialized term for a certain scientific phenomenon or object. These are sometimes followed by *reformulations or paraphrases*, used to explain by rephrasing the information to be conveyed, normally introduced by rephrasing markers such as "which means".

Calsamiglia and van Dijk (2004, p. 372) enlist *exemplification* among the types of explanations. It is a concretization strategy (Cavalieri, Diani 2019) that provides lay readers with specific instances of difficult concepts and notions. Another strategy is the *scenario* which is a "direct appeal to one's interlocutor by creating a possible but imaginary situation to explain a complex fact" (Ciapuscio 2003, p. 213).

Additional engaging strategies that we will consider are *wh*-questions, imperatives, exhortatives or personal forms to address the reader.

The multimodal analysis is linked to the engaging strategies since it is based on interpersonal meaning, i.e. the "particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2020, p. 42).[6] The reasons behind this choice are threefold. Firstly,

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[6] There are also compositional/textual meanings that "are concerned with the distribution of the information value or relative emphasis among elements of the text and image" (Unsworth 2008, p. 383).

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educational materials are expected to promote interpersonal meaning thus aligning with the socio-cognitive perspective that conceive children as agents in meaning construction; secondly, the topic faced deals with children's emotions and feelings and their involvement is then essential. Thirdly, it is interesting to investigate interpersonal meaning given the scarcity of research on this topic: for example, Koutsikou *et al.* (2021, p. 6) underline how research on science materials for children "has mainly explored the representational or compositional meaning". Therefore, the methodology integrates the previous methodological toolkit with Koutsikou *et al.*'s classification, which in turn draws upon Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). In particular, three dimensions – *address*, *social distance*, and *involvement* – are used to establish and promote interpersonal meaning both verbally and visually in multimodal science informational materials (Koutsikou *et al.* 2021):

1. *address* indicates how a reader is addressed in a text. From a verbal point of view, it is realized by the type of clause and by the person of the verb in a clause (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004): address is considered "low" when declarative clauses and the third person are used, "moderate" when an interrogative clause and a verb are combined, and "high" when there are imperative clauses and the second-person pronouns (Koutsikou *et al.* 2021, p. 9; Koutsikou, Christidou 2019, p.116). From a visual point of view, address can be expressed by showing or hiding the represented participants' gaze in relation to the reader (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006). The "Represented participants" are defined as "the people, places and things (including abstract 'things') represented in and by the speech or writing or image, the participants about whom or which we are speaking or writing or producing images" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 45). Specifically, the address in the visual content is "low" when the participants' gaze is not directed towards the reader; it is "moderate" when participants are evenly split between those who are and are not looking at the reader, denoting a balance between high and low address, while "high address" obviously refers to all participants looking at the reader (Koutsikou *et al.* 2021, p. 245; Koutsikou, Christidou 2019, p.116).

2. *Social distance* refers to the type of social interaction that a text seeks to foster between the reader and the people it represents. Social distance is determined verbally by means of the voice of the verb (active or passive) and the kind of relationship between clauses (hypotaxis or parataxis) (see Halliday, Matthiessen 2004), and visually by the size of the frame, namely, the distance of the shot, "the choice between close-up, medium shot and long shot" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 124). As regards the former mode, social distance is classified as "small" when the active voice of the verbs is combined with parataxis; it is "moderate" when there are

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both the middle/neutral voice of verbs and a balance between parataxis and hypotaxis. Lastly, it is "large" when passive voice and hypotaxis are used together (Koutsikou *et al.* 2021, p. 9; Koutsikou, Christidou 2019, p.117). As to the visual, it is categorized as "small" when the represented participants are portrayed in a close shot; it is classified as "moderate social distance" when participants are depicted in a medium shot, that is, "when a participant's body was 'cut' to the chest, waist, or knees, or the full body [is] depicted occupying more than 50% of the image space" (Koutsikou *et al.* 2021, p. 9). Finally, the visual content is considered "large" when participants are represented in a long shot showing their full body and occupying less than 50% of the image space.

3. *Involvement* concerns the degree to which the reader is encouraged to interact with what is represented. It relies on the possessive pronouns: the verbal content is categorized as "weak involvement" when the third person is used or when there are no possessive pronouns; "moderate involvement" sees the use of the first-person possessive pronoun, while "strong involvement" is realized with the second person pronoun. From a visual perspective, involvement has to do with the horizontal angle of the image (frontal/oblique). When the portrayed participants are depicted in an oblique angle, the content is classified as "weak involvement", and when they were depicted in a frontal position, the content is classified as "strong involvement". When there is an equal number of participants represented at oblique and frontal angles, denoting a balance between weak and strong involvement, the visual content is classified as "moderate involvement".

Based on Painter *et al.* (2013), Koutsikou *et al.* (2021, pp. 10-11) identify several combinations of image-text relations for each dimension of interpersonal meaning: the verbal text-image relationship is one of *convergence* when the two semiotic modes are categorized at the same level of dimension. When one of the modes is classified as at one of the extreme levels and the other is classified at the moderate level (for instance, a unit of analysis involving a verbal text of high address and a visual image of moderate address), their relationship is defined as *complementarity*. The third type is that of *divergence* between the two semiotic modes: the verbal and visual parts of a unit of analysis are classified at the two opposite extreme levels (for example, a unit of analysis with the verbal text denoting "small social distance" and the image indicating "large social distance").

4. Bullying explained to children and teenagers: definitions and roles

The webpage on bullying of *Health for Kids* (HK) can be accessed through the section "Feelings".

The verbal text on this page begins with a statement about how bullying can make people feel:

(1) Bullying can make you feel scared and lonely.

This initial sentence is written in a larger font size and directly addresses the users as *you*, immediately connecting the topic with children's feelings. Following this engaging opening, a declarative sentence advises readers that bullying is a behavior that should be reported adults:

(1a) No-one should be made to feel like this, and it is important to tell a grown-up and get help if you're being bullied. (HK)

This short premise does not only capture children's attention but also emphasizes the importance of involving adults when dealing with bullying situations, setting the stage for the subsequent more informative content.

The definition of bullying is then introduced with a *wh*-question (2):

(2)   What is bullying? (HK)

This question serves as the title and is a common feature of websites designed for young audiences, as observed in prior studies (*inter alia*, Diani 2015; Sezzi 2015, 2017; Silletti 2017). Questions of this nature have a didactic purpose and help structure the text by mirroring the "traditional classroom discourse structure" (Stenglin, Djonov 2010, p. 205). As noted by Hyland (2002, p. 530), such questions signal "an imbalance of knowledge between participants" (Hyland 2002, p. 530), framing "readers as learners, and learning as a one-way transfer of knowledge" (2002, p. 535). Additionally, questions stimulate children's curiosity and interest (Webber 1994).

The resulting definition is an example of an *operational definition*, characterizing "bullying" as "a set of actions or operations" (Copi *et al.* 2006, p. 97). This type of definition is usually employed in psychology: psychological concepts and constructs are mostly abstract (e.g., mind, happiness) and they can be defined only by referring "to behavior or to physiological observations" (Copi *et al.* 2006, p. 97).

The definition of bullying is as follows:

(3)   Bullying is when someone upsets you on purpose, either by what they say or by what they do. (HK)

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Next, a "negative" *operational definition* (4) is provided to distinguish bullying from other interpersonal conflicts. It also introduces the second fundamental characteristic of bullying. Bullying is not only deliberate but it is repeated:

(4)   Bullying is different to just having an argument with someone or falling out with one of your friends because bullies set out to hurt you again and again. (HK)

In line with the use of "you" in the first paragraph, these definitions employ the second person pronoun to involve the reader.

The second person is also kept in the second paragraph entitled *Types of bullying* (5). The *denominations* of the different types of bullying behaviors are followed by their *definitions by example*:

(5)   Types of bullying
      There are different types of bullying, these include:
      Physical
      A bully might hurt you regularly by hitting or kicking you, spitting at you, throwing stones or pushing you.
      Verbal
      Bullies can hurt you with the words they use. They might say unkind things to you or about you, talk about you behind your back or tell lies about you. (HK)

Moreover, these descriptions are closely related to the *scenario* strategy, as seen in example (5), where an imaginary situation is described. *Scenario* is accompanied by a list of *exemplifications* (6) of what bullying behavior can be:

(6)   They might whisper loudly so you can hear them to make you feel uncomfortable.
      Other behaviour
      Bullying behaviour can also include:
      Staring or giving 'dirty looks'
      Ignoring you
      Hiding or taking your things
      Deliberately leaving you out (HK)

Examples of emotional bullying are also provided here, even though it is not explicitly mentioned.

Perhaps it is believed that this additional distinction and its related terminology are too complex for children to grasp. In this case, concrete instances of emotional bullying serve as substitutes for its explicit definition and specialized nomenclature.

Cyberbullying, the last category of bullying, is also defined *by example*:

(7)   Cyber bullying is through a mobile phone or online – sending unkind messages, videos or photos to upset or hurt someone. (HK)

In general, concretization prevails so that abstract new knowledge is linked to non-abstract familiar concepts. In this way, children think about their experiences, recognize the detrimental behavior, and can look for help.

As a matter of fact, the last paragraph of the webpage is entitled *What can you do if you're being bullied?*. This interrogative sentence is followed by imperative statements in which the reader establishes a direct relationship with the child user by offering him/her advice on how to handle this situation, as, for example, happens in health popularization for adults (Cavalieri, Diani 2019). In particular, the text suggests telling it to teachers or parents or calling a prevention helpline (8):

(8)   What can you do if you're being bullied?
       Bullying is wrong and no-one deserves to be bullied.
       If you are being bullied or you are worried about someone being bullied, tell a teacher or talk to your parents.
       You can also ring Childline (0800 1111) if you feel that you have no one you can trust to speak to. (HK)

Interestingly, while the verbal text is focused on the victim or potential victim, as the use of "you" shows, the visual component is centered on another figure involved in bullying, namely, the adult who has a helping role (Figure 1).

Besides two decorative images of a crab and of a smiling child waving at the user, the main central image is that of an adult, probably a teacher, as she wears a badge and pair of glasses (she is also wearing flippers, a diver's mask, and a snorkel, in line with the setting of this section).

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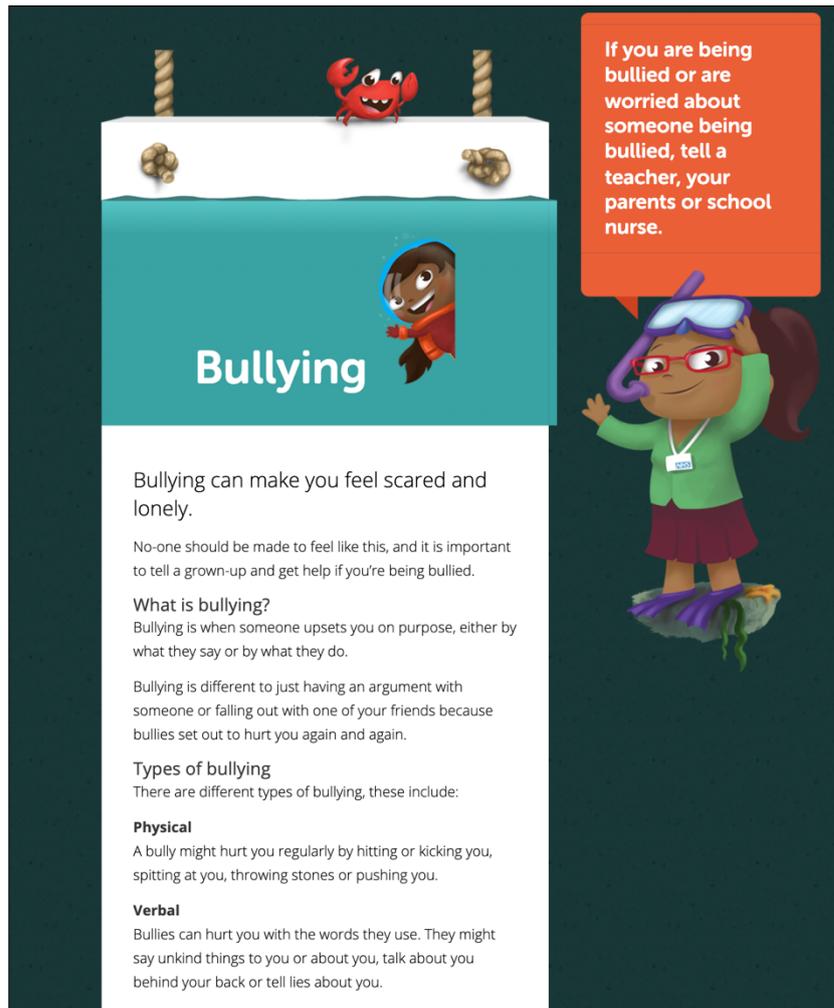
Figure 1
Bullying section from HK.

From the point of view of the dimension of *address*, there is a *convergence* between the visual and the verbal modes: they are both "high".

Indeed, verbally, second person pronouns and imperative sentences are used, and the represented character is looking directly at the child reader. It realizes a "visual you" (Kress, van Leeuwen 1996, p. 122), creating a personal relationship with the child viewer and speaking directly to him/her with a speech bubble, which says: "If you are being bullied or are worried about someone being bullied, tell a teacher, your parents or school nurse". As Buckingham and Scanlon (2004, p. 279) underline, "these visual characters reinforce and complement the message of the written text".

In terms of *social distance*, the image-text relationship is that of *divergence*. As a matter of fact, while social distance can be classified as "small" in the verbiage given the active voice and the use of parataxis, the image is represented in a long shot. This seems to be a paradox, but it can be ascribed to the fact that the person depicted is a teacher. Children do not have

to identify with her. Teachers' role in bullying dynamics is that of a helper children can rely on and trust. Moreover, the main text and the text in the speech bubble emphasize a "small social distance", inviting children to feel at ease with adult figures.

As to *involvement*, again, there is a relationship of *convergence* as both modes display a "strong involvement": the second-person pronoun throughout the verbal text and the frontal angle to portray the participant are employed. Therefore, in general, the webpage does not simply present knowledge; bullying is explained by relying on concrete situations children are familiar with. In addition, it cohesively involves the reader using the verbal and the visual modes, thereby establishing a close interpersonal relationship with the web-user.

The webpage on bullying on *Kids Health Hub* (KHH) is designed for middle-school students. The verbal content is more extensive, and the images differ from those on the previous website. The webpage is segmented into horizontally colored frames, each corresponding to a different paragraph of the verbal text. The first one still has a question as a title: *What is bullying?*. The answer is an *intensional definition* of the *genus and difference* type. First, it is said that *Bullying is mean and hurtful behaviour*, and its distinguishing properties are emphasized by separating them in a list and by the italics to make teenagers better understand what bullying is:

(9)   What is bullying?
       Bullying is mean and hurtful behavior.
       Bullying is:
       Intentional – the person is mean and hurtful on purpose. If they do not mean to
       do it, it is an accident.
       Repeated – the person is mean more than once. If they are hurtful one time,
       that is them being rude or inconsiderate.
       Power Imbalance – the person is using their power negatively. Their power
       could come from: being older, being bigger/stronger, having more friends,
       knowing more, having more confidence, or having more things. If there is no
       power imbalance, it is a conflict. (KHH)

Its necessary characteristics are associated with their respective *reformulations* so that users will not confuse bullying with other types of behavior, such as an accident or a simpler conflict. The image associated with this paragraph is of a stylized boy gazing at the verbal text with a puzzled facial expression and three question marks above his head. The verbal-visual relationship in terms of *address* is one of *convergence*: verbally, address is "low" because of the use of declaratives and of the third person; visually, it is "low" as the participant is not looking at the viewer. When examining *social distance*, again, *convergence* prevails. Social distance is verbally and visually "moderate" because of the neutral voice of the verbs employed and the use of

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parataxis and hypotaxis, as well as the fact that the boy is represented in medium shot. Modes are *convergent* also in the dimension of *involvement*: the third person with no possessive pronouns and the oblique angle indicate a "weak" involvement in the text.

The second paragraph, *Who does bullying involve?*, has another *wh*-question as a title, and its answer is a visually separated list of the people involved in bullying:

(10)   Who does bullying involve?
        The person who is targeted by the bullying behaviour.
        The person who is bullying.
        The person who witnesses the bullying.
        These roles can shift, and people can be more than one of these roles in different areas of their life. (KHH)

No *denominations* are given. It is specified that these are not fixed roles. This is somehow mirrored in the accompanying image. It is a photograph of a girl watching her mobile phone in a school corridor, with a blurry group of three female students talking in the background. The girl seems to be isolated. Yet, it is difficult to understand whether the girl in the foreground is a victim and the other girls are bullies, or vice versa (Figure 2). From the point of view of the image-text interplay, the relationship is that of *convergence* for all the three dimensions of the interpersonal meanings: *address* is verbally "low" since the text is made of third-person declaratives, and it is also visually "low" because all the participants are not gazing at the viewer; *social distance* is "moderate" both in relation to the written text and to the picture given the neutral voice of the verbs together with the use of parataxis and hypotaxis, and the medium shot; *involvement* is visually and verbally "weak" because of the oblique angle of the girl and the third person of the body of the text.
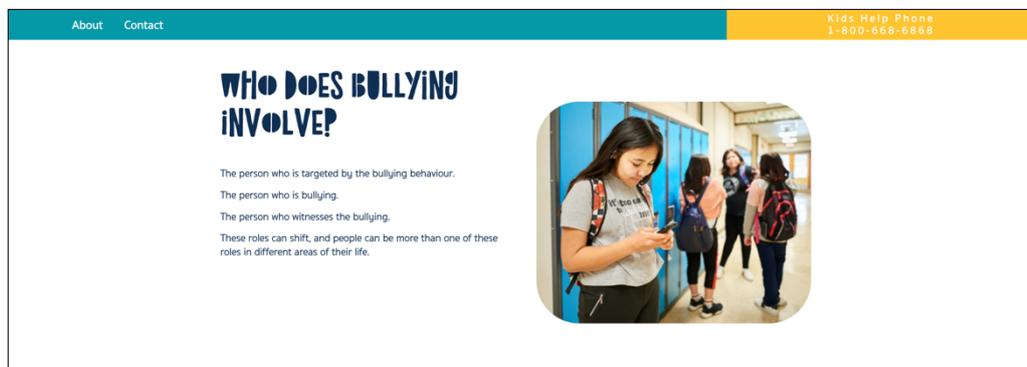
Figure 2
Bullying section from KHH.

The third paragraph, *What are the types of bullying?*, provides teenagers with the *denominations* and the *operational definitions* of the different types of bullying (11):

(11)   What are the types of bullying?
          Verbal – using words to be mean and hurtful.
          For example, teasing, insults, threatening, making jokes, humiliating someone, racist/sexist/homophobic comments, or sexualized language
          Physical – harming someone's body or their things.
          For example, hitting, slapping, punching, pushing, choking, hazing, spitting, stealing/wrecking someone's property, grabbing, or choking.
          Social – harming someone socially, like ignoring someone, telling secrets, ruining friendships, or inviting someone to do something and not showing up.
          For example, spreading rumours, telling secrets, ganging up on someone, ignoring someone, keeping someone away from their friends, or making plans with someone and not showing up to be mean.
          Cyberbullying – using technology to be hurtful, like texting mean things or posting things on social media.
          For example, sending hurtful or mean messages via text, email, social media, or phone call, sharing an embarrassing picture of someone without permission, pretending to be someone else online, or creating pages or polls to rate people in a hurtful way. (KHH)

These definitions are completed by *exemplifications* incapsulated in the text introduced by "like" or separated from it and introduced by "for example". They provide users with concrete examples of bullying actions such as spreading rumors or spitting.

The protagonist of the connected photograph is still a girl watching her phone, probably sitting at a desk with a sad and/or serious expression. For all three dimensions of interpersonal meanings, the relationship between the image and text is one of *convergence*, as in the previous paragraphs: *address* is "low" both verbally and visually because the text is written in the third person and because the girl's gaze is directed to her mobile. *Social distance* can be categorized as visually and verbally "moderate", given the neutral voice of the verbs and the fact that only the girl's face and part of her chest can be seen. *Involvement* is "weak" in the two modes because the girl's body is turned right (oblique angle) and the sentences are in the third-person.

Coherently, the next paragraph entitled *Who does bullying hurt?* is composed of short third-person declarative sentences answering this question, as in examples (12):

(12)   When someone is bullied, it can be really hurtful and have many negative outcomes. (KHH)

Then, there are three bullet lists of the emotions the victim of the bullying, the bully, and the witness can feel (*The person being bullied might feel or*

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experience; *The person who witnesses bullying might feel or experience*; *The person who is bullying another might feel or experience*). Three out of the four roles involved in bullying are considered.

The picture portrays a girl like in the other pictures analyzed. She wears a ballerina dress, sadly bended towards the floor, her eyes closed, thus exemplifying the feelings felt by the target of the bullying behavior.

The relationship between the verbal and visual elements might be classified as one of *convergence* in terms of *address* and *involvement*, with both being "weak": the viewer is not gazed at by the girl who is represented in an oblique angle, and all the sentences are characterized by the third-person pronoun. The image-text relationship is instead of *complementarity* in terms of *social distance*: verbally, it is "moderate", yet it is visually "large" because the girl's entire body is depicted. This distance from the viewer may be due to the fact that these feelings are tried to be presented as objectively as possible, as the verbal text attempts to do.

Particularly, the neutral/third person is abandoned in the last sentence of the paragraph for an inclusive "we" (Vladimirou 2007), comprising the writer and the reader: *This is why we need to get help*. The distance created by the picture is therefore shortened by including the reader in the age range of the users.

This sentence links this paragraph to the last paragraph of the webpage *How to deal with bullying?*. In this one, the reader is directly addressed with the second pronoun "you" and with a series of imperatives offering him/her advice on how to stop bullying such as *save the messages for proof*. These suggestions are presented in bullet lists according to the types of bullying (*Cyberbullying*, *Other types of bullying*, etc.). A *scenario* is then embedded in an *exemplification* when it is said to exploit humor. Without a further explanation, the use of humor as a weapon against bullying may be difficult to understand so an imaginary situation is described:

(13) Using humour is taking what they say and "owning" it in a humorous way. For example, if they say, "You're so ugly," you could respond with "I know, right?? It's actually amazing how ugly I am." Remember, this is not you validating what they say! It is just showing them their words don't have power. (KHH)

The corresponding photograph features a girl again (!) speaking to an adult in the background, probably her father since the setting appears to be a living room. The image-text relationship is still that of *divergence* as regards *address*: verbally, it is "high" because of the second person pronoun and the use of the imperatives, and visually, it is "low" since the two participants in the picture do not look at the viewer but the father stares at the daughter and the girl gazes downwards. Image-text relationship in the dimension of

involvement can also be classified as *divergence* with the visual and the verbal positioned at the two opposites: the picture implies "low involvement" whereas the text a "high involvement". In terms of *social distance*, it exhibits *complementarity*: visually, social distance is "moderate" because the user can see the girl's face and part of the chest (but only her father's face, who is anyhow blurred) but is "small" from a verbal point of view because no passive voice is used, and parataxis dominates. Therefore, the picture maintains the style of the other photographs.

Generally, bullying seems to be presented as objectively as possible, without focusing on the users' engagement. Information is more detailed and precise as it can be evinced from the use of *denominations*. This objectiveness characterizes the pictures on the webpage too. However, it is worth noting that the choice to convey information through lists can serve both as a form of scaffolding or of a scientific approach and as a means to connect with users.

It can also be seen as a form of "teenspeak", a "language which imitates the jargon of teenagers and which tries to convey a conversation-like quality as in advice from peers" (Gotti 2014, p. 25). As a matter of fact, "teenspeak" has been detected in health discourse on risks in teen magazines (McKay 2006, pp. 316-317). This seems somehow corroborated by the inclusive "we" found in the third paragraph.

5. Concluding remarks

The study's findings reveal that differences between HK' and KHH's webpages on bullying predominate over similarities, given the different age-groups they address. From a linguistic perspective, one notable feature is the use of the second-person pronoun on HK's webpage, which is distinctive of health materials designed for children. As Breeze (2015, p. 16) suggests, "the level of familiarity associated with the second person serves to involve the reader in the story"; thus, its goal is to create a rhetorical effect of closeness, emphasizing the highly interactive nature of children's websites. (See also Diani 2019.)

The second-person pronoun is also found in the definitions given on the webpage. It is combined with the types categorized as *operational*; these are the ones typically used in psychology to make abstract concepts like anger more comprehensible.

The emphasis on child engagement is coherently observed in image-text relationships. In terms of *interpersonal meaning*, with regard to *address* and *involvement*, the combination of the verbal text and the image helps build a relationship with the child users so that they can cope with bullying and trust the advice offered. Notably, the role of adults as dependable helpers for

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children is visually emphasized through the dimension of *social distance*: these adults are not figures who children need to identify with, but rather they appear as welcoming and supporting caregivers.

On the other hand, KHH, being addressed to an older audience, focuses on precise and objective *definitions* using a neutral third person, accompanied by *denominations*, for the different types of bullying. This tendency is mirrored in the associated photographs. From the point of view of *interpersonal meaning*, the image-text relationship does not appear to favor users' direct engagement but a distanced and detached approach. This may also be due to the fact that the visual is composed of photographs of specific hurtful situations that exemplify the victim's and/or the bully's role: sometimes the user cannot distinguish whether the depicted girl is a victim or a bully, perhaps underlining the same feeling of fear and distress characterizing both figures.

However, the webpage changes at the end when coming to the set of guidelines to prevent and stop bullying violence; in this case, second-person pronouns and imperatives are used in contrast with the related picture of the paragraph. The reason lies in the fact that the user's direct engagement is, in this case, more than necessary for the actions they should implement.

In fact, teenagers' involvement appears to be incentivized throughout the text via systematic recourse to lists. These can be interpreted as a feature of the so-called "teenspeak", which has been identified in other kinds of health materials for teenagers. Therefore, the webpage seems to create a balance between accurate and impersonal knowledge dissemination and users' involvement.

Similarities between HK and KHH are few but extremely important. First, questions are used as titles in order to simulate an interaction between experts and non-experts, and a familiar classroom situation. Secondly, both webpages use *concretization* strategies, that is, *exemplification* and *scenario*. These can help children and teenagers relate bullying behavior to their own experiences, and connect what is said on the webpages to their own experiences, so as to ultimately understand the characteristics of bullying and learn to deal with it.

In conclusion, the study's results demonstrate how the HK and KHH educational webpages are conceived as means through which bullying can be recognized and fought, by exploiting the visual and verbal modes, and tailoring them to the different age-groups they target. Specifically, they disseminate knowledge and involve users by adopting strategies that suit their different ages (Bianchi *et al.* 2022).

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NEWS PRESS RELEASES
IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS
A contrastive genre and corpus-based approach
to promoting inclusiveness within two
LGBT+ organizations

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Abstract – Press releases as a genre can be seen as a pre-formulation device for news reports, highlighting the relationship emerging between press release writers and journalists (Jacobs 1999). Within genre studies (Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993), company press releases have been shown to exhibit a set of standard moves and strategies (McLaren, Gurau 2005), which reveal their hybrid nature resulting from the tension between informative and promotional goals (Catenaccio 2008). However, the status of the press release as a genre has been questioned due to a continuous variation in stage combinations and communicative purposes (Lassen 2006). Digital technologies have also challenged the textual structure and the participation framework of the genre (Catenaccio 2008). This paper concentrates on non-profit organizations and examines the language and features of a pilot corpus of online news press releases retrieved from the webpages of a British LGBT+ charity (*Stonewall*) and of its closest Italian counterpart, the Italian LGBT+ organization *Arcigay*. From a genre perspective, the results suggest recourse to the same (recursive) rhetorical moves, which serve informative purposes and, crucially, are primarily promotional and persuasive in nature. Additionally, based on the corpus-informed analysis, investigation into the collocational patterns of selected top lexical keywords for each corpus (vis-à-vis *EnTenTen20* and *ItTenTen20*), as well as their concordances, showed that both organizations presented themselves as cohesive and committed communities promoting inclusiveness, and supporting LGBT+ people and communities, which are discursively framed as threatened by homo-bi-transphobic violence.

Keywords: corpus linguistics; genre analysis; inclusiveness; LGBT+ organizations; news press releases.

1. Introduction

News press releases are brief documents that are similar to news stories. They present newsworthy information issued by companies or organizations and are primarily intended for journalists, who will then turn them into actual news stories (Catenaccio 2008, p. 11). They serve as a tool to promote the group's image and reputation. Although they have been studied in the field of

public relations since the beginning of the 20th century, not many scholars have analyzed press releases from a linguistic perspective. One notable exception is Geert Jacobs (1999), also one of the first scholars who identified the linguistic and pragmatic features of press releases. Based on research in participation frameworks in oral conversation (Goffman 1981; Levinson 1988) and in the news (Bell 1991), Jacobs showed how press releases are designed, produced, and released by formal organizations in order to provide journalists with content in their own news reporting. Within this communicative exchange, journalists serve as both addressees and intermediaries between organizations themselves and newspaper readers, who are the final recipients of the message. The press release itself represents a tacit sign of agreement between the institutional parties (Jacobs 1999, pp. 63-64) – i.e., the organizations and the media.

Because both parties are aware of the goals and constraints on their permissible contributions when they design the information to be released, press releases can be seen as a form of institutional discourse (Drew, Heritage 1992, pp. 3, 22). Due to the journalists' shift from receivers in the initial utterance event into producers in the next utterance event (Jacobs 1999, p. 74), press releases are also understood as a form of "projected discourse." Third, press releases are "pre-formulation devices" (Jacobs 1999, p. 75), in that they are designed and formulated to meet both the formal and content requirements of news reporting. In other words, the way press releases are formulated anticipates how news reports are produced and released, with meta-pragmatic features of pre-formulation, including third-person self-references, self-quotations, and explicit semi-performatives (Jacobs 1999).

Taking another perspective on press releases, Pander-Maat (2007) concentrated on promotional language, with special attention to evaluative adjectives, intensifying adjectives, and property-specifying adjectives. More recently, corpus-driven approaches have used lexical bundles in order to compare and contrast press releases and news reports in terms of register and pragmatic functions (de Cock, Granger 2021).

Although the earliest linguistic and pragmatic analyses of press releases have emphasised the relationship between the writers and journalists, further research has highlighted that this bond has been challenged by the introduction and development of the Internet, where these texts are now published in the form of news press releases. McLaren and Gurau (2005, p. 13) argued, for instance, that in web press releases, the role of the addressee has been progressively taken over by stakeholders: press release writers have gradually gained more freedom as to what to write since they "have the possibility to publish directly on their websites" (Lassen 2006, p. 508), thus "[bypassing] journalistic intervention in reaching the public" (Catenaccio 2008, p. 15). Accordingly, companies and organizations have been

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increasingly referring to "earlier press releases" vis-à-vis "news releases" on their websites, in that the gradual disappearance of journalists as intermediaries has resulted in the publication of releases that are similar to news reports and address the wider public (Scott 2007).

Press releases have also been explored across different domains, for instance, releases in biotechnology (McLaren, Gurau, 2005; Lassen 2006), business releases announcing products or services (Catenaccio 2008), releases for institutions such as the European Court of Justice (Tessuto 2021), and museum communication (Lazzeretti 2014; Lazzeretti, Bondi 2012). Working within genre analysis (Bhatia 1993; Paltridge 1997; Swales 1990, 2004), researchers have identified typical core and peripheral moves within this conventionalized genre, which combines informative, promotional, and persuasive purposes (de Cock, Granger 2021, p. 692). Press releases are therefore characterized as "multipurpose" (de Cock, Granger, 2021, p. 692) or "hybrid" texts (Catenaccio 2008; McLaren, Gurau 2005), which blur boundaries between discourses (Catenaccio 2008, pp. 11-12). Reflecting on this hybrid aspect, Lassen (2006) further questioned the status of press releases as a stable genre: due to a certain degree of variation in textual staging, as well as to the convergence and achievement of multiple rhetorical objects (a term used to refer to genre communicative functions), press releases should be seen as genres on the basis of the sole textual form and not in terms of contents and rhetorical objectives. In Lassen's (2006) words, "[the] press release is not a genre, but rather a media-channel used as a vehicle to carry a variety of rhetorical objectives, and hence a variety of genres" (p. 507).

Since, to the best of my knowledge, linguistic research on press releases has been conducted to explore mainly data from companies or institutions rather than non-profit organizations or charities, this study concentrated on two LGBT+ organizations. Such a choice is grounded in my initial assumption that structural and linguistic patterns found in the issued press releases might depart from the standard features of corporate press releases as a result of their focus on activism and social issues, rather than on profiting from their work and initiatives. The following complementary research questions are therefore addressed:

- Which rhetorical moves are used by LGBT+ organizations in the news press releases published on their websites?

- Which communicative functions are achieved?

- Is there a correlation between textual staging and the way LGBT+ organizations present themselves?

The choice of LGBT+ organizations is also grounded in the lack of studies exploring the linguistic and discursive representation of LGBT+ people and

communities within organizations supporting them, which may contribute to further develop longitudinal and cross-generic research within existing research analysing the press, in order to explore to what extent journalists align themselves with LGBT+ organizations when reporting news involving them. Questions here are:

- How are LGBT+ people and communities discursively represented in the news press releases under scrutiny?
- How do the LGBT+ organizations under investigation discursively present themselves?

2. Data and methodology

2.1. Data

This study is based on the *LGBT+ News Press Release Corpus* (henceforth *LGBT+_NR Corpus*) – a comparable, bilingual corpus that brings together the 2018-2020 news releases of the British LGBT+ charity *Stonewall*[1] and its closest Italian counterpart, *Arcigay – Associazione LGBTI Italiana*,[2] or the main Italian non-profit LGBTI organization. Criteria adopted to identify the organizations and the time frame include the availability of news releases on their websites, a certain homogeneity and uniformity in terms of number of texts and tokens for English and Italian, and the possibility to replicate the analysis. The British module, *LGBT+.En*, comprises texts from the news subdirectories media releases[3] and media statements,[4] the Italian module, *LGBT+.It*, comprises texts from the Comunicati ('press releases'). The texts selected for collection were primarily designed to keep users updated with the latest news and events involving the organizations themselves and the LGBT+ communities. All web pages have been manually downloaded and saved as .txt files using AntFileConverter[5] and then edited with NotePad++[6] and cleaned and formatted for whitespace, characters, HTML, links, duplicates, and other. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the corpus.

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[1] https://www.stonewall.org.uk/ (27.4.2023).
[2] https://www.arcigay.it/ (27.4.2023).
[3] https://www.stonewall.org.uk/media-statements (27.4.2023).
[4] https://www.stonewall.org.uk/media-releases-0 (27.4.2023).
[5] https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antfileconverter/ (27.4.2023).
[6] https://notepad-plus-plus.org/ (27.4.2023).

LGBT+_ NR Corpus			
MODULES	YEAR	TEXTS	TOKENS
LGBT+.En UK component	2018	36	22,727
	2019	47	18,958
	2020	22	9,826
	TOTAL	105	51,511
LGBT+-.It Italian component	2018	46	16,193
	2019	58	21,292
	2020	46	16,042
	TOTAL	150	53,527

Table 1
The LBGT+_NR Corpus.

I could observe that the texts range from announcements of forthcoming and past events or initiatives to position statements or viewpoints towards specific issues, reports following surveys, news reports, and combinations of these genres. Overall, the data suggests that Stonewall releases announcements and statements with few reports, while Arcigay issues a considerable number of texts that merge features of news reports and position statements or viewpoints.

2.2. Methodology

The research question of this study is twofold. On the macro-pragmatic level, I want to identify the purpose(s) and structure of press releases on the web pages of LGBT+ charities and organizations. On the micro-pragmatic level, I am interested in the lexical (re-)presentation of LGBT+ people, charities and organizations across English and Italian. In this context, combining the tools of genre analysis and corpus-assisted discourse studies seems to be an appropriate approach.

2.2.1. Genre-based analysis

Due to the variability in the types of texts contained in the corpus, a randomized sample of texts has been selected from each module: on average, 36 texts for *LGBT+.En*, i.e. minimally 1 text per each month of years 2018, 2019, 2020 – in this case, for each year, minimally 6 releases and 6 statements; and 36 texts for *LGBT+.It*, i.e. minimally 1 text per each month of years 2018, 2019, 2020. Close reading of each and every text has enabled me to identify generic moves and, therefore, explore whether Stonewall and Arcigay shape their texts following a fixed and conventionalized structure, and if variability of rhetorical and communicative purposes affects the textual

staging of the texts. Working along the lines of recent genre-based studies, including more recent developments (e.g. Wang, Flowerdew 2016), I can therefore discuss the different ways in which the organizations present themselves. For reasons of space, I provide the overall structuring of the genre and then restrict discussion to core and frequent rhetorical moves observed in the corpus.

2.2.2. Corpus-informed (discourse) analysis

Corpus-driven and corpus-based methods (Tognini-Bonelli 2001) are used to explore the discursive representations of LGBT+ communities and people, as well as the discursive self-presentation of Stonewall and Arcigay.

From a quantitative point of view, lists of lexical keywords of the British and Italian sub-corpora have been calculated using the online software *SketchEngine* (Kilgariff *et al.* 2014)[7] and the *EnTenTen20* and the *ItTenTen20* respectively as reference corpora.[8] Keyword obervation is a methodological procedure widely used in discourse studies. These are not only words occurring in a corpus that are "statistically significantly more frequently than would be expected by chance when compared to a corpus which is larger or of equal size" (Baker *et al.* 2006). In fact, keywords identify the "aboutness" of the texts and corpora under scrutiny, i.e. what texts of the corpora are about (Phillips 1989). From a discourse perspective, as Baker *et al.* argue, keywords "help to act as signposts for discourse, ideology or argumentation" (2011, p. 67). To rephrase, research in corpus linguistics and discourse analysis has proven that, due to their nature as both unusually frequent and topical words in a corpus, keywords can be used to identify salient discourses in a corpus. In this analysis, keywords have served as a tool to pinpoint prevalent themes and discourses around LGBT+ people and communities within the two organizations supporting them. Due to space limits, this study concentrates on the top 15 lexical keywords returned in the English and Italian keyword lists. Collocations of keywords referring to the organizations or to LGBT+ people, communities, or related issues have then been explored.

Collocations do not simply represent frequent and strong lexical patterns around specific words. In discourse studies, collocates "give us the most salient and obvious lexical patterns surrounding a subject, from which a number of discourses can be obtained", since frequently collocating words provide evidence "that the discourses surrounding them are particularly powerful - the strength of collocation implies that these are concepts which have been linked in the minds of people and have been used [repeatedly]"

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[7] https://www.sketchengine.eu/ (23.4.2023).
[8] https://www.sketchengine.eu/documentation/tenten-corpora/ (20.6.2023).

(Baker 2006, p. 112). In procedural terms, collocations have been calculated using the corpus software *AntConc 4.2.0* (Anthony 2022) adopting multiple statistical association measures – these include MI, MI3, MI2, Dice and LogDice, which favor rare or less rare collocates occurring almost exclusively in the company of specific search words (Brezina 2018, p. 70). Although these statistical measures are targeted towards different forms of mutual attraction between words, their combination has been adopted due to the very similar results obtained with each test. Due to space reasons, Section 3.2. shows the strongest collocations according to their likelihood value.

In the final analytical stage, preliminary analysis of lexical keywords in their concordances and collocational patterns (Sinclair 2003, 2004) is carried out in order to identify recurrent discursive strategies and corroborate the findings that emerge from the analysis of keywords and collocations.

3. Results

3.1. Genre-based analysis

Both modules seem to show the same (sometimes) recursive and nonlinear, rhetorical moves: Heading and Subheading, Announcement, Summary, Details Account, Comment, Standpoint, Justification, Call for Action, Statement of Commitment, and Contact details.

Headings are topic-giving. That is, they describe the issues or events that follow. This move is generally written selecting key or specific information that might be appealing for the targeted reader. The *Announcement* represents the pragmatic strategy through which events, results, or initiatives are announced within the release. It may combine with a brief *Summary* of content in the *Subheading*, to further orient users through the text, or be incorporated in the Heading. Importantly, these moves are cannot be observed in isolation. Example (1), from *LGBT+.En*, is a case in point. It shows overlap of Subheading, Announcement and Summary, with repetition and expansion of content across the resulting incorporation and the Details Account move.

(1)   Stonewall announces Top Global Employers [HEADING - ANNOUNCEMENT]
        17 companies commended by Stonewall for efforts to create inclusive global workplaces [SUBHEADING/ANNOUNCEMENT/SUMMARY]
        Stonewall, Europe's leading lesbian, gay, by and trans equality charity, today (Monday 21 September 2020 announced its 17 Top Employers for 2020. [DETAILS ACCOUNT] [*LGBT+.En*/21Sept2020]

Announcements, however, are not necessarily signaled by the word *announce*. Besides being incorporated in other rhetorical moves, announcements may be implicit, as in example (2), where the submission of the text of the Law against homo-bi-transphobia to the Italian Parliament[9] and the position of the organization constitute the objects being announced in the document.

(2)   OMOBITRANSFOBIA, DEPOSITATO IL TESTO UNIFICATO. ARCIGAY: "PROPOSTA MIGLIORABILE, INSERIRE DIVIETO TEORIE RIPARATIVE" [HEADING/ANNOUNCEMENT/STANDPOINT]
Bologna, 1 luglio 2020 – "Il deposito del testo di legge unificato contro l'omobitransfobia in Commissione Giustizia alla Camera segna l'inizio di un nuovo tentativo di colmare il ritardo nella battaglia contro le discriminazioni legate all'orientamento sessuale e all'identità di genere che sconta il nostro Paese. [SUMMARY][10] [*LGBT+.It*/1Jul2020]

Other texts, however, do not provide the same amount of incorporated information shown in examples (1) and (2). Headings may, in fact, highlight a particular fact, despite dealing with more aspects in the rest of the document. This pattern appears to be more frequent in the Italian module.

The example reported in Figure 1 highlights an episode of homophobia involving an employee, while the entire document represents a socio-political reflection on the importance of discussing and finding effective solutions to workplace discrimination within parliamentary debates. The interest in the discriminatory event in the heading and in the position towards the issue in the subheading suggest that the release was likely written primarily to appeal to readers' emotions – in particular, indignation – and directly address institutions. In other words, overlooking more informative content in the heading of the document is due to the prevailing persuasive function served by the text.

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[9] The law against homo-bi-transphobia, also known as "Legge Zan," was proposed in Italy by the Deputy Alessandro Zan. Although it was approved by the Chamber of Deputies on November 5, 2020, this law did not pass in the Senate. See https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/356433.pdf for more reference to the text of the law in the Italian language.

[10] 'HOMO-BI-TRANSPHOBIA, SUBMITTED THE UNIFIED TEXT OF THE LAW. ARCIGAY: "IMPROVABLE, PROHIBITION OF THEORIES ON CONVERSION THERAPIES TO BE INCLUDED"
Bologna, July 10, 2020 – "The submission of the unified text of the law against homo-bi-transphobia to the Justice Commission of the Chamber of Deputies marks the beginning of a new attempt to make up for the delay in the fight against discriminations based on sexual orientation and gender identity in our Country."' [My translation]

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Figure 1
Heading and subheading in a news release from Arcigay.[11]

Although some releases devote specific paragraphs to providing the *Details* of the event, initiative, or results, in other texts this account is missing, or is incorporated within the *Comments* of the CEOs or of other people speaking on behalf of the organizations, as can be seen in example (3). The excerpt reports the decision of the Italian Region Friuli Venezia Giulia not to adhere to an initiative for non-discrimination. This is told through the words of Arcigay's CEO, who negatively comments this decision.

(3)   "Per quanto prevedibile, [COMMENT]
        l'uscita della Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia dalla Rete Nazionale delle
        Pubbliche Amministrazioni Anti Discriminazioni per orientamento sessuale e
        identità di genere (Rete Re.a.dy), [DETAILS ACCOUNT]
        è un fatto grave e carico di ripercussioni negative": così Gabriele Piazzoni,
        segretario nazionale di Arcigay. [COMMENT/STANDPOINT]
        Che prosegue: "La Rete, infatti, non comporta oneri significativi per le
        istituzioni aderenti ma di contro dà la possibilità di attingere a un bacino di
        buone pratiche in uso nei Comuni e nelle Regioni del nostro Paese per
        prevenire e contrastare la discriminazione delle persone lgbti. [DETAILS
        ACCOUNT]
        Rinunciare a questa possibilità non solo è un atto politicamente miope e denso
        di ripercussioni negative per la cittadinanza, ma smaschera, semmai ce ne
        fosse bisogno, il furore omotransfobico della parte politica che occupa ora i

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[11] https://www.arcigay.it/comunicati/omofobia-insultato-e-licenziato-perche-gay/ (27.4.2023).
    'Homophobia, insulted and fired because he is gay – Arcigay: 'IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO
    CREATE JOBS IF WE DO NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DISCRIMINATION
    OF WORKERS.'' [My translation]

ruoli di governo di quel territorio. [COMMENT] [*LGBT+.It*/31May2018][12]

A rhetorical move featured in nearly all the texts examined in this study is the comment. In fact, most of the news press releases present one or more sections where the organization's CEO, or other people speaking on behalf of it or other organizations, comment on the events being reported, thus expressing their standpoint, i.e. their point of view regarding those events. This move often converges into the comment. Example (4) shows how the comment of the CEO served as a tool to provide the viewpoint of the organization. More specifically, the comment provides a negative evaluation of work carried out by UK Government to reform the Gender Recognition Act.

(4)   Nancy Kelley, Stonewall, Chief Executive said: 'Today, the UK Government has fallen far short on its promise to reform the Gender Recognition Act, and has missed a key opportunity to progress LGBT equality. (...) [STANDPOINT/COMMENT] [*LGBT+.En*/22Sep2020]

News press releases may also concentrate on justifying a certain initiative or action. *Justification* is a rhetorical move through which the organization explains the importance of what is being announced or reported, as illustrated in example (5).

(5)   The Roundtable is another important event in a wider series put together by Stonewall as part of its ongoing commitment to becoming a more BAME-inclusive organization. In the past year, the charity has hosted its second Diaspora Showcase, strengthened its partnership with UK Black Pride and run a free community role model programme for BAME/POC LGBT young people. [JUSTIFICATION] [LGBT.En/24Feb2020]

The selected texts, if dealing with issues or negative events involving LGBT+ people and communities, also display a *Call for Action* and a *Statement of Commitment*. The former is a linguistic and pragmatic invitation or urge to take appropriate action to solve the problem. This entreaty is mainly addressed to institutions or wider audiences who should become more aware of specific issues (examples 6 and 7). The latter is often complementary, and

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[12] 'As far as foreseeable, the refusal of the Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia to join the National Network of Public Administrations Against Discriminations based on sexual orientations and gender identity (Network Re.a.dy) represents a serious matter with negative consequences," says Gabriele Piazzoni, National Secretary of Arcigay. He continues: "Institutions joining the Network do not have any significant burdens; on the contrary, they can adopt a range of good practices used in municipalities and regions of our country to prevent and contrast the discrimination of LGBTI people. Not only is such refusal a politically 'myopic' political action with negative consequences for citizenship, but it also reveals, if anyone was still unaware, the homo-transphobic 'fury' of some politicians covering governmental roles in that territory (…).' [My translation]

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it signals the effort taken by the organization to support the communities and the people they address (example 6).

(6)   To all *our* supporters and everyone who cares about equality, this fight is far from over. We urge you to call or write to your MP, the Minister for Women and Equalities and the Prime Minister. Tell them why we can't take a massive step back for trans people and echo Section 28. Talk to them about why reform of the GRA is simply about legally recognising trans people as who they are and treating them with dignity and respect. [CALL FOR ACTION]
Stonewall will continue to work with you, with trans communities and trans-led organizations, until each and every one of us is accepted without exception. [STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT]
Take action for trans equality! [CALL FOR ACTION] [*LGBT+.En*/22July2020]

(7)   Il *nostro* appello è affinché la Camera dei deputati faccia presto e bene nell'approvazione di una legge efficace contro omotransfobia e misoginia, senza cedere all'ostruzionismo e ai continui tentativi di indebolimento del testo in discussione. [CALL FOR ACTION] [*LGBT+.It*/3Nov2020][13]

Finally, some texts also provide *Contact Details* to allow readers to get in touch with the organization either to report any struggle or to join in.

It is important to note that the moves described in this section do not appear according to a fixed order. Rather, they are organized recursively, as argued Catenaccio (Catenaccio 2008). Also, we cannot distinguish between core and peripheral moves, since no single move appears to be mandatory in the texts under scrutiny.

3.2. Corpus-informed analysis

Table 3 shows the most significant lexical keywords found in *LGBT+.En* and *LGBT+.It*.

LGBT+.EN			LGBT+.IT		
KEYWORD	FREQUENCY (N. TOKENS)	KEYNESS SCORE	KEYWORD	FREQUENCY (N. TOKENS)	KEYNESS SCORE
Stonewall	574	4109,78	*Arcigay*	709	4001,92
lgbt	660	1612,28	*Piazzoni*	312	3480,44
trans	395	1050,72	*lgbti*	339	3228,67
lgbt-inclusive	51	874,709	*omotransfobia*	174	1925,73
bame[14]	59	756,123	*Pride*	200	651,745
anti-lgbt	42	642,126	*misoginia*	34	296,843

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[13] '*We* appeal to the Chamber of Deputies for approving, as soon as possible, an efficient law against homo-transphobia and misogyny, without surrendering to obstructionism and continuous attempts at weakening the text of the law under discussion.' [My translation]

[14] The term that is used as an acronym to refer to Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

bi	151	482,171	*Arcifesta*	24	290,114
teampride	26	453,996	*omo-bi-transfobia*	23	276,868
Pinsent	21	330,441	*transfobia*	26	256,065
non-binary	24	303,672	*omobitransfobia*	20	240,934
equality	247	218,82	*Zan*	27	233,969
biphobic	12	207,492	*omofobia*	58	229,192
homophobic	26	205,712	*coming*	41	212,704
lesbian	109	202,571	*sostienici*	17	202,365
transphobic	12	180,365	*omogenitoriali*	17	188,367

Table 2
Top15 lexical keywords.

The most frequent keywords are the names *Stonewall* in *LGBT+.En*, *Arcigay* and *Piazzoni* (Arcigay's secretary, who speaks on behalf of the organization, as in example 3) in *LGBT+.It*.

Other keywords in *LGBT+.En* mainly refer to sexual and gender identities, such as *LGBT(QI)*, *trans*, *bi(sexual)*, *non-binary*, and *lesbian*. Keywords denoting reactions to such identities are also present, e.g. *biphobic*. In a slightly different manner, the top 15 keywords in *LGBT+.It* include lexical items describing issues and problems faced by the LGBT+ communities, and, therefore, reaction to LGBT+ identities, as suggested by words such as *omo-bi-transfobia* 'homo-bi-transphobia' and *misoginia* 'misogyny'.

Both modules show frequent lexical keywords related to Pride movements and initiatives, suggesting that this is a strongly reported and discussed topic within both organizations. Examples are *Teampride* in *LGBT+.En*., and *Pride* and *Arcifesta* in *LGBT+.It*.

In addition, some differences emerge from both corpora. First, I would like to mention a relatively more inclusive and intersectional approach towards LGBT+ identities in the British corpus, as suggested by the strong presence of words referring to a wide range of minorities, including trans, non-binary and black communities. In the Italian corpus, however, although there is a strong presence of terms collectively referring to LGBT+ people and communities (e.g., *omo-bi-transfobia* is a word in which lexical items referred to homosexual, bisexual, and transsexual identities co-occur together), special emphasis is put on issues involving homosexual communities, as suggested by the word *coming* (i.e. coming out and publicly revealing one's identity) and *omogenitoriali* 'same-sex parents, adj.'. One reason behind this pattern might be that, unlike British Governments, the Italian Parliament has never approved legislation authorizing same-sex couples to have or adopt children, so the issue is still strongly discussed within Arcigay and Italian national politics. Second, it emerges that in the Italian corpus, keywords mainly refer to problematic issues experienced by

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LGBT+ communities, suggesting that they are discursively framed as threatened and challenged by forms of homo-bi-transphobic violence or intolerance. Evidence for this comes from discussion of the data in Tables 4 and 5, which show the most frequent collocates of the top lexical keywords related to LGBT+ identities and LGBT+ organizations in *LGBT+.En* and *LGBT+.It*.

KEYWORDS COLLOCATIONS IN *LGBT+.En*	
WORD	COLLOCATE (LIKELIHOOD)
Stonewall	*said* (154.871), *statement* (99286), *Chief* (67.614), *executive* (58.357), *people* (19.670), *welcomes* (16.997), *report* (15.963)
LGBT	*people* (149.273), *anti* (58.937), *equality* (41.868), *foundation* (41.607), *trans* (41.237), *students* (34.729), *bame* (29.547), *inclusive* (23.429)
trans	*people* (229.346), *lesbian* (109.906), *gay* (94.920), *bi* (81.553), *equality* (64.783), *allies* (44.208), *lgbt* (41.269), *programme* (40.848), *young* (22.813), *support* (22.294), *communities* (16.238)
bame	*lgbt* (29.591), *black* (19.485), *face* (18.147), *ethnic* (17.706), *Asian* (16.374), *together* (16.344), *minority* (15.809), *unwelcome* (14.123), *people* (13.903), *communities* (13.757)
bi	*lesbian* (263.250), *gay* (257.722), *trans* (81.646), *people* (52.807), *erasure* (27.097), *biphobia* (23.609), *equality* (18.848)
non-binary	*people* (29.265), *gender* (17.942), *trans* (11.897), *as* (11.555), *including* (9.569), *not* (9.122)
lesbian	*gay* (5.394), *bi* (4.944), *trans* (2.923), *and* (1.736), *people* (2.052), *equality* (2.576)

Table 3
Keywords collocations in *LGBT+.En*.

KEYWORDS COLLOCATIONS IN *LGBT+.IT*	
WORD	COLLOCATE (LIKELIHOOD)
Arcigay	*prosegue* 'continues' (39.712), *rete* 'network' (32.353), *mobilitazione* 'mobilization' (31.523), *campagna* 'campaign' (29.177), *lancia* 'launches' (3.110)
Piazzoni	*conclude* 'concludes' (262.641), *commenta* 'comments' (192.923), *dichiara* 'declares' (129.552), *prosegue* 'continues' (32.625)
LGBTI	*persone* 'people' (348.180) *movimento* 'movement' (100.439), *associazioni* 'associations/ organizations' (81.562), *diritti* 'rights' (59.664), *comunità* 'communities' (49.812), *visibilità* 'visibility' (37.586), *(nei) confronti* 'towards' (23.387)

Table 4
Keywords collocations in *LGBT+.It*.

The collocates of the keywords *Stonewall*, *Arcigay* and its National Secretary *(Gabriele) Piazzoni* provide evidence of the use of the meta-pragmatic features identified by Jacobs (1999). Most of these are, in fact, third person self-reference verbs (e.g., *said*, *prosegue* '*continues*', *commenta* '*comments*', *dichiara* '*declares*' and semi-performative (e.g., *welcomes* and *lancia* '*launches*'). Self-reference, however, is not the sole linguistic-pragmatic resource employed by *Stonewall* and *Arcigay*, but also the pronoun *we* and its related forms, through which they discursively frame themselves as large communities and promote inclusiveness, as also evidenced in quotes (6) and (7) previously.

The discursive self-construction of *Stonewall* and *Arcigay* as two organizations promoting inclusiveness is strongly suggested by their collocates – respectively *welcomes* and *rete* '*network*' – as well as lexical items in *LGBT+.En* collocating with words referring to identities: *inclusive* with *LGBT*; *support* with *trans*; *together* with *bame*; *including* with *non-binary*. Closer analysis of the concordance lines further confirms such findings. Specifically, the instances of *LGBT-inclusive* (19 occurrences) refer to inclusive employers, suggestions for inclusive practices that should be socially adopted, and Stonewall's initiatives of commitment towards inclusiveness, as exemplified in the following extended concordance lines (Figure 2). The same is true for *support* (28 occurrences) in the context of *trans*, and the word *together* with *bame* (6 occurrences), as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

I congratulate them all.' More than 400 employers were in contention to get a coveted spot in this year's Top 100	*LGBT inclusive*	employers list. The top 10 employers were a diverse mix of organizations, with representation from both the public and
Stonewall reveals Britain's best employers for trans and non-binary staff as it releases its annual list of Top 100	*LGBT-inclusive*	employers. Stonewall's annual review has this year, for the first time ever, marked employers specifically on trans
and school corridors. 'It's now essential the Government invests in training and resources to support teachers to consistently deliver	*LGBT-inclusive*	teaching. 'We look forward to working with Government and our network of School Champions and Children and Young
will give young people what they need to make informed decisions. Stonewall Cymru will continue to campaign for high-quality,	*LGBT-inclusive,*	RSE to ensure that LGBT young people are equipped to make safe, healthy decision about their wellbeing.'
PROJECT LAUNCH LGBT WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP Two leading LGBT charities – The Rainbow Project and Stonewall – have launched a partnership to support	*LGBT-inclusive*	employers in Northern Ireland. The new initiative builds on an employers' programme established five years ago by The

Figure 2
Extended concordance lines of *LGBT-inclusive* (*LGBT+.En*).

trans discrimination where they find it. People can: Join Stonewall's 'Come Out for Trans Equality' campaign to show their	*support*	for trans people, especially on social media. Encourage friends, family and colleagues to join the campaign. Visit the Come
and Nic Bullen, co-chairs of Stonewall's Bi Staff Network Group said: 'The movement is a welcome show of	*support*	of trans equality. #BWithTheT 'Today's open letter from the bi community is another powerful demonstration that we as
s open letter from the bi community is another powerful demonstration that we as a community are united in our	*support*	of trans equality. At times when the discourse is so fractured, when our hard won rights are under threat,
their support and make sport a comfortable and accepting environment for all lesbian, gay, bi and trans people. The more	*support*	there is, the easier it will be for athletes to be open about their sexuality. 'Sports governing bodies also
or customer in the last year. But the sheer diversity of our launch partners show there is a wealth of	*support*	for trans people at the most senior levels of British industrial and cultural life. With that kind of commitment

Figure 3
Extended concordance lines of *support* in the context of *trans* (*LGBT+.En*).

| 'Part of building a more inclusive culture is creating spaces where BAME LGBT people can come | *together* | and celebrate who they are, free from discrimination and abuse. |
| we get closer and closer to a world where everyone can be accepted without exception.' BAME LGBT talent come | *together* | for special Stonewall showcase Event celebrates unique experiences of being BAME and LGBT Activists, performers, poets and writers share |

Figure 4
Extended concordance lines of *together* in the context of *bame* (*LGBT+.En*).

Similar patterns cannot be observed in *LGBT+.It*. However, nouns such as *movimento* '*movement*', *mobilitazione* '*mobilization*', *rete* '*network*' (examples 8 and 9) and *comunità* '*community/communities*' certainly suggest that Arcigay discursively presents itself as a cohesive organization.

(8)   […] domani per il quinto weekend dell'Onda Pride, la grande *mobilitazione* e dell'orgoglio arcobaleno organizzata da Arcigay *in rete con le altre associazioni* del **movimento LGBTI**. [*LGBT+.It*/22Jun2018][15]

(9)   Oggi è un giorno tristissimo, in cui *tutto* il **movimento LGBTI** e più in generale tutte le persone che hanno a cuore la battaglia per i diritti civili perdono una compagna importante e carissima [*LGBT+.It*/28Sep2019][16]

Through the discursive strategies outlined above, Stonewall and Arcigay present themselves as trustworthy organizations supporting identities and communities that face several challenges in their lives, as also signalled in the keyword lists. The strongest collocates of words referring to identities featuring as keywords in each module, and of their concordance lines, appear to point to the same view.

In *LGBT+.En*, the phrase *LGBT people* (100 occurrences) mostly co-occurs with the verbs *face* (14 occurrences), and *feel* (12 occurrences). The first verb is followed or preceded by the words such as *discrimination*, *exclusion*, *inequality*, as shown in the following extended concordance lines (Figure 5).

| health and social care staff want to deliver the best possible care, as this | *face* | *discrimination*. As a result, one in seven LGBT people (14 per cent) avoid |

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[15]'[…] tomorrow for the fifth weekend of Onda Pride, the great mobilisation of rainbow pride organised by Arcigay *within a network of other organizations* of the *LGBTI movement*.' [My translation]

[16]'Today is a very sad day, in which the *entire LGBTI movement* and more generally all the people who care about the battle for civil rights lose an important and dearest companion.' [My translation]

report shows, many LGBT people still		seeking healthcare for fear of discrimination, which
dangerous precedent which could be used by others to justify even more discrimination at a time when LGBT people still	*face*	*exclusion*, *abuse* and *discrimination* every day, despite that being against the law. 'This is a backward step for equality
come a long way. But the fight for true equality is far from over. We know that LGBT people still	*face*	significant *challenges*, including the rising levels of *hate crime*. That's why we're still fighting for a world
five (61 per cent) reported having episodes of anxiety. 'And it's no wonder this is the case: LGBT people still	*face*	*routine discrimination* in all areas of their lives. The Government's annual hate crime report revealed a 32 per cent

Figure 5
Extended concordance lines of *face* in the context of *LGBT people* (*LGBT+.En*).

Most concordance lines for *LGBT+ people* in the context of the verb *feel* show references to the role played by initiatives promoted by Stonewall to support and include LGBT+ people and communities, as can be observed in examples (10) and (11).

(10) The conference tackles best practice in supporting LGBT staff and creating an environment where *LGBT people* at all levels *feel comfortable* to be visible role models. [*LGBT+.En*/26Apr2018]

(11) Stonewall, the UK's leading charity for lesbian, gay, bi and trans equality, has released new research that finds a group of 'hesitant allies' among the British public who want to help *LGBT people feel included* in sport. [*LGBT+.En*/28Nov2018]

The same discursive strategies may be found in the context of *trans people* (127 occurrences) and *bame* (25 occurrences) *LGBT* people, who are discursively represented as both facing discrimination and receiving benefits from Stonewall's initiatives, as in the examples (12) to (14).

(12) […] It's only by working together that we can create a world where all young lesbian, gay, bi and *trans people* are accepted without exception". [*LGBT+.En*/27Apr2018]

(13) These waves of support for trans equality come at a crucial time, when *trans people* are *facing* high levels of *harassment* and *discrimination*. [*LGBT+.En*/25Mar2019]

(14) We know from our research that *bame LGBT* people can *feel unwelcome* and *excluded* from both the bame and LGBT communities, which is why events like this are so important. [*LGBT+.En*/06Sep2018]

In general, other collocates of keywords related to LGBT+ identities in
LGBT+.En include lexical items referring to other identities, suggesting a
collective use of these words to convey and promote inclusiveness. In other
words, all challenges and beneficial initiatives promoted by Stonewall are
experienced by LGBT+ people and communities as large, diversified and
cohesive communities. Example (15) illustrates this point.

(15) 'We know *trans* and *non-binary* people face high levels of abuse and
       discrimination in their day-to-day lives. […] With that kind of commitment
       and hard work we can create workplaces – and a world – where all lesbian,
       gay, bi and trans people are accepted without exception.'
       [*LGBT+.En*/18Apr2018]

In addition, words such as *biphobia* and *erasure*, which collocate and co-
occur with words referring to bisexuality, contribute to a representation of
some LGBT+ identities as marginalized and needing visibility (example 16).

(16) 'We know there is a real need for young people to learn more about the issues
       bi people face. This can help us start to tackle the lack of understanding there
       is about bisexuality, which in turn will help to stop the damaging bi-erasure
       and biphobia that young bi people experience. [*LGBT+.En*/30Apr2018]

Similar discourses are also found in *LGBT+.It.*, in extended concordance
lines in the context of *LGBTI*, whose collocates are *persone* [people] (133
occurrences) and *comunità* 'community/communities' (19 occurrences). Most
refer to problems of discrimination and violence faced by LGBTI people and
communities (example 17), and to the need to improve their lives or giving
them visibility – also through initiatives promoted by Arcigay or
organizations cooperating with it (example 18).

(17) Ancora una volta attraversiamo lo stivale con l'onda del nostro orgoglio […]
       che oggi più che mai si trova a dover reagire all'avanzate delle forze
       neofasciste e di chi pratica *l'oppressione*, delle *persone LGBTI* ma anche dei
       migranti, dei poveri e di chi non si allinea a una cultura dominante.
       [*LGBT+.It*/29Jun2018][17]
(18) L'idea del progetto è di […] *promuovere* la *visibilità*, il *benessere* e
       l'integrazione nella *comunità LGBTI* favorendo il dialogo intergenerazionale e
       percorsi abitativi adatti. [*LGBT+.It*/25Jan2019][18]

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[17] 'Once again we cross our Country with our pride wave, that today, more than ever, has to react
against the rising neo-fascism and those practising *oppression* towards *LGBTI people*, migrants,
poor people, and those not aligning with the dominant culture (…)' [My translation]
[18] 'The idea of the project is to (...) *promote visibility*, *well-being* and *integration* in the *LGBTI
community* by boosting intergenerational dialogue and suitable housing paths (...)' [My
translation]

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The discourse of oppression is further reinforced by references to homo-bi-transphobic violence, as also suggested by the keywords. Most of these concordance lines mainly refer to the debate on the introduction of a law against homo-bi-transphobic violence and the role played by it in the fight against LGBT+ people and communities' oppression (example 19).

(19) Nelle passate settimane – riprende Piazzoni – si è avviato nel nostro Parlamento l'iter per la discussione di una *legge contro l'omotransfobia*: questa risoluzione può rappresentare un contributo importante e concreto […] [*LGBT+.En*/27Dec2019][19]

4. Conclusions

This paper has examined news press releases from websites of two LGBT+ organizations, namely Stonewall and Arcigay Italia, from a cross-cultural perspective, using the tools of corpus linguistics and genre analysis, to explore how these organizations present themselves and represent the communities supported.

From a genre perspective, the identification and analysis of the rhetorical moves in the selected texts has proven that the two organizations achieve informative, promotional, and persuasive functions, in line with previous linguistic studies on press releases within the corporate and institutional fields. However, especially in the releases written by Arcigay, there are more comments than details, which are removed or summarized briefly within the comments of the Secretary, who makes intertextual references to the events he discusses. In such terms, promotional and persuasive communicative purposes are stronger than the informative dimension. In addition, the organizations under scrutiny adopt common and conventionalized strategies for textual staging. Where present, they are not fixed, or may even be omitted. Importantly, the texts are mainly addressed to the general public – i.e. mainly readers experiencing or disagreeing with homo-bi-transphobic forms of discrimination – and not to journalists – which might explain why regular and linear strategies of textual staging cannot be found, intended to be later re-told in the form of a news report. In conclusion, the results of the corpus-informed analysis reveal that Stonewall and Arcigay discursively present themselves as cohesive organizations promoting inclusiveness for all LGBT+ people and communities, which are discursively

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[19] 'In the past weeks – Piazzoni continues – our Parliament started to discuss a law against homo-transphobia: this resolution can represent an important and concrete contribution (...)' [My translation]

framed as threatened and continuously challenged by discrimination and homo-bi-transphobic violence.

This research is not without limits. Future research might, in fact, adopt or integrate the tools of multimodal and critical discourse analysis (Kress, van Leeuwen 2001; van Leeuwen 2008) to further explore how LGBT+ people and communities are discursively represented as social actors through different semiotic resources. Such an integration might serve as a tool to further explore whether journalists reporting on LGBT+ issues and people align with LGBT+ organizations in terms of the discursive strategies adopted to represent them. In addition, while the corpus under analysis is somewhat limited and not fully representative of news press releases from non-profit organizations or LGBT+ organizations, the research conducted here provides a starting point for further linguistic research into releases from more organizations, in different non-profit sectors.

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THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
Insights from an analysis of CSR reports in the USA, UK and Japan

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Abstract – Communicating Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) topics has become a 'must-have' corporate practice for firms worldwide and a key component of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting. Most studies have been carried out from a content analysis perspective and sparse attention has been paid to how the topics are discursively constructed. This paper explores the linguistic resources adopted in CSR reports to communicate EDI to both internal and external stakeholders. The analysis was conducted on a small sample of disclosures belonging to companies operating in three different sectors: Banking, Pharmaceuticals, Personal & Household Products and Services, and headquartered in three countries: the USA, the UK and Japan. With the support of corpus linguistics tools, portions of CSR reports were examined in a selection of frequent words and their phraseology. The quantitative and qualitative analysis was intended to shed light on the main discursive and rhetorical strategies for the expression of EDI in its many forms.

Keywords: CSR reports; Corporate Social Responsibility; Equality; Diversity; Inclusion.

1. Introduction

The recent events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the wave of social movements in the late 2010s, such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, have brought renewed attention to the question of inequality and, for that matter, to equality, diversity and inclusion. Such social issues have increased in prominence in civil society but also in the business world. Growing stakeholder scrutiny on these matters and demand for morality and ethics have prompted companies to intensify their engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR; Carroll 1999; Dahlsrud 2008; Lantos 2001) and in particular to (re)consider their stand on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Thus, CSR, which is commonly understood as a company's responsibility for its economic, environmental and social impacts, has seen EDI take on a pivotal role and become a major component of corporate performance, identity and communication (Breeze 2013). In other words,

these issues have started to gain ground as values adding to the image of a responsible company (Hon, Brunner 2000), and their communication is now considered a 'must-have' corporate practice.

The existing literature suggests that equality, diversity and more recently inclusion have long been investigated in the workforce from a management perspective (Maxwell *et al.* 2001; Mazzei, Ravazzani 2012; Mor Barak 2005; Oswick, Noon 2014; Roberson 2004; Thomas, Ely 1996). In particular, management research has revealed a gradual shift from equality to diversity and inclusion. Equality, which dominated the 1970s up to early 1990s, assumes that all people should be treated the same and offered equal opportunities irrespective of their race, gender and disability. In the 1990s, significant momentum was gained by diversity or the recognition of the value of differences, viewed in terms of surface level characteristics (i.e. age, ethnicity, gender, physical attributes/abilities, race and sexual orientation), and more invisible features (i.e. education, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs and work experience; see Litvin 1997). Companies' practice of diversity has been mainly driven at a utilitarian level by the economic benefits that they derive from a diverse workforce, such as increased employee creativity, productivity, and job satisfaction. However, although the business case has remained predominant, 'the justice or fairness case' has also emerged, which justifies diversity on moral grounds of fairness and equal opportunity. Finally, the 2000s saw a rise in popularity of inclusion, which is concerned with the processes that support employees' participation, empowerment and contribution in organizations, and "incorporate differences into business practices and thereby help to realize the value" (Oswick, Noon 2014, p. 26).

While different organizational models to the management of EDI have been elaborated (see for example Mazzei, Ravazzani 2012), only sparse consideration has been given to the discursive manifestations of these values in corporate disclosures. Apart from few content-based and cross-cultural studies on the communication of diversity, especially on websites (Jonsen *et al.* 2021; Singh, Point 2006; Uysal 2013), limited research has been conducted on how companies linguistically and discursively construct the issues (Hofer-Bonfim *et al.* 2023; Malavasi 2023; Nocella 2023; Turnbull 2023). Set against this theoretical background, the present study sets out to examine how companies operating in three different industrial sectors and geographical areas present and celebrate their practices of equality, diversity and inclusion in CSR reports (Garzone 2014; Idowu, Towler 2004; Mahoney *et al.* 2013; Nielsen, Thomsen 2007; Williams 2008), which is one of the main channels of communication available to companies. Specifically, a sample of frequent and relevant words was analyzed in extended stretches of language to identify how EDI is conceptualized and expressed by a small selection of firms headquartered in the United States, the UK and Japan. The

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research materials and methods are described in Section 2, while the findings obtained are presented and discussed in Sections 3 and 4.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is based on the *EDI-Reports-Corpus*. This is a small corpus of 2020 Sustainability Reports, Integrated Reports, and Sustainability Summaries [1] in their "Our people", "Our values", "Our Approach to Sustainability", "Community" and "Corporate Governance" sections (see Table 1). The focus on these specific portions of disclosures is motivated by the contents being covered which are closely linked to the key concern of this paper, namely how EDI is communicated to both internal and external stakeholders. The firms were mainly identified and chosen among the most diverse and inclusive companies in international indices such as the Refinitiv D&I Index 2021.[2] In particular, the study examined enterprises that operate in the sectors of Banking, Pharmaceuticals, Personal & Household Products & Services, and are headquartered in three different countries: the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan. For practical reasons and also for comparative purposes, the corpus was divided into three sub-corpora, one for each country. For the North American sub-corpus (*NA-EDI-Corpus*), Goldman Sachs Group Inc., Johnson & Johnson and Procter & Gamble Co. were selected; the British sub-corpus (*UK-EDI-Corpus*) comprises Standard Chartered plc, GlaxoSmithKline plc and Unilever plc; the Japanese sub-corpus (*J-EDI-Corpus*) consists of data from Nomura Holdings Inc., Takeda Ltd and Shiseido Company Ltd.[3]

For the investigation of the discursive construction of equality, diversity and inclusion, the visual and non-linguistic components of texts such as images, tables and graphs (Martinec, van Leeuwen 2009; Kress, van Leeuwen 2001) were disregarded in favor of a more precise focus on language. The three collections of texts were examined in a selection of words which are both quantitatively representative of the documents studied and functional to the companies' framing of EDI. With the support of corpus linguistics tools and the software suite *AntConc 3.5.8* (Anthony 2019), a frequency wordlist was generated for each database. Manual reading of the texts and close inspection of the top 100 most frequent words informed the selection of a sample of recurrent lexical items relevant to EDI. These words

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[1] When CSR documents were not available, Annual Reports were considered in the analysis.
[2] https://www.refinitiv.com/en/financial-data/indices/diversity-and-inclusion-index (1.1.2023).
[3] This is a small-sized corpus and a limited number of firms were considered as this is intended to be a pilot study, which is part of a larger project dealing with the communication of diversity and inclusion in a broader range of corporate disclosures belonging to a wider sample of companies.

were then concordanced and analyzed in their context of use, collocational patterns and phraseology (cf. Sinclair 2003, 2004). The quantitative perspective was integrated with a more qualitative approach to better detect the discursive strategies for disclosing EDI.

NA-EDI-CORPUS (USA): 89,510 tokens			
Goldman Sachs Group Inc.	Banking Services	Sustainability Report 2020	24,726 tokens
Johnson & Johnson	Pharmaceuticals	Health for Humanity Report 2020	34,215 tokens
Procter & Gamble Co.	Personal & Household Products & Services	Citizenship Report 2020	30,569 tokens
UK-EDI-CORPUS (UK): 35,757 tokens			
Standard Chartered plc	Banking Services	Sustainability Summary 2020	2,723 tokens
GlaxoSmithKline plc	Pharmaceuticals	Annual Report 2020	18,532 tokens
Unilever plc	Personal & Household Products & Services	Annual Report and Accounts 2020	14,502 tokens
J-EDI-CORPUS (Japan): 37,961 tokens			
Nomura Holdings Inc.	Banking Services	Nomura Report 2020	8,795
Takeda Ltd	Pharmaceuticals	Sustainability Report 2020	19,853
Shiseido Company Ltd	Personal & Household Products & Services	Sustainability Report 2020	9,313

Table 1
Corpus structure and size.

3. Results

Given the focus of this paper, insights are given into the language of EDI adopted by companies in their CSR reports. The discursive and rhetorical framing of equality, diversity and inclusion is analyzed first in the US materials (Subsection 3.1.), then in the UK sub-corpus (Subsection 3.2.) and finally in the Japanese one (Subsection 3.3.).

3.1. The NA-EDI-Corpus (USA)

The analysis of EDI communication by the US firms revolves around lexical items that we selected from the Word List of the NA-EDI-Corpus, based on preliminary analysis of their role in shaping the issues. Interestingly, as a preliminary result, the size of this database (see Table 1) suggests that compared to British and Japanese enterprises, North American companies

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appear to present more information in their reports and describe EDI-related topics in great detail. Indeed, the total number of tokens in the US corpus is more than double the number of running words in the UK and Japanese database. As for the specific lexical items under examination, Table 2 provides a breakdown of their rankings, frequencies and normalized frequencies per thousand words (ptw).

Statistical figures show that the NA-EDI-Corpus is permeated by conspicuous references to *employee* in its singular and plural form. The inspection of these lexical items in their concordance reveals that employees are portrayed as a key focus of corporate aspirations and initiatives, which are in place or were implemented by the firms to guarantee them *all* *"health"*, *"well-being"*, *"growth"* and *"support"* (examples 1-2).

RANK	WORD	RAW FREQ.	NORMALIZED FREQ.
25	*employees*	303	3.38
28	*people*	277	3.09
39	*women*	226	2.52
43	*all*	214	2.39
49	*communities*	181	2.02
65	*community*	140	1.56
77	*diverse*	123	1.37
84	*diversity*	119	1.32
87	*Black*	114	1.27

Table 2
Most frequent lexical words in the NA-EDI-Corpus.

Some recurrent clusters in which *employees* occurs are *available to all **, *ensure the safety and health of our **, *help our **, *training for all **, and *provide the means for **, where the wildcard stands for the search word.

(1) Following the successful achievement of our health and well-being goals in 2020 (see Health for Humanity 2020 Goals Scorecard), this year, as part of our Health for Humanity 2025 Goals, *we have an innovative, first-of-its-kind commitment for Johnson & Johnson to ensure our managers across the organization realize the imperative of protecting, supporting and advancing health and well-being for all employees*. Through this new goal, we will reinforce *our commitment to protecting employee health, prioritizing employee mental health* and sustaining our focus on energy management to help *build employee resiliency*. (Johnson & Johnson)

(2) The firm maintains *a variety of programs aimed at employees' growth and support* throughout their careers and as they evolve into leaders: • Through our *Black Analyst and Associate Initiative*, *we seek to grow and develop Black professionals* by investing in their career development, enhancing connectivity to managers and providing access to a senior leader within their division, who serves as a coach. • Our *Hispanic/Latinx Analyst Initiative* supplements *Hispanic/Latinx analysts' day-to-day experience* by fostering early and

> ongoing communication with their managers, divisional leadership and peers. • The firm's *Women's Career Strategies Initiative* is a global five-month *program focused on accelerating the career growth of high-performing women associates* through *targeted learning opportunities*, goal-setting and enhanced global connectivity, with close manager engagement throughout. (Goldman Sachs)

While highlighting their support for some specific groups of employees, such as *"Black"*, *"Hispanic/Latinx"* and *"women"* (excerpt 2), what emerges is an overall favorable attitude of the US companies towards *"equality"* (example 3), *"employee engagement"* and *"an inclusive culture"* (extract 4). Indeed, employees are not simply portrayed as the target beneficiaries of the same opportunities, they are also supported, engaged and encouraged to participate in forums and surveys, and *"to take an active role"* to drive progress inside and outside the company.

(3)   In honor of International Women's Day, we hosted our fourth annual *#WeSeeEqual Forum* at our Cincinnati headquarters. Each year, *the #WeSeeEqual Forum welcomes those with diverse perspectives and backgrounds allowing employees*, P&G partners and change-makers *to share their stories as part of our commitment to gender equality*. The annual event was born out of *P&G's aspiration to create a world free from gender bias, a world with equal representation and an equal voice for all individuals.* (Procter & Gamble)

(4)   *Employee Engagement* GRI 413-1 Across our Enterprise, *we encourage employees to take an active role in advancing Our Purpose to change the trajectory of health for all. We provide platforms, tools and resources to help everyone contribute at their best.* Similarly, *we foster an inclusive culture* that embraces creativity combined with care for others, our communities and our planet. One of the platforms we use *to track employee sentiment and feeling of being connected to our colleagues and our values is our biennial Our Credo Survey* which, in 2020, was administered in 78 countries and made available in 36 languages. In a year of unprecedented change, the survey resulted in *an all-time high for both participation rate and favorability*. (Johnson & Johnson)

The discursive interplay between equality, diversity and inclusion is also confirmed by the examination of *people* and *community/communities* in their co-text or wider linguistic context. In addition to reiterating their willingness to nurture a culture of belonging where employees, *our people*, feel involved and contribute to their full potential, the North American companies were found to enumerate and showcase their commitments, partnerships and dedicated initiatives to positively impact the outside world. Corporate activities and programs benefiting *people* are often described through overall general and quite 'evasive' sequences that foreground the firms' efforts to *"improve people's lives"* (see example 5), *"advance equality for all people"* (extract 6), support minority groups (as in examples 6 and 7), and eradicate *"racial and social injustice"* (excerpt 8) also exacerbated by the COVID-19

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pandemic. An analysis of these statements reveals that they are often realized through juxtapositions or enumerations of general and abstract concepts that may lead readers to question whether companies' commitment to EDI is genuine.

(5) At Johnson & Johnson, inspired by Our Credo, we use our scale and resources for good, contributing to many causes around the world *to help advance health* and *improve people's lives through targeted initiatives providing local support, engaging employees in our communities, supporting them in cases of emergencies and donating products for a range of needs.* (Johnson & Johnson)

(6) Recognizing the moment of urgency in our society highlighting systemic inequalities, *P&G and our brands stepped up our ongoing efforts to advance equality for all people and especially at this moment for Black and Brown Americans.* We have highlighted *the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Hispanic communities in America* with the films "Circumstances" and "Estamos Unidos" and have *sponsored fundraising and relief efforts to help those disproportionately affected by the pandemic. We established the P&G Take On Race fund to help fuel organizations that fight for justice, advance economic opportunity, enable greater access to education and health care and make our communities more equitable.* (Procter & Gamble)

(7) P&G and our brands created "Can't Cancel Pride: *COVID-19 Relief Benefit for the LGBTQ+ Community*" as *a virtual relief effort to help raise visibility and funds for LGBTQ+ communities most impacted by COVID-19.* (Procter & Gamble)

(8) There is an urgent need to take on the inequities rooted in systemic racism that *threaten health in communities of color across the United States.* That's why *Johnson & Johnson is focusing its efforts and committing $100 million to address racial and social injustice* as the critical public health issue that it is. (Johnson & Johnson)

Remarkably, as evidenced by the extracts above, prominence is given by the US companies to their dedication to issues related to race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. This is further testified by *women*, *Black*, *diversity* and *diverse* which stand out as frequent lexical items in the North American corpus. Companies' pledges to address gender and racial biases and to foster *"diversity"* (example 9) or *diversity* coupled with *"equity"* and *"inclusion"* (extract 10) go hand in hand with initiatives specifically targeted at *women* and *Black* people, whose *"representation"* in leadership ranks (excerpt 11) and economic empowerment (example 12) are strived for or even achieved by the firms.

(9) *We share the goal of democratizing access to opportunities in the financial industry. We are focused on the advancement of women and all underrepresented professionals.* This takes the form of *aspirational diversity goals,* robust talent development programs and *diversity-retention initiatives. Diverse characteristics, including gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation and disabilities, offer an abundance of perspectives and*

capabilities, and *help to best serve our clients and stakeholders*. (Goldman Sachs)

(10) Our mission is to make *diversity, equity and inclusion* (DEI) how we work every day. We know that *bringing together our diverse backgrounds, cultures and perspectives drives innovation to solve today's complex health problems*. We continue to challenge ourselves on what it means to prioritize DEI in every business decision we make, and *we leverage our DEI strategy, policies and programs to provide our workforce with the support and opportunities they need to help create a healthier, more equitable world.* (Johnson & Johnson)

(11) EQUALITY AND INCLUSION In 2020, *P&G achieved equal representation of women and men* among our independent Board Directors and *increased multicultural representation* to 25%. Both statistics represent meaningful growth since 2015. (Procter & Gamble)

(12) *We have long been committed to promoting inclusion, diversity* and *equity within our own firm, throughout our industry and in the communities where we live and work*. Last summer, in response to the recent senseless acts of racism and violence against *Black people and other minorities*, *we renewed this dedication*. We believe the effort needed *to truly bridge gaps in equality* is ongoing – we know there is more to be done, and we continue to aim higher. In this spirit, *we recently announced One Million Black Women, a new $10 billion initiative focused on acknowledging, empowering and raising up an entrepreneurial engine in women and underserved communities across the US.* (Goldman Sachs)

The evidence discussed so far suggests that in their CSR reports the North American companies favor a rather holistic approach to EDI with an emphasis on the efforts they make and the programs they have developed to advance equity, equality, diversity and inclusion. A close examination of the discourses on these issues reveals that they are often realized through 'grand', composite and somewhat vague constructions that enumerate and magnify the companies' goals, initiatives and activities they have in place to serve their workforce and the society at large.

3.2. The UK-EDI-Corpus

Examination of EDI communication by the British companies is based on the inspection of frequent words, which are found to have a strategic role in the expression of these issues in the UK corpus. Table 3 includes the relevant lexical items in the database together with their respective rankings, raw frequencies and normalized frequencies (ptw).

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RANK	WORD	RAW FREQ.	NORMALIZED FREQ.
15	*people*	210	5.87
38	*all*	90	2.51
39	*employees*	85	2.37
70	*culture*	54	1.51
94	*employee*	44	1.23

Table 3
Most frequent lexical words in the UK-EDI-Corpus.

A preliminary analysis of the forms suggests that the UK companies recurrently resort to such signals as *people* and *employee(s)* to disclose their attitude and commitment in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

A more in-depth examination of these forms in their concordance shows that the firms put both *people*'s and *employees' "development"* (example 13), *"wellbeing"* (extract 14), health (excerpt 15) and safety at the heart of what they do. The insistence on these issues can be gleaned from stretches of language where *people* in general and more specifically, employees, *our people*, are the receivers of the actions performed by the companies, like *help*, *reach*, *support*, *improve* and *protect.*

(13) *People development We want our people to keep developing throughout their career. Every employee has the opportunity to discuss and agree a development plan* with their manager. In 2020, *93,718 employees accessed training resources through our internal development portal.* During the year, *we redesigned and rolled out a new virtual First Line Leader training programme*. We provide targeted development for leaders at all stages of their careers. (GlaxoSmithKline)

(14) *A fairer and more inclusive world* Our business relies on the millions of people who work in our value chain – including farmers, factory workers, small shop owners, waste recyclers and others. We can only create widescale change by *giving people opportunities to improve their livelihoods*. So *we work to improve people's health, confidence and wellbeing; to create opportunities for all; and to respect and promote human rights.* (Unilever)

(15) *Our commitment is to partner to improve disease prevention, awareness and access to healthcare services for 12 million people* by 2025 In 2020, *we exceeded this target, reaching 13.9 million people* through our partnerships. (GlaxoSmithKline)

Descriptions of the manifold activities to develop the workforce (example 13), improve people's life (extracts 14 and 15) and protect them against Covid-19 are intertwined with more general declarations of support for diversity and inclusion (excerpts 16 and 17).

(16) In addition, as a company that has respect for people at its core and takes pride in providing access to our medicines, vaccines and consumer products to all, *we have an opportunity and an obligation to build an inclusive culture*

internally and to be a force for good in improving diversity and inclusion in society. In 2020 we focused on *building a more inclusive culture, including inclusion training for all employees alongside our work to evolve our policies, processes and practices. We also set new aspirational targets for gender and for race and ethnicity* (see page 37). (GlaxoSmithKline)

(17) Open to all Making Unilever a completely *inclusive place* to work will make us a stronger, better business. *Our priority is to ensure that the diversity of our people reflects the societies in which we live and work.* So we take a holistic approach – *making sure people feel welcome and are treated fairly at Unilever, regardless of their race, gender, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, religion or experience* and recognising the importance of self-identification, given the broad circumstances under which discrimination can happen. This year, the Black Lives Matter movement shone a light on racial discrimination and social injustice, and *we strengthened our focus on race, alongside gender, disability and LGBTQI+.* (Unilever)

Notably, *people* and *employee(s)* were found to be embedded in textual sequences that highlight the centrality of inclusion and diversity in the workplace and in the outside world. As shown by examples (16) through (19), emphasis is laid on the ambitious goals of creating an inclusive and diverse society, and providing an organizational climate where employees are welcomed and feel equally treated *"regardless of their race, gender, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, religion or experience"* (see example 17).

(18) We believe that *inclusion and diversity (I&D) leads to business success by unleashing the enormous potential of all our people* and strengthening our ability to respond to the differing needs of our patients and consumers. At the heart of our I&D agenda lies *our fundamental commitment to equity in our employment practices. To support this, and create an inclusive workplace, all employees participate in an annual training programme, we facilitate inclusion dialogues*, and we invest in our leadership programmes to ensure all leaders understand their responsibilities. (GlaxoSmithKline)

(19) While there is more to do on gender balance, our efforts are being recognised. *We're proud to have won a prestigious Catalyst Award for our initiatives to create a gender-balanced and inclusive culture that breaks down stereotypes. We were also listed in Bloomberg's 2020 Gender-Equality Index.* As part of our Framework for Fair Compensation, *we are committed to pay a living wage to all our direct employees.* […] We want to make sure that *people's experience of Unilever is fair for everyone* and that *we're fully including members of LGBTQI+ communities.* (Unilever)

'High-minded' (example 18) and evidence-based (extract 19) claims about equality, equity and an *"inclusive culture"* (excerpts 19 and 20) merge with descriptions of diversity that revolve around references to some minority groups who are supported by the companies or are fairly represented in the organization. Worthy of mention are *"LGBTQI+ communities"* (example 19), *young people*, people with disabilities (example 21) and *"ethnically diverse employees"* (example 22).

(20) We continued to progress towards *an inclusive culture*. In 2020, *we secured a place in the top 100 organisations in the Bloomberg Gender Equality Index and ranked as a Diversity Leader in the Financial Times report on Diversity and Inclusion in Europe*. (Standard Chartered)

(21) Between 2003 and 2020, we raised $104.2 million through fundraising and Group matching and reached more than 250 million people through Seeing is Believing, our global initiative to tackle avoidable blindness. *We continued our support for the eye health sector through the development of the Vision Catalyst Fund and by supporting people with visual impairments through Futuremakers*. (Standard Chartered)

(22) *To support our aspirations and our commitment to equality of representation we are focused on recruiting and developing diverse talent.* This includes: setting *appropriate and ambitious targets for ethnically diverse candidates* for our early talent programmes in the US and UK; launching *a new global development programme*, Accelerating Difference, for *ethnically diverse employees*; and, for our most senior roles, we are also introducing a policy that requires a diverse shortlist of qualified candidates, including *ethnically diverse representation* (as defined appropriately by country). (GlaxoSmithKline)

All the considerations put forth so far seem to demonstrate that the UK firms' promotion and communication of EDI 'reverberate' with repeated and somewhat general references to good practices, value-related statements and numerical evidence, which, on the whole, prove the companies' recognition of the importance of people's equality, heterogeneity and inclusion both in the workplace and in communities at large.

3.3. *The J-EDI-Corpus* (JAPAN)

For the analysis of how EDI meanings are expressed by the Japanese companies in the J-EDI-Corpus, the lexical items listed in Table 4 were taken into account.

RANK	WORD	RAW FREQ.	NORMALIZED FREQ.
23	*employees*	144	3.79
30	*people*	124	3.26
50	*all*	84	2.21
53	*human*	79	2.08
69	*society*	67	1.76
72	*social*	64	1.68
83	*rights*	58	1.52
100	*women*	50	1.31

Table 4
Most frequent lexical words in the J-EDI-Corpus.

The examination of *employees* in its surrounding lexical context reveals the tendency of Japanese enterprises to emphasize the manifold opportunities

they aim to create for their workforce's *"health"* (example 23), *"safety"* (extract 24), *"self-development"* and *"training"* (excerpt 25)*.*

(23)   In July 2016, Nomura Group adopted the NOMURA Health & Productivity Declaration Statement as part of the Group's efforts led by the Group Chief Health Officer (CHO) *to maintain and improve the health of employees*. In addition, since 2017, Nomura has launched the "Nomura Work Style Innovation" initiative, which comprises "Work Style Reform" and "Health & Productivity Management," and *has been developing an environment that enables diverse employees to demonstrate their talents and play active roles*. In this regard, we have developed and internally announced guidelines with quantitative targets. (Nomura)

(24)   The pandemic has brought a complete shift in how we work and collaborate. How has Takeda ensured your people's safety and minimal disruption at work? *The safety of our employees comes first*. With approximately 50,000 people across about 80 countries, there has been no one-size-fits-all response to how *we support our colleagues and their families, as well as the patients and health care practitioners* who are at the core of our purpose at Takeda. (Takeda)

(25)   In addition, *we offered a variety of self-development initiatives* to employees in Japan, including: *online business skills training* (219 employees participated); *leadership training for future female leaders* (24 executive candidates participated); *short training videos* covering topics such as presentations and project management; and *virtual tours of the corporate museum* aimed at new employees. As a result of our efforts, Shiseido Group employees spent an average of 26 hours on *education and training* in 2020. (Shiseido)

The statements around the words *employees* and *colleagues*[4] evoke the firms' support for *all* employees' *"development"* (example 26) and the creation of a collaborative working environment in which they can thrive, leverage their abilities and feel included. A sense of *"unity"*, participation and cooperation (examples 27 to 29) seems to be prominent in the documents analyzed.

(26)   *We encourage the personal development and self-growth of all employees by providing individual support to help them advance their career*. In preparation for the introduction of a job-based personnel system, our global headquarters worked with its major affiliates in Japan to define the specialized knowledge and skills required by each position. (Shiseido)

(27)   *As employees, we might come from different countries and have diverse backgrounds*, but *we all carry the same pocketbook. This creates a sense of unity among the Shiseido family*, and serves as a source of knowledge and inspiration for every one of us. (Shiseido)

(28)   *Nomura organizes various forums for direct dialogue between management and employees* around the world. *Town hall meetings and employees gatherings are held regularly* in each region to provide opportunities for

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[4] *Colleagues* (59 occurrences) is used in Takeda's Sustainability Report as a synonym for *employees* and as such it was considered in the study.

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senior management to share the firm's vision, strategy, and philosophy, and *for employees to engage in active dialogue with senior management with the aim of deepening mutual understanding.* […] From FY2020/21, *Nomura Group will further enhance its dialogue with employees* by measuring their awareness of the Nomura Group Code of Conduct, including their views on ESG and diversity. (Nomura)

(29) *We strive to have a workforce as diverse as the patients we serve. We are committed to embracing differences*, exploring possibilities and *developing our colleagues. Our success depends on an inclusive environment where all colleagues are welcomed, empowered and inspired to use their unique voices and talents.* This is how we'll find innovative approaches to serve our patients, customers and communities. (Takeda)

In addition to the emphasis on inclusion and equal opportunities, general references to diversity (example 29) were found in the sub-corpus, together with more specific mentions of minority groups. These include expressions featuring *"women"*, *"female employees"* (example 30), and *people with disabilities* or illnesses.

(30) Then, in the 1990s, we introduced *efforts to help women* keep working regardless of life events, such as raising children. *We have continued to support our female employees ever since.* […] Building on our heritage of *empowering women in Japan and around the world*, we also collaborate with organizations *to give vulnerable girls STEM* (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) *education opportunities.* (Shiseido)

Notably, issues regarding *women* are addressed by the Asian companies in their CSR reports, which are pervaded by phraseological units comprising *"support our female employees"*, *"help"* and *"empower women"* (extracts 30 and 31). These sequences are manifest indicators of the firms' concern about gender equality both inside and outside the organization (example 31).

(31) Over the years, *Shiseido has launched several initiatives to empower women* and *address global gender issues.* Working closely with our brands and regional headquarters, *we support the education of socially disadvantaged women and girls* around the world to enable them to be more self-reliant. (Shiseido)

In addition to signals pointing to 'center stage' taken by the promotion of women's rights, a variety of expressions insist on the firms' commitment to improving people's lives as a key objective to pursue. This emerges patently from statements which showcase the efforts made to support and create *"better health for people"* (example 32) and instill respect regardless of individuals' backgrounds or differences (excerpt 33).

(32) Research and development (R&D) is fundamental to our culture and an element of our strategic roadmap that drives innovation at Takeda. For almost

240 years, *we've focused on delivering Better health for people, brighter future for the world*, setting and adhering to a high bar for innovation, sourcing innovation through partnerships and managing the pipeline dynamically through key data readouts, especially to address critical unmet patient needs. (Takeda)

(33) For Society: *Realize a society filled with respect and empowerment* through the power of beauty *Shiseido embraces diversity in beauty to inspire people around the world*. By celebrating its many values, *we aim to realize a society where people accept and respect each other as individuals, regardless of backgrounds or differences*. (Shiseido)

Similar emphasis on respect can be recognized in 'idealistic' discourses surrounding *society* and *social*. Corpus insights into the use of these two words show that they are mostly employed within sequences that highlight the corporate efforts to promote *"a society of diversity and inclusion"* (excerpt 34). Some formulae featuring the search words are, for example, *advance a society that embraces diversity through respect*, *realize a society filled with respect and empowerment*, *support a society where people feel empowered, confident and free to be themselves*, *address "social challenges/justice"* (examples 35 and 36) and *solve social issues* (extract 37).

(34) The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on society and has forced many people to question their beliefs and re-examine the way they live. In particular, it has had significant consequences for groups who were already exposed, such as highly vulnerable women. Going forward, *we strive to promote a broader range of social values*. By offering various avenues of education, *we aim to move away from monoculture, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination to nurture a society of diversity and inclusion*. (Shiseido)

(35) The Nomura Group Code of Conduct sets out 19 *specific guidelines for our actions according to our three major stakeholders: our clients, our people, and society*, from the perspective of how we view them in light of the three values of entrepreneurial leadership, teamwork and integrity. In addition to legal compliance as well as general professional and *social ethics, these guidelines cover all aspects of our activities, including* the fundamental view on client services, personnel development, *diversity and inclusion, respect for human rights, and our stance on addressing social challenges*. (Nomura)

(36) How does the recent focus on *addressing social justice and equality issues* affect Takeda's approach? Marcello: It's helped to accelerate our progress as we recognize that we have a lot of room for growth in many areas and locations. We're operating at multiple levels — globally *we're establishing a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion team to support companywide initiatives*. Regionally, locally and at the functional level, we will continue with the efforts in place, working closely with our TRGs. (Takeda)

(37) As part of our activities *to help solve social issues, Shiseido Americas also supported LGBTQ organizations, and Shiseido Japan co-sponsored online seminars* in cooperation with local governments for mothers raising children during the pandemic. (Shiseido)

Finally, the significant presence of *human rights* in the sub-corpus signals that respect for human rights is another cornerstone of these companies'

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culture and an integral part of their activities. This is conveyed through lexical bundles including *"respecting human rights"* (see example 38) and *"prevent or mitigate human rights issues"* (extract 39).

(38) Human rights Much of our supply chain resides in emerging markets where worker protections are often not very robust. *Respecting human rights, including the rights of workers, is one of our greatest responsibilities*, given our scale and potential influence. Our Supplier Code of Conduct outlines our commitment and expectations for suppliers on modern slavery practices, including child labor, forced and bonded labor, and human trafficking. *We also strengthened our Supply Chain Human Rights and Labor initiatives* through various policies and position statements […] (Takeda)

(39) *We have established a human rights due diligence process to help us promptly identify potential human rights issues*. In 2020, *in order to prevent or mitigate human rights issues*, we took steps to identify and assess the visible and potential impact of our activities. These efforts included: *Identification of human rights issues* In cooperation with external human rights experts, and by referencing international codes on human rights, standards on non-financial disclosures, and the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB), *we have developed a list of human rights issues to be considered. This list includes modern slavery issues, such as forced labor and child labor, as well as a wide range of human rights issues, such as freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and discrimination.* (Shiseido)

Considering the examples above, it seems safe to claim that special emphasis is devoted to communicating the firms' motivation for employee betterment and inclusion, and their whole-hearted support for a better society. General and quite vague statements about the companies' engagement with commendable social values are accompanied by descriptions of the activities they perform to 'put these values into practice'.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The study of the three sub-corpora substantiates the claim that the communication and practice of EDI has become an important business imperative and a core value in CSR communication. All the companies selected, irrespective of the sector and geography in which they operate, were found to dedicate sections of their CSR reports to the discussion of these issues. In compliance with CSR reporting standards, and national and international laws on labor and human rights, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, the firms under examination turn out to report on their equality, diversity and inclusion goals and performance. However, as evidenced by the size of the three sub-corpora, longer sections appear in the US companies' CSR reports that provide information on EDI themes. This is counterbalanced by more concise disclosures by the British and Japanese firms that appear to devote less space to the discussion of the same topics.

In particular, the quantitative and qualitative examination of a sample of recurrent words in the three collections of documents has revealed that a range of standard and rather formulaic constructions were deployed by the firms to promote EDI and to project an image of themselves as reliable and responsible corporate citizens. Similar expressions were, for example, used by the three groups of companies to stress their efforts to *improve the health of employees/people*, *help/support employees/people*, *support/support for women*, and *engage people/employees*. Specifically, the companies under investigation were found to describe the equal opportunities offered to the *employees* or *our people* and more in general to *people* irrespective of their visible and invisible differences (see for example extracts 1, 6, 13, 14, 26 and 32). The insistence on *safety* and *health* can, however, be attributed to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the companies' contribution to limiting its devastating impact on people worldwide. In addition to similar emphasis on equal opportunities, the value of inclusion seems to pervade the reports analyzed (see for instance excerpts 4, 10, 16, 18, 23 and 29). All the companies appear indeed to base their EDI communication on inclusion or integration statements, which reflect the growing popularity of inclusion in the management and organizational literature. Finally, importance is also given to diversity and minority groups (see for example extracts 17, 22, 30 and 33). Remarkably, as a consequence of social and historical developments, the North American firms appear to espouse a greater focus on diversity, namely the value of heterogeneity and differences in organizations and in the outside world. This is evidenced by the centrality attributed by US enterprises to *women*, *diverse*, *diversity* and *Black* (see examples 2 and 9).

Overall, however, the co-existence of discourses on equality, diversity and inclusion, moral and ethical considerations, as well as utilitarian arguments, reflect a rather comprehensive approach to EDI that is shared by the US, UK and Japanese companies. From a more linguistic perspective, it proved to be common among the firms under consideration to resort to phraseologies that combine general declarations laying emphasis on the value of EDI, goal-related statements outlining promising courses of action to take, and passages describing the activities implemented to foster these values in the organization and society at large. Nevertheless, preliminary results hint to a greater focus on initiatives and programs in the US companies' communication that seems to be replaced by a stronger orientation to performance, and values as well as commitments in the British and Japanese firms' disclosures, respectively. Finally, although not specifically discussed in this paper, the analysis has revealed that EDI discourse is often realized through composite and 'elusive' constructions and juxtapositions of abstract concepts, which makes communication susceptible to vagueness and opacity, and may jeopardize readers' trust in the company's claims. Thus,

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transparency (Ball 2009; Rawlins 2009; Stacks *et al*. 2013; Schnackenberg, Tomlinson 2016) appears to be a relevant issue worth analyzing in future studies. It can be hoped that further research – e.g. exploring strategies for transparency vs. vagueness and opacity, increasing the number of companies and CSR reports, including other sectors and geographies – will contribute to a more complete analysis of EDI communication and practice.

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ECO-FRIENDLY LANGUAGE, SUSTAINABILITY CLAIMS, AND POWER RELATIONS IN GREEN ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

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Abstract – As the global quest for sustainability and environmental commitment becomes more and more urgent, many consumers are now opting for products and brands aligned with their values (Mintel 2021). Indeed, according to a survey by the European Commission, 56% of average European consumers declared that "environmental concerns influenced their purchasing decisions" (EC 2021). Consequently, companies are now revising their marketing and advertising strategies in order to focus on eco-friendly claims, thus reversing the traditional image of passive consumers manipulated by advertisers (Wilke *et al.* 2021). In this context, the present paper investigates eco-friendly discourse and sustainability claims in a dataset of Italian food and drinks television commercials. The study considers 15 commercials recently aired in Italy for a qualitative manual analysis of textual and language features, in line with traditional CDA methods (Huckin 1997); a critical evaluation of environmental claims through a framework for greenwashing detection (Carlson *et al.* 1993) is also included. While attention is placed on critical aspects such as power relations between businesses and consumers, results suggest that environmental and sustainability topics are exploited in advertising to provide evidence of companies' sustainability commitment, and to please conscious consumers asking for more responsible production.

Keywords: CDA; eco-friendly language; food and drinks advertising; green advertising; sustainability claims.

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the generalized feeling of social, financial, and environmental insecurity shared by Western societies has made the quest for sustainability more urgent than ever. While discussion on this topic is ongoing in private and public arenas, the very concept of *sustainability* remains quite difficult to define, as it encompasses at least three dimensions, namely the economic, the social, and the environmental (Wilke *et al.* 2021). Due to this complex nature, there is currently no agreement over "its scope, meaning, limitations, and implications, especially as there is ample potential for tension between the three dimensions of sustainability" (2021, p. 20). On the one hand, transnational governments and policymakers are working on stricter regulations on sustainability; on the other hand, global

businesses are trying to implement sustainable operations and practices among their core objectives. In addition, laypeople are increasingly opting for products and brands aligned with their values (Mintel 2021), as 56% of European consumers declared that "environmental concerns influenced their purchasing decisions" (EC 2021), thus playing a central role through their choices.

Given the multi-dimensional nature of environmental and sustainability topics, interdisciplinary research on environmental discourses – namely the product of environmental issues and environmental ideologies (Novikau 2016, p. 3) – is constantly on the rise. Research in Marketing, Business, and Communication Studies has provided useful conceptual notions, for example clarifying the meaning of 'green' in 'green marketing' or 'green advertising' – two concepts based "on the subjective perception of the producer and the consumer, not necessarily on the facts of whether such behavior would achieve the end objectives of sustainability" (Akenji 2014, p. 16). Similarly, a distinction between 'enviropreneur marketing' (Menon 1997) and 'compliance marketing' (Peattie, Crane 2005) separates ideologically committed practices from initiatives based on imposed compliance with environmental regulations.

In this context, it has been noted that both companies and institutions have become promoters of 'green consumerism', a lifestyle model that focusses on "the production, promotion, and preferential consumption of goods and services on the basis of their pro-environment claims" (Akenji 2014, p. 13) – for example by means of eco-labelling, public awareness and recycling campaigns, or environmental certifications and standards. Criticism about green consumerism centres mainly on its tendency to load consumers with the sustainability burden, as if they were the main agents in the successful transition to sustainable production – sometimes called 'scapegoatism' (Akenji 2014, p. 13). Moreover, most forms of green consumerism have been accused of encouraging consumption while making pervasive use of sustainability motifs, for instance with reference to people's health. Indeed, in the past, "green marketers believed that people worried about the environment because they felt the planet was hurting – and their communications reflected as much. […] But today's marketers increasingly realize that consumers really fear the planet is losing its ability to sustain human life; they fret about their own immediate health, and that of their children" (Ottman 2011, p. 4). Such utilitarian view of our planet – albeit linked to human health – conflicts with the environmentalist (and ecolinguistic) principle that nature has intrinsic value, and it should be protected regardless of human interests (Stibbe 2020).

Overall, it seems that contemporary green marketing and advertising strategies are responding to necessary corporate environmentalism efforts

(Sharma 2021), while also acknowledging consumers' role and influence on production processes. However, when companies – through all forms of corporate communication – declare their orientation towards certain environmental values, they also need to implement practical strategies to fulfil sustainability objectives; when these are missing, "charge[s] of 'greenwashing'" (Banerjee *et al.* 2003, p. 106) may undermine the credibility of eco-friendly claims. From a critical perspective, attempts at cunning or vague environmental claims by companies are seen as another area of discursive conflict where unequal power relations unfold. Indeed, in the words of Fairclough (2001, p. 30), "[t]here are […] certain key discourse types which embody ideologies which legitimize, more or less directly, existing societal relations", and advertising discourse is one of those. For this reason, the field of advertising is often at the center of critical discourse studies (CDS) which also try to uncover sings of greenwashing in advertising claims.

The present study explores eco-friendly discourse in a collection of green advertisements of food and drinks recently aired in Italy. In the first part, it takes into account key themes, language and claims, to see how environmental and sustainability motifs are constructed in advertising discourse. In the second part, it observes current power relations between producers/advertisers on the one hand and consumers/audiences on the other. As will be seen, while people in general are becoming more and more skilled decoding advertising messages, and the traditional idea of passive consumers manipulated by advertisers (Federici 2018; Wilke *et al.* 2021) is being dismantled, deconstructing the objectives of green advertising by describing its features remains a challenging task for discourse analysts.

2. Literature review

In the field of language and discourse studies, relevant research has dealt with environmental communication in traditional and new media, for instance investigating media representation and popular perception of environmental issues, especially climate change (Bednarek, Caple 2010; Hansen 2018; Hansen, Cox 2015; Nerlich *et al.* 2010; Olausson 2011). Framing is another central focus of communication-oriented studies (Alexander 2010; Lakoff 2010), for example in research assessing effective/ineffective corporate communication (Dai *et al.* 2022; Xue 2015), and positive vs. negative framing on consumer behaviour (Amatulli *et al.* 2019; Baek, Yoon 2017). Linguistic and corpus-based approaches (see, for example, Alexander 2017; Collins, Nerlich 2016; Grundmann, Krishnamurthy 2010; Liu, Huang 2022) have privileged detailed features of environmental discourses, including frequency and keyness of the emblematic adjective 'green'. In particular,

quantitative and corpus-based analyses have described the positive semantic prosody linked to this word (Benz 2000; Bevitori 2011; Hunston 2007; Partington 2004; Wild *et al*. 2013), or the use of environmental metaphors (de los Ríos, Negro Alousque 2022) in advertising.

Moving to discourse studies, critical and/or multimodal approaches have been adopted to analyze sustainability topics in different contexts, underlining how verbal, visual, and multiple semiotic elements combine in creative, purpose-driven ways to convey targeted messages or units of non-neutral meaning, for instance in marketing (Hansen, Machin 2008). Considering advertising, critical discourse studies have sought to unveil power relations and dominant views, as well as hidden ideologies and their impact on laypeople (Asghar 2014; Freitas 2013; Thompson 2004). As for green advertising, critical methodologies may also "strongly complement environmental political economy, ideology, and representation because all take into consideration the ongoing power struggle as well as the historical context of discourses" (Budinsky, Bryant 2013, p. 213). Critical qualitative and/or mixed methods for the analysis of eco-friendly advertising discourse have been used in specific case studies, especially, but not only, in digitally-mediated contexts (Atkinson 2014; Chen 2016; Hansen, Machin 2008; Kenalemang-Palm, Eriksson 2021; Liu 2015). Moreover, a part of the literature has dealt with cases of greenwashing in corporate advertising and communication (Budinsky, Bryant 2013; Caimotto, Molino 2011; Gräuler, Teuteberg 2014; Plec, Pettenger 2012), also in the area of food and drinks marketing, from local markets (Koch, Compton 2015) to big corporations (Boncinelli et al. 2023; Niceforo 2021).

From a theoretical and methodological standpoint, dialectical-relational, and sociocognitive approaches (Wodak, Meyer 2016) may well take into account the changeable nature of meaning in advertising discourse. Following this perspective, discourse as a social practice depends on the dialectical relations "between structure […] and events […] and, within each, between semiotic and other elements" (Fairclough 2009, p. 164). Therefore, meaning is the product of an ongoing sociocognitive mediation by each of the parties involved in communication – which resonates with the broad dialogic construction of advertisements, in which the two parties engage in a process of meaning and message negotiation.

In light of the above, linguistic research in the field of advertising opens to multiple theoretical and methodological foundations. Within language and discourse studies, the environment appears as a *trait d'union*, functioning as a discourse element and an object of communication, a marketing feature, a theme or message, and an element for ideological debate.

3. Methodology

This study examines eco-friendly language and sustainability claims in a corpus of Italian television commercials about food and drinks. Most categories of consumer goods are today advertised through green marketing techniques: cars, clothes, and household products are perfect examples of green advertising. However, the already-mentioned link between health and sustainability is especially associated to food choices: according to a 2021 survey by Deloitte, 64% of European consumers are aware of the relation between correct nutrition and health, while 79% actively look for information on healthy and sustainable lifestyle, especially after the pandemic (Deloitte 2021, p. 5). The Italian public, in particular, seems to care deeply for sustainable and healthy food products, and it would generally agree to taxing products which have a negative impact on health and the environment (Deloitte 2021, p. 19).

For the present study, extensive viewing of advertisements having environmental and sustainability topics was conducted at the beginning of data collection over a period of about two months. Green advertisements of food and drinks products constituted the large majority, although eco-friendly commercials of non-food products, such as cars, clothes, soaps and detergents, body care products, or marketplaces also abounded. At the end of this stage, 15 commercials were selected for their thematic and linguistic focus on sustainability and the environment. All commercials, aired on Italian national television channels between 2020 and 2022, advertise packaged goods such as water, coffee, frozen or canned vegetables, and fish; one advertisement is part of a campaign by Coop supermarkets. All commercials are by Italian and/or international brands operating in Italy, which may open to further studies on localization from/into Italian. A list of selected commercials is available in Annex 1.

It must be noted that all the commercials are in Italian; therefore, the analysis hereby presented takes into account linguistic markers translated from this language into English. While the author acknowledges that this could be a limitation of the study, two additional motivations add methodological strength: firstly, all verbal elements under investigation are broadly semantically related to the field of environment, regardless of cultural and/or linguistic specificities within the Italian language. Secondly, only one section focusses on linguistic elements, and more space is devoted to discursive aspects (themes) and the critical dimension (sustainability claims), typically less affected by language-specific concerns.

Given the qualitative nature and the critical purpose of the study, a manual analysis of all relevant features was performed. Software analysis, however, could be preferable for larger corpus-based studies of the same

type, ideally to observe word frequency, keywords, collocation patterns, and other elements. The linguistic analysis draws from traditional models for CDA, such as that given by Huckin (1997), to comment on nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs and verbal patterns, as well as pronouns and markers of agency and stance. In particular, Huckin's model proposes a clear progression for analysis, looking at linguistic elements at the level of:

(a) Text as a whole: strategies of Framing, Foregrounding/Backgrounding, Omission, and Presupposition;

(b) Individual clauses: Topicalisation, Foregrounding, Deletion or Omission, Presupposition, and Insinuation;

(c) Words and phrases: Connotation, Register, and Modality.

Table 1 provides a list of the advertisements' features considered in this paper, with correspondent discursive strategies and analytical categories:

ADVERTISEMENTS FEATURES	DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES
Main Focus or Theme	a. Framing, Topicalisation
Implied Knowledge	b. Presupposition, Backgrounding, Omission
Claim or Explicit Message	c. Insinuation, Foregrounding, Connotation
Mood	d. Modality
Stance	e. Agency, Deletion/Omission, Register

Table 1
Advertisements' features and discursive strategies (adapted from Huckin 1997).

As for Claim or Explicit Message Evaluation, the analytical categories of Insinuation (how explicitly claims/messages are suggested), Foregrounding (how prominently claims/messages are presented), and Connotation (how positively/negatively claims/messages are constructed) are paired with the Content Analysis Model for environmental advertising claims by Carlson *et al.* (1993). This model is especially valuable when looking for signs of greenwashing, thanks to the double classification of eco-friendly claims based on:

(a) Type: product-oriented, process-oriented, image-oriented, providing environmental facts, and combining different elements; and on

(b) Misleading or deceptive eco-friendly information: vague/ambiguous, omitting factual information, false/outright lie, or a diverse combination of such strategies.

Claim Evaluation allows for a better understanding of power relations configurations in the selected examples; to this purpose, insight into overall narrative structures is provided in the last section of the analysis. While a multimodal analysis of visual elements would have further completed the investigation, this was not performed nor included in the paper due to space

constraints.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Advertisements' features: theme, implied knowledge, and claim

As previously anticipated, the 15 advertisements under investigation share similar features, not only because they belong to the same textual/discourse genre, but also due to the observed correlation among food, health, and sustainability. Results emerging from close manual reading at the textual and sentence levels indicate that all three topics are presented as the main thematic frames in the dataset; in particular, while health appears to be at the center of fewer commercials, the combination health *and* sustainability constitutes the central theme in most advertisements; the remaining commercials stress the concern for sustainability in a more generic way, by targeting implied knowledge on the subject. With this in mind, it is possible to further group the commercials into three broad sub-themes:

- People's Health;
- Sustainable Practices (fishing, farming, cultivating);
- Packaging Design and Disposal, and Recycling.

The following examples are also listed in Annex 1 (with numbers identifying brands, and letters identifying categories of analysis, as per Table 1, section 3). Concerning the first group, *Coop*'s commercial highlights that some food or shopping choices are positive for people's health (1e). The claim *"Good shopping can change the world"* (1b) makes implicit reference to sustainability and the fact that farming has negative impacts on the environment; the main assumption, however, is that antibiotics and pesticides are not good for people's health, and that only by changing our shopping habits (viz. by buying *Coop* products) will it be possible to put *"health [...] at the center of everything"*. In this sense, health is foregrounded, while sustainability is omitted or rather taken as a presupposition. Similarly, the commercial by *Garden Gourmet* assumes that plant-based diets are healthier (and more sustainable) by placing the focus on individual eating choices: *"Whether you're vege-tarian, flexi-tarian, gourmet-tarian, or messy-tarian. In short, whatever -tarian you are"* (8e).

The relationship between health and sustainability is more evidently framed in those commercials which stress sustainable fishing, farming, or cultivation practices. *As do Mar*, for example, claims that its tuna is *"good for the sea"* – thus acknowledging that tuna fishing has a negative impact on sustainability (implicit knowledge) –, but also for the people ("It's good for

you"), as summarized in the slogan *"As do Mar, quality and respect"* (2e). The same positive framing linking people and the planet can be found in the *Findus Pisellini Primavera* commercial, where the explanation – *"because by respecting the environment, they also respect you"* – gives topical prominence to both health and sustainability (6c). Other brands thematize this relationship more clearly. Among them, *Frosta* assumes that additives are unsafe and unhealthy, as the commercial reads: *"We catch and process fish sustainably. Do we really want to put additives in it?"*; and *"Only fish from sustainable fisheries, delicious, and no additives"* (3e). *Oro Saiwa* frames both themes through quality and authoritativeness. Respectively: *"It's made with the best grains, it doesn't waste water and it protects the bees"*; *"That's why [grandma] chose it, she did it for me and for the Earth"* (9e). *Bonduelle* and *Mulino Bianco* also mention bees with reference to pesticides (5e) and sustainable agriculture, as in *"Respectful of the environment and bees are happy or 3% of the fields are planted with flowers to help the bees"* (10e) – but health reasons are omitted.

Another group of advertisements alludes more generically to sustainability: while *Garden Gourmet*'s commercial seems to focus mainly on health, it also addresses people who do not follow a vegan/vegetarian diet (e.g. flexitarians, that is people who eat mainly vegetarian food but also meat occasionally), thus implying that plant-based diets are generally more sustainable than omnivore ones (8e). *Findus Green Cuisine*'s commercial implicitly suggests that meat is not sustainable (7e), and the claim tries to reverse, through discursive insinuation, the popular idea that vegetable burgers are not tasty: *"Green Cuisine burgers are sustainable, meatless, and taste amazing"*. In *Lavazza*'s commercial, sustainability is associated to forests' management, climate change, and workers' protection, three issues usually linked to coffee farming: *"We support reforestation in the Amazon. We support the training of young people in Africa. We respond to climate change"* (11e). Another coffee brand, *Nespresso*, uses similar claims to highlight sustainable farming, in *"we protect what is most precious and guarantee exceptional and sustainable quality, and careful practices, in we carefully cultivate one of the world's best coffees, or we guard a carefully cultivated passion"* (12e).

The last group of advertisements stresses topics such as packaging design, disposal, and recycling. Two brands of bottled water, *Ferrarelle* and *San Benedetto*, frame sustainability through corporate recycling in (14e) – *"[our] recycling plant removes 20,000 tonnes of plastic from the environment every year"* – and recycled packaging in (15e) – *"the new [...] 100% carbon-neutral and 100% recycled plastic bottles"*. In the two commercials, the idea that plastic packaging is bad for the environment is backgrounded, while it is underlined that the two companies are leading

laypeople with good recycling practices. *La Valle degli Orti* makes the paradox of plastic packaging explicit: *"We grow and process our vegetables sustainably. And then we put them in plastic. Is there another way?"* (4e). Lastly, *Caffè Borbone*'s commercial insists on correct packaging disposal as a proof of sustainability (*"the coffee is 100% eco-friendly, because you can throw the pod in the compostable bin [...] and the bag goes in the paper"*) and connotes individual recycling in a positive way (13e).

4.2. Linguistic features

In all the advertising texts considered, the majority of Italian words fall within the semantic areas of environment and sustainability. While the study concentrates on Italian commercials, this constitutes the first step towards broader research investigating possible lingua-cultural differences across Italian and UK commercials of products, services in the same sectors and segments, as well as with similar social intents. For what concerns nouns (double underlining in Annex 1), the words *world, planet* and *Earth* offer a clear, recognizable linguistic object and ideological target for conscious consumers (*"we will manage [...] to build a world"* (1b); *"she did it [...] for the Earth"* (9b)). The words *environment* and *nature* are used similarly in key phrases, especially in collocations with derivates of *respect**, as in *"respect for the environment"* (5b), the adjective phrase *"respectful of the environment"* (5b), or the verb construction *"respecting the environment"* (6b). Rhetorical use of nouns is made in metaphorical expressions (*"friend of nature"* (13b), *"endless possibilities"* (12b)), euphemisms and positive claims (*"a world with more nature"* (10b); *"a commitment to nature"* (14b)), and other catchphrases (*"when there's love, there's more taste"* (6b)). Among the nouns in the area of food sustainability, *impact, reforestation, commitment, climate change*, and of course *sustainability* stand out, as well as *plastic*, *paper*, *quality*, or *health* with reference to food production, processing, and packaging. The noun *choice(s)*, as it will be shown, plays an important role in targeting the advertisements' receivers – as in the expressions *"the right choice for a better world"* (13b), and *"the choices we make can change the planet"* (11b).

Moving to verbs (single underlining in Annex 1), *change* is found in combination with the modal *can* in *"good shopping can change the world"* (1b) and *"the choices we make can change the planet"* (11b), with the declarative mood signaling possibility and deontic modality. The action verbs *protect, choose, convince, try* and *help* also hint at individual agency, usually to push consumers to commit to sustainable living. For the same reason, the strategic verbs *recycle* and *respect* can be seen as markers of a prevailing, albeit indirect, imperative mood; similar verbs in this sense include the optimistic *make* and *build*. Speaking of connotation at the word level, the

usually negative verbs *limit* and *reduce* are here positively connoted to describe corporate efforts to cut polluting emissions, use of pesticides, antibiotics, and additives. Other verbs describing production processes include *grow*, *fish* and *farm*.

While certain lexical choices seem rather necessary to build the advertising discourse on environmental sustainability, adjectives and adverbs are selected and positively connoted in each advertisement for promotional purposes. Regarding adjectives, *recyclable* and *recycled* are used to reassure consumers that a product is sustainable (*"delicious vegetables in recyclable paper-based bags"* (4b)), and to show evidence of corporate commitment to sustainability issues (*"100% recycled plastic bottles"* (15b)). All derivates of the stem *sustainab**, including the adjective *sustainable*, the adverb *sustainably*, or the noun *sustainability*, are less semantically specific; as a matter of fact, the evoked claims (*"Findus Green Cuisine burgers are sustainable"* (7b); *"Spring Peas are [...] sustainable"* (6b)), practices (*"fish from sustainable fisheries"* (3b); *"flour from sustainable agriculture"* (10b)), and objectives (*"takes another step towards full sustainability"* (15b)) have different implied meanings and concepts, already discussed in the previous section. The adjective 'compostable' (*"compostable bin"* (13b)) has the same communicative purpose as its *de facto* synonyms *recyclable* and *sustainable*. Finally, the gradable *good* alludes to food taste (*"Spring Pees are good"* (6b); *"[veggie burgers] taste amazing"* (7b); *"friend of nature and good"* (13b)), but also, metaphorically, to quality (*"the best nature of coffee"* (11b); *"one of the world's best coffees"* (12b)), and environmentally sustainable products (*"it's good and simple, because it's made with the best grains"* (9b)). Other expressions have a more general positive meaning (*"good shopping can change the world"* (example 1b); *"every day, a good day"* (9b); *"a better world"* (13b)).

4.3. Power relations: mood and stance

The thematic and lexical analysis conducted so far has focused on all three levels of analysis envisioned in the Methodology section, namely text as a whole, sentence by sentence, and words and phrases. At a higher level, a contextualized interpretation (Huckin 1997, p. 99) can yield insight into more critical aspects, such as the advertisements' narrative strategies and configuration of power relations among the participants. For the sake of critical interpretation, it is maintained that some imbalance in the relation between advertisers and target audience is implied in advertising discourse in general, at least because the latter "firmly embeds the mass of the population within the capitalist system by assigning them the legitimate and even desirable role of 'consumers'" (Fairclough 2001, p. 30). In this and the next section, mood and stance, as well as (environmental) claim evaluation, are

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seen as natural expressions of register at all discursive levels.

Regarding mood, all advertisements are structured in the form of statements or commands, either separately (8 statements) or in combination (6 statements + commands); in one case, a question, or rather an invitation to the target audience is included (1 statement + question). Statements present information as factual, reliable, and trustworthy, and try to persuade potential buyers by means of authoritativeness and stance. In order to achieve this communicative effect and further justify the claims, some clauses are introduced by the adverb *because* (*"because it's made with the best grains"* (9b); *"and that's why"* (10b); *"because the choices we make can change the planet"* (11b); *"because you can throw the pod in the compostable bin"* (13b)). In some instances, however, the logic links between clauses are unclear and show signs of vagueness (*"because by respecting the environment, they also respect you"* (6b); *"because a world with more nature is a happier world"* (10b); *"because with every cup we guard a carefully cultivated passion"* (12b)). In terms of participant relations and tenor, the target audience seems to be guided by means of logic, rather than manipulation; this is also confirmed by the presence of experts or familiar characters introduced as 'friendly authority' (*"The Findus agronomist knows"* (6b); *"Grandma says it's good and simple"* (9b)). The lack of direct imperative mood and modal verbs expressing obligation, together with the general predominance of personal constructions in the active voice, account for informality and equality among participants.

On the other hand, commercials combining statements and commands are more direct and persuasive. Not surprisingly, all advertisements abound in imperative constructions (*"Choose Bonduelle salads"* (5b); *"Discover Garden Gourmet"* (8b); *"Try Garden Gourmet now"* (8b); *"Protect nature with us"* (15b)) typically used in this genre, for example to signal urgency (Barnard 2017). One particular case is the imperative *let*: since it is usually found in combination with the inclusive first person plural pronoun *us* (*"Let's all recycle"* (14b); *"Let's be honest"* (3b)), the resulting command is perceived as less direct, and agency is mitigated. The modals *will* (*"we will manage"* (1b)) and *can* (*"we can protect"* (15b)), are also used to avoid direct expression of imperative mood. Conditional and correlative constructions, in particular, mark veiled commands by linking individual agency to positive outcomes, as in the examples: *"If all together we continue to choose [Coop] products [...] we will manage to [...] build a world"* (1b), and *"the more people we convince to recycle, the more plastic will be removed from the environment"* (14b). In this latter case, the passive construction *will be removed* is also an instance of agency omission. In the *Findus Green Cuisine* advertisement for vegetarian burgers, the causative statement *we'll change your mind* is accompanied by the question/invitation

"Want to join us?" (7b), which challenges the target audience to try vegetable products, and mitigates the previous manipulative statement.

Together with mood, stance creates recognisable addresser/addressee relationships through linguistic elements such as personal and possessive pronouns, and other markers of agency (highlighted in bold in Annex 1). Stance and agency features respond to the general storytelling need to build and reinforce the advertisement's message through clear, coherent narration; in this sense, three different stances can be identified in the dataset:

1. *we vs you*;
2. *we*;
3. *we and you*.

In the first group of commercials (*we vs you*), the juxtaposition of the pronouns *we/us* and *you/your* (*"It's good for us [...]. It's good for you"* (2b); *"whatever -tarian you are, we have many irresistible vegetable products for you"* (8b); *"With every cup we [...] give taste to your coffee moment"* (12b)) shows relational imbalance in which the consumer entrusts their decisional power to the company as a sort of convenience compromise.

A similar perspective is created in those advertisements where a detached *we* guides the narration: these commercials are characterized by lists of positive actions which are meant to give proof of companies' commitment to sustainability and quality (*"We support reforestation [...]. We support the training of young people [...]. We respond to climate change"* (11b)). When passive constructions substitute the explicit subject *we* (*"Mulino Bianco cookies are made with [...]"; "3% of the fields are planted with flowers"* (10b)), the resulting agentless claims are more likely to be perceived as vague or ambiguous.

The last group of advertisements adopts a cooperative *we and you* perspective by including companies among the actors of positive change together with consumers. This approach manages to create a fairer communicative environment in which the message is not imposed from above on the audience (*you*), but the pronoun *we* indicates a plurality of equally responsible agents (*"If all together we"* (1b); *"that's the salad we like"* (5b); *"along with us stands San Benedetto"* (15b)). At the same time, however, the subject *we* defines a broader, less specific group of agents, as in the ambiguous *"Let's be honest"* (4b), where it is unclear whether *Frosta* and *La Valle degli Orti* include themselves in the group identified by *us*.

4.3.1. Power relations: claim evaluation

In line with Carlson *et al.* (1993), claims of environmental sustainability in the dataset can be assessed critically, for instance to look for signs of greenwashing. Close reading of the advertisements shows that the majority of

claims are product-oriented (focusing on "environmentally friendly attributes that a product possesses" (Carlson *et al.* 1993, p. 31)) in which they try to present the advertised products as eco-friendly, usually with reference to sustainability. In some cases, eco-friendly attributes are rather arbitrary, as no explanations or detailed figures are presented (*"this […] tuna is good for the sea"* (2b); *"grown with respect for the environment"* (5b)): for this reason, these claims suffer from vagueness or ambiguity. Conversely, process-oriented claims (dealing with "an organization's internal technology, production technique and/or disposal method that yields environmental benefits" (Carlson *et al.* 1993, p. 31)) appear to be more reliable when numbers and quantifiable data are given as a proof of transparency (*"3% of the fields are planted with flowers"* (10b); *"[Ferrarelle] removes 20,000 tonnes of plastic from the environment every year"* (14b); *"100% carbon-neutral and 100% recycled plastic bottles"* (15b)).

Omissions and vagueness are detected in the majority of process-oriented claims (*"no additives"* (3b); *"farms that reduce the use of antibiotics and cultivation methods that increasingly limit the use of pesticides"* (1b); *"bags with reduced emissions"* (4b); *"it doesn't waste water and it protects the bees"* (9b); *"much more [plastic] than what it uses to produce bottles with recycled plastic"* (14b); and others). In some cases, generic figures included in slogans to impress the audience offer no factual information on sustainability (*"-1 impact"* (15b); *"100% the natural choice"* (3b, 4b); *"100% eco-friendly"* (15b)). The same can be said for the use of Anglicisms (*"You got the power"* (7b); *"eco-friendly"* (13b); *"carbon neutral"* (15b) and the English adjective *green*, which provides a generic semantic link to the environment, as in: *Findus Green Cuisine* and *San Benedetto Eco-green 100 eco*. Indeed, the presence and use of English words in Italian promotional texts has been recognized as a sign of greenwashing, or "an attempt at catching the attention of recipients and impressing them" (Caimotto, Molino, 2011, p. 8).

Environment-oriented claims – involving "independent statement that is ostensibly factual in nature from an organization about the environment at large, or its condition" (Carlson *et al.* 1993, p.31) – make use of shared knowledge on environmental issues to gain consumers' support. It should be said that certain daily use products are more frequently addressed in popular discussion compared to others: coffee and bottled water, for instance, are widely linked to direct environmental damage, in particular to deforestation and plastic pollution. Therefore, the related advertisements make explicit mention of environmental problems, as in the case of *Lavazza* (*reforestation, climate change* (11b)), *Ferrarelle* (*"removes […] plastic from the environment"* (14b)), and *San Benedetto* (*"recycled plastic bottles"* (15b)). Similar image-oriented claims (claims associating an organization "with an

environmental cause or activity for which there is broad-based public support" (Carlson *et al.* 1993, p. 31)) stress corporate commitment to environmental issues (*"we grow and process our vegetables sustainably. And then we put them in plastic"* (4b); *"Lavazza Tierra shows the Lavazza Foundation's commitment"* (11b); *"With every cup we protect what is most precious"* (12b)), thus creating more credible narrations for the target audience. A different type of image-orientation appears in the advertising claims of plant-based products. Because of the still widespread skepticism towards novel or alternative foods (*"we'll change your mind about veggie burgers"* (7b)), the claims by *Findus Green Cuisine* and *Garden Gourmet* use humour and linguistic creativity to address all kinds of consumers (*"Whether you're vege-tarian, flexi-tarian, gourmet-tarian, or messy-tarian"*, (8b)), thus creating a positive feeling of trust.

5. Conclusions

The present study has sought to deconstruct eco-friendly discourse in a dataset of 15 food and drinks advertisements in Italian. Despite the limitations previously illustrated, results from the qualitative critical analysis show that environmental and sustainability themes are exploited in all commercials at the textual and linguistic levels. In some cases, sustainability is framed using health motifs, whereas explicit references to environmental sustainability tend to be less specific. With reference to nature's intrinsic value (Stibbe 2020), it seems that environment-related narrations are rather used for specific marketing purposes to provide evidence of sustainability commitment by companies, also in line with Corporate Social Responsibility requirements. On the one hand, the need for eco-friendly advertising appears to be pushed by conscious consumers urging businesses to opt for more responsible production (Mintel 2021); on the other hand, it is part of green marketing strategies promoting green consumerism models (Akenji 2014).

From a critical standpoint, the traditional imbalance between passive consumers and aggressive marketers is now more openly questioned, as people become more aware of their power to drive markets with their purchasing choices. The risk of greenwashing as a way of pleasing conscious consumers remains, but reported cases are being dealt with by the Italian Court under the European Commission guidelines on Unfair Commercial Practices (see Piovano, Andolina 2022). Future research may explore power relations in green advertising more systematically, for example through enhanced frameworks for the assessments of environmental claims, or by comparing Italian and English advertisements of multinational/international brands to evidence possible lingua-cultural differences.

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Annex 1 – Commercials

Notation:
Bold = pronouns and markers of agency and stance
<u>Single underlining</u> = verbs and verb phrases
<u>Double underlining</u> = nouns, adjectives, and adverbs

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1. COOP – COOPERATIVE/SUPERMARKETS

TEXT (A) – Se tutti insieme continuiamo a scegliere prodotti come quelli a marchio Coop, che provengono da allevamenti che riducono l'utilizzo di antibiotici e da metodi di coltivazione che limitano sempre più l'uso di pesticidi, riusciremo pezzo dopo pezzo a costruire un mondo in cui la salute è al centro di tutto. Coop, una buona spesa può cambiare il mondo.

(B) 'If **all together we** <u>continue to choose</u> Coop-branded products, which come from farms that <u>reduce</u> the use of antibiotics and <u>cultivation</u> methods that increasingly <u>limit</u> the use of pesticides, **we** <u>will manage</u>, piece by piece, to <u>build</u> a <u>world</u> where <u>health</u> is at the center of everything. Coop, <u>good</u> shopping <u>can change</u> the <u>world</u>.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Health.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Farming has negative impacts on the environment; antibiotics and pesticides are not good for people's health.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Coop products can change the world and improve people's health; Product and Process Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement and (veiled) command; WE *and* YOU.

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2. AS DO MAR – CANNED TUNA

TEXT (A) – Questo tonno As do Mar è buono per il mare. È buono per noi, perché è lavorato in Italia. È buono per te. As do Mar, la qualità e il rispetto.

(B) 'This As do Mar tuna is <u>good</u> for the <u>sea</u>. It's good for **us** because it is processed in Italy. It's good for **you**. As do Mar, <u>quality</u> and <u>respect</u>.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Health; Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Tuna fishing has a negative impact on sustainability.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – As do Mar tuna is positive for both people and the planet; Product orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE vs YOU.

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3. FROSTA – FROZEN FISH AND FISH PRODUCTS

TEXT (A) – Siamo onesti: peschiamo e lavoriamo il pesce in modo sostenibile. Davvero ci vogliamo mettere gli additivi? C'è un altro modo? Prova i prodotti Frosta! Solo pesce da pesca sostenibile, buonissimo, e senza additivi. Frosta, 100% la scelta naturale.

(B) '<u>Let's</u> be <u>honest</u>: **we** catch and process fish <u>sustainably</u>. Do **we** really want to put additives in it? Is there another way? <u>Try</u> Frosta products! Only fish from <u>sustainable</u> fisheries, delicious, and no additives. Frosta, 100% the <u>natural choice</u>.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Health; Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Additives are not good for people's health.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Competitors' products have additives; Frosta products are healthier and sustainable; Product, Process and Image Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement and command; WE vs YOU.

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4. LA VALLE DEGLI ORTI – FROZEN VEGETABLES

TEXT (A) – Siamo onesti: coltiviamo e lavoriamo le nostre verdure in modo sostenibile. E poi le mettiamo nella plastica. C'è un altro modo? La Valle degli Orti, verdure buonissime, in buste riciclabili a base di carta e con emissioni ridotte. La Valle degli Orti, 100% la scelta naturale.

(B) '<u>Let's</u> be <u>honest</u>: **we** grow and process our vegetables sustainably. And then **we** put them in plastic. Is there another way? La Valle degli Orti, delicious vegetables in <u>recyclable paper-based</u> bags with <u>reduced</u>

emissions. La Valle degli Orti, 100% the <u>natural choice</u>.' [translation, MN]
MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.
IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Plastic packaging is not good for the environment.
CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Competitors' products have plastic packaging; La Valle degli Orti products have sustainable packaging; Product, Process, and Image orientation.
MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE vs YOU.

5. BONDUELLE – VEGETABLE PRODUCTS

TEXT (A) – Insalate, già lavate sono fresche e prelibate. Rispettose dell'ambiente e le api son contente. Sulle tavole, in famiglia, trova il gusto che ti piglia. Così semplice e vivace è l'insalata che ci piace. Scegli le insalate Bonduelle, coltivate nel rispetto dell'ambiente. Bonduelle. Il mondo che ci piace.
(B) 'Salads, already washed, fresh and delicious. <u>Respectful</u> of the <u>environment</u> and <u>bees</u> are <u>happy</u>. On the table, with the family, find the taste that captures you. So simple and lively, that's the salad **we** like. <u>Choose</u> Bonduelle salads, <u>grown</u> with <u>respect</u> for the <u>environment</u>. Bonduelle. The <u>world</u> **we** like.' [translation, MN]
MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.
IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Farming has negative impacts on the environment and on bees.
CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Bonduelle salads respect the environment; Product Orientation.
MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement and command; WE and YOU.

6. FINDUS PISELLINI PRIMAVERA – VEGETABLE PRODUCTS

TEXT (A) – L'agronomo Findus lo sa: i Pisellini Primavera sono *una bontà*, teneri, *dolci, piccoli, sostenibili*, perché rispettando l'ambiente, rispettano anche te. Findus, quando c'è amore, c'è più gusto.
(B) 'The Findus agronomist knows: Spring Peas are good, tender, sweet, small, <u>*sustainable*</u>, because by <u>respecting </u>the <u>environment</u>, they also <u>respect</u> **you**. Findus, when there's love, there's more taste.' [translation, MN]
MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Health; Sustainability.
IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Farming has negative impacts on the environment.
CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Findus products respect the environment and therefore they respect people; Product Orientation.
MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE vs YOU.

7. FINDUS GREEN CUISINE – VEGETABLE AND PLANT-BASED PRODUCTS

TEXT (A) – Sotto questa bandiera vi faremo cambiare idea sui burger vegetali. I burger Green Cuisine Findus sono sostenibili, senza carne, e con un gusto sorprendente. La rivoluzione è iniziata. Vuoi essere dei nostri? Findus Green Cuisine, you got the power!
(B) 'Under this flag, **we**'<u>ll</u> <u>change</u> **your** mind about veggie burgers. Findus Green Cuisine burgers are <u>sustainable</u>, meatless, and taste amazing. The <u>revolution</u> has begun. <u>Want to join **us**</u>? Findus Green Cuisine, **you** <u>got</u> the <u>power</u>!' [translation, MN]
MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.
IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Meat is not sustainable; people think vegetable burgers are not tasty.
CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – If people buy these burgers, they will be part of a sustainability revolution; Product and Image Orientation.
MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement and question; WE vs YOU.

8. GARDEN GOURMET – VEGETABLE AND PLANT-BASED PRODUCTS

TEXT (A) – Scopri Garden Gourmet. Che tu sia vege-tariano, flexi-tariano, gourmet-tariano, pasticcia-tariano. Insomma, qualunque –tariano tu sia, per te abbiamo tanti prodotti vegetali irresistibili. Prova subito Garden Gourmet.
(B) '<u>Discover</u> Garden Gourmet. Whether **you**'re <u>vege-tarian, flexi-tarian, gourmet-tarian, </u>or <u>messy-tarian</u>. In short, whatever -tarian **you** are, **we** have many irresistible vegetable products for **you**. <u>Try</u> Garden Gourmet now.' [translation, MN]
MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Health.
IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Plant-based diets are healthier and more sustainable.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – There is a Garden Gourmet product for every type of diet; Product and Image Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement and command; WE vs YOU.

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9. ORO SAIWA – BISCUITS

TEXT (A) – Da quando ero piccolo, a colazione c'è Oro Saiwa. Nonna dice che è buono e semplice, perché è fatto con i chicchi migliori, non spreca l'acqua e protegge le api. Per questo l'ha scelto, l'ha fatto per me e per la Terra. Oro Saiwa, ogni giorno, un giorno buono.

(B) 'Ever since **I** was little, **I**'ve had Oro Saiwa for breakfast. **Grandma** <u>says</u> it's good and simple, because it's made with the <u>best</u> grains, it doesn't <u>waste</u> water and it <u>protects</u> the <u>bees</u>. That's why **she** chose it, **she** did it for **me** and for <u>the Earth</u>. Oro Saiwa, every day, a good day.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Health; Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Farming has negative impacts on water consumption and bees.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Oro Saiwa biscuits are good for both people and the planet; Product and Process Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE.

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10. MULINO BIANCO – BISCUITS

TEXT (A) – I biscotti Mulino Bianco sono fatti con farina da agricoltura sostenibile. E per questo il 3% dei campi è coltivato a fiori per aiutare le api. Perché un mondo con più natura è un mondo più felice.

(B) 'Mulino Bianco cookies <u>are made</u> with flour from <u>sustainable</u> agriculture. And that's why 3% of the fields <u>are planted</u> with flowers to <u>help</u> the <u>bees</u>. Because a <u>world</u> with more <u>nature</u> is a <u>happier world</u>.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Farming has negative impacts on bees.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Mulino Bianco cookies are sustainable; Product and Process Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE.

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11. LAVAZZA – COFFEE

TEXT (A) – Supportiamo la riforestazione in Amazzonia. Sosteniamo la formazione dei giovani in Africa. Rispondiamo al cambiamento climatico. Lavazza Tierra testimonia l'impegno della fondazione Lavazza, perché le scelte che facciamo possono cambiare il pianeta. Lavazza Tierra, la migliore natura del caffè.

(B) '**We** <u>support</u> <u>reforestation</u> in the Amazon. **We** <u>support</u> the training of young people in Africa. **We** <u>respond to</u> <u>climate change</u>. Lavazza Tierra <u>shows</u> the Lavazza Foundation's <u>commitment</u>, because the <u>choices</u> **we** <u>make</u> <u>can change</u> <u>the planet</u>. Lavazza Tierra, the best nature of coffee.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Coffee farming has negative impacts on forests, climate change, and workers' protection.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Lavazza Tierra is committed to saving the planet; Image and Environment orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE.

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12. NESPRESSO – COFFEE

TEXT (A) – Con ogni tazza coltiviamo con cura uno dei migliori caffè al mondo e diamo gusto al tuo momento del caffè. Con ogni tazza proteggiamo ciò che è più prezioso e garantiamo una qualità eccezionale e sostenibile. Perché con ogni tazza custodiamo una passione coltivata con cura. Nespresso, What else!
E grazie al progetto 'Da chicco a chicco', quando ricicli contribuisci a trasformare capsule e caffè in infinite possibilità.

(B) 'With every cup **we** <u>carefully</u> <u>cultivate</u> one of the world's best coffees and give taste to **your** coffee moment. With every cup **we** <u>protect</u> what is most precious and <u>guarantee</u> exceptional and <u>sustainable</u> quality. Because with every cup **we** <u>guard</u> a <u>carefully</u> cultivated passion. Nespresso, What else!' [translation, MN]
And thanks to the project 'From grain to grain', when **you** <u>recycle</u> **you** <u>help</u> <u>transform</u> capsules and coffee into <u>endless</u> <u>possibilities</u>.

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Coffee farming has negative impacts on the environment.
CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Nespresso products are sustainable; Image Orientation.
MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE *vs* YOU.

13. CAFFÈ BORBONE – COFFEE

TEXT (A) – Ragazzi, caffè? – *Sì* grazie*, dopo mangiato ci vuole proprio.* Nuova macchinetta Borbone, così il caffè è 100% eco-friendly, perché la cialda la butti nell'umido – *compostabile* – e la busta va nella carta – *continua il ciclo della carta!* – la scatola invece… *Uagliu', ma stu' ccafè l'amma riciclà o ce l'amma bere?* Caffè Borbone, amico della natura *e buono! Anche perché se non era buono…* Borbone, la scelta giusta per un mondo migliore.

(B) 'Guys, coffee? - *Yes, thank you, after eating we really need it.* New Borbone coffee machine, so the coffee is <u>100% eco-friendly</u>, because **you** can <u>throw</u> the pod in the <u>compostable</u> bin – *compostable!* – and the bag <u>goes</u> in the paper – *the paper cycle continues!* – the box instead... *Guys, are we <u>recycling</u> this coffee or are we drinking it?* Caffè Borbone, <u>friend of nature</u> *and good*! *Also because if it wasn't good...* Borbone, the <u>right choice</u> for a <u>better world</u>.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Recycling is good for the environment.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Borbone products are eco-friendly; each person can protect the environment through correct packaging disposal; Product and Process Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement; WE *vs* YOU.

14. FERRARELLE – BOTTLED WATER

TEXT (A) – Alleluya, Ferrarelle mi ha convinto e io sono riuscito a convincere Mattia. E io Sofia. Perché più persone convinciamo a riciclare, più plastica verrà tolta dall'ambiente. Proprio come fa Ferrarelle, l'unica che con il suo impianto di riciclo toglie ogni anno 20.000 tonnellate di plastica dall'ambiente, molte di più di quante ne utilizza per produrre bottiglie con plastica riciclata. Ricicliamo tutti per realizzare questa filosofia: un mondo a impatto -1. Ferrarelle, un impegno per la natura.

(B) '*Alleluya,* **Ferrarelle** <u>convinced</u> **me** and **I** managed to <u>convince</u> Mattia. And **I** <u>convinced</u> Sofia. Because the more people **we** <u>convince to recycle</u>, the more <u>plastic</u> will be <u>removed</u> from the <u>environment</u>. Just like Ferrarelle <u>does</u>, **the only one** whose <u>recycling plant</u> <u>removes</u> 20,000 tonnes of <u>plastic</u> from the <u>environment</u> every year, much more than what **it** uses to <u>produce</u> bottles with <u>recycled plastic</u>. **Let's all** <u>recycle</u> to <u>achieve</u> this philosophy: a <u>world</u> with -1 <u>impact</u>. Ferrarelle, a <u>commitment</u> to <u>nature</u>.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Recycling is good for the environment; plastic packaging is not good for the environment.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – Ferrarelle gives a good example; each person can protect the environment through recycling; Process, Image, and Environment Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement and (veiled) command; WE *vs* YOU.

15. SAN BENEDETTO
BOTTLED WATER

TEXT (A) – Che spettacolo, eh? Ma noi non siamo solo spettatori, con le nostre scelte possiamo proteggere l'ambiente e mantenere pura e incontaminata l'acqua, anche per le generazioni future. Insieme a noi c'è San Benedetto, che fa un altro passo avanti verso la piena sostenibilità con la nuova eco-green 100 eco. 100% carbon-neutral e bottiglie 100% plastica riciclata. Per me nessuna è come lei. San Benedetto eco-green: proteggi la natura con noi.

(B) 'What a view, huh? But **we'**re not just spectators, with **our** <u>choices</u> **we** can <u>protect</u> the <u>environment</u> and <u>keep</u> water pure and uncontaminated, even for future generations. Along with **us** <u>stands</u> San Benedetto, which <u>takes</u> another step towards <u>full sustainability</u> with the new Eco-green 100 eco. <u>100% carbon-neutral</u> and <u>100% recycled plastic</u> bottles. For **me**, none is like it. San Benedetto Eco-green: <u>protect</u> <u>nature</u> with **us**.' [translation, MN]

MAIN FOCUS OR THEME (C) – Sustainability.

IMPLIED KNOWLEDGE (D) – Plastic packaging is not good for the environment; recycled packaging is sustainable.

CLAIM OR EXPLICIT MESSAGE (E) – San Benedetto gives a good example; each person can protect the environment by buying San Benedetto's products; Process, Image, and Environment Orientation.

MOOD AND STANCE (F) – Statement and command; WE *and* YOU.

NEW CONCEPTS AND MEANINGS OF *SLOW*
The case of Slow Art

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Abstract – The present study explores new meanings and values of the word *slow* in the context of *Slow Art Day*, a global event that takes place once a year and whose aim is to encourage both visitors and museum curators to engage with art in new and different ways. Since 1989 and the early days of Carlo Petrini's Slow Food Movement, the concept of slowness has become a relevant and ethical topic that is often related to what is organic, local and sustainable. While the notion and impact of slowness have been studied in different areas such as food (Petrini 2003), media (Rauch 2011), medicine (Wear *et al.* 2015) and education (O'Neill 2014), museums are yet to be investigated in depth. Through the lens of Appraisal Theory (Martin, White 2005) and corpus linguistics (Sinclair 2004), I focus on a diachronic study of the language of evaluation adopted in the Slow Art Day official blog, which keeps a record of the reports of the museums that take part in the yearly event. By using both a quantitative and qualitative approach, I focus on how appraisal is used to enhance and promote the new and different semantic dimensions related to slowness. My analysis of the Slow Art Day blog will illustrate how slowness is no longer related to the semantic dimension of Time, but also to those of Wellbeing and Inclusiveness, while a close study of evaluative language will show how these dimensions are interconnected to one another.

Keywords: Appraisal Theory; blog; corpus linguistics; promotional discourse; slow art.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore new values attributed to the adjective *slow* in the context of the *Slow Art Day*, focusing specifically on the linguistic options adopted in the promotion of the event.

In 1989, to protest against fast-food chains and support local and ethical production in favour of a 'good, clean and fair' economy in Italy, Carlo Petrini created the *Slow Food Movement*. The coining of such a slogan, seems to suggest that, within the context of analogous movements, the adjective *slow* acquired new meanings in English: as a matter of fact, *slow* seems to be associated with issues related to wellbeing and sustainability and not only to time (Nocella, Bondi Submitted). Little did Petrini know at the time, that Slow Food would be in fact used as an example all over the world to initiate similar movements, such as Slow Academia (O' Neill 2014), Slow

Medicine (Wear *et al*. 2015), Slow Shopping, Slow Housing (Steele 2012), Slow Media (David 2015), and Slow Art. Terry founded the Slow Art Day in 2010 to encourage museum visitors to engage with art in a non-consumeristic way, encouraging them to spend more than the average of 28.7 seconds in front of a piece of art before moving on to the following one (Grant 2018). The Slow Art Day movement is intended for both visitors and for museums themselves, which is why for the event museums agree to organize exhibitions where visitors have to focus on five different art pieces for ten minutes each (Gould 2018). The end of the exhibition is usually followed by a convivial discussion around food and drinks where people will share their feelings and impressions. Since 2009, more than 200 museums have taken part in the initiative, and the Slow Art Day team writes posts on each event which are then published throughout the year on their official blog.

Which values are promoted in the Slow Art Day blog (SAD-blog)? And how are they linked to new concepts of *slow*? Given the change in meaning of the adjective *slow* in English (Nocella, Bondi Submitted), it would be interesting to explore whether such changes are also applicable to the Slow Art Day movement.

This paper will open with a review of the literature on blogs (section 2.1) and evaluative language (section 2.2), with a specific focus on Appraisal Theory (Martin, White 2005). Then it will examine materials and methods used (section 3), followed by results (section 4) and conclusions (section 5).

2. Background

2.1. Blogs

The classification of blogs has been a topic of interest in research over the years. Blogs are virtual spaces where people share, disseminate and recontextualise knowledge according to their readers' needs (Luzón 2012). Herring *et al.* (2005) identify three types of blogs: topical blogs, which are news-based; journals and diaries, which are more personal; and knowledge-blogs, where authors share their expertise. Blog posts, which are "authors' entries" (Bondi, Seidenari 2012, p. 17) can vary in style, from colloquial to formal, and by target, addressing a small or large audience, and select their readership based on personal or professional elements (Puschmann 2013, p. 88). Despite this variation that we encounter in the different types of blogs, Puschmann (2013, p. 91) argues that some linguistic properties and elements seem to be universal. For example, blogs show consistency in their construction: usually they start with a title, followed by a text, and they close with tags or keywords related to the content of the post, name of the author, time of publication and the URL (Winer 2001). Blogs also distinguish

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themselves for being text-based, for showing posts in reverse chronological order (from the most recent to the oldest), as well as for being frequently updated, and for having links to other websites (Baron 2008; Schmidt 2007).

Blogs are real instances of language in use: they provide readers with glimpses of how language is used to carry out communicative actions, both at professional and everyday levels (Bondi 2018a), and their authors even interact with different audiences at different levels (Lazzeretti 2021), creating "interwoven polylogues" (Bondi 2018a, p. 46), and maintaining simultaneous conversations with their audience. However, they have also been studied as a space for both self-promotion and creation of group identity (Davies, Merchant 2007; Luzón 2012; Myers 2010). Academic blogs, for example, are encouraged by institutions, becoming "a key means of disseminating research, visibility and expanding outreach to commercial and lay worlds" (Zou, Hyland 2019, pp. 714-715). As a useful tool for self-promotion, blogs become "virtual arenas where content (including news) is produced, shared, and – crucially – commented on evaluatively" (Bondi, Seidenari 2012, p. 18). According to Puschmann (2013, p. 88), blogs are "a highly variable form of self-expression", where bloggers and commentators tend to show their attitudes towards their audience, making evaluation a central discursive function in blog texts (Bondi 2018a; Bondi, Seidenari 2012, p. 18). In fact, the "inherently evaluative nature of blogs" (Bondi, Seidenari 2012, p. 25) has led blog authors to use a high number of subjectivity markers in this genre (i.e., personal pronouns and adjectives). The degree of subjectivity has been explored in the genre of blogs (Bondi 2018a; Bondi, Diani 2015; Cacchiani 2019, 2023), in more specific academic blogs (Bondi 2018b, 2018c; Zou, Hyland 2019) and scientific blogs (Bondi 2018a).

Zou and Hyland (2019) identify four attitudinal dimensions, also known as elements of stance, through which writers present themselves to readers. These are hedges, used to withhold a complete commitment to a position; boosters, which are used by authors to gain credibility; Attitude markers, which indicate the writer's affective side; and self-mention, which shows the "writer's intrusion in the text" (Zou, Hyland 2019, p. 717). Zou and Hyland (2019) also analyse engagement strategies that are used by authors of academic blogs to recontextualise as well as to attract an audience. Such rhetorical strategies include readers-mention, which attracts readers by using second person pronouns (i.e., the use of *you*); directives, which give instructions to readers through the use of the imperative or obligation modals; and questions, which invite readers to a "direct collusion" with the author, by appealing to readers' shared knowledge (Zou, Hyland 2019, pp. 717-718).

2.2. Evaluative language and Appraisal Theory

The notion of Evaluation is widely used in discourse analysis and in analysing lexical expressions related to speakers and writers' emotional attitudes. It is related to the expression of the speakers'/writers' attitude or stance towards a viewpoint or feeling about something (Hunston, Thompson 1999, p. 5). While evaluation can be achieved linguistically, lexically, and grammatically through texts (Hunston 2011, p. 12), lexical items (such as adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs) play a fundamental role thanks to their "chief function and meaning" (Hunston, Thompson 1999, p. 14).

Therefore, evaluation can be described as "comparative, subjective, and value-laden" (Hunston, Thompson 1999, p. 13) where its core lies in identifying signals of comparison, subjectivity, and social values while still highlighting the polarity between what is good and what is bad, with good coinciding with what helps us to achieve a goal, and bad with negative obstacles (Hunston, Sinclair 1999, p. 85). While different studies provide appropriate approaches to delimit evaluation (Bednarek 2006; Channell 1999; Hunston 2011; Su 2016), for this specific case study I will use Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, which specifically focuses on issues regarding speakers/writers' evaluation, and considers different parts of discourse without necessarily focusing on grammar.

The appraisal framework is organised into three main systems, namely Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, which are then divided into different subsystems:

- Attitude is concerned with "values by which speakers pass judgements and associate emotional/affectual responses with participants and processes" (White 2001, p. 1).

- Engagement focuses on language users' resources that are adopted to negotiate the arguability of their utterances.

- Graduation involves the intensity and modulation of prepositions.

Particular attention is placed upon Attitude, which is especially relevant for this study as it provides tools and identifies strategies that will be useful to analyse the type of language used in the Slow Art Day blog. Martin and White (2005, p. 43) claim that "Attitudinal meaning tends to spread out and colour a phrase of discourse as speakers and writers take up a stance oriented to affect, judgement or appreciation". This particular system of meanings provides tools to map feelings in English texts (Martin, White 2005, p. 42), not to mention the fact that "the canonical grammatical realization for attitude is adjectival" and that grammatical frames are useful for distinguishing kinds of attitude with respect to this kind of realization (Martin, White 2005, p. 58). As this paper also concerns the new meanings of the adjective *slow*, a system

of attitudes provides the right tools to carry out my investigation.

As previously mentioned, Attitude is further divided into three main subsystems concerning emotions, ethics, and aesthetics, which respectively correspond to Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation (Martin, White 2005).[1]

- Affect belongs to the semantic field of emotion (e.g., *happy/sad*, *confident/anxious*). It is concerned with positive and negative feelings, emotions, and reactions to different kinds of behaviour, text/processes and phenomena.

- The subcategory of Judgement concerns how we construe our attitude towards people and the way they behave, and it is further divided into the subcategories of Social esteem and Social sanction (Martin, White 2005, p. 52).

- Appreciation can be thought of as the system by which human feelings, either positive or negative, towards products, processes and entities are institutionalised as a set of evaluations (Martin, White 2005, p. 42). It is a "mental process ascribing an attitude to a thing" (i.e., a person considers/sees something [appreciation]) (Martin, White 2005, p. 42), with "things" referring to what we make, performances and natural phenomena (Martin, White 2005, p. 56). Appreciation can be further divided into Reaction (impact of the object), Composition (the complexity of a product) and Valuation (how it is valued).

Martin and White provide a series of lexical-grammatical resources that help classify and evaluate propositions for each category, highlighting how words act in context.

3. Materials and methods

This study is based on the analysis of the *Slow Art Day corpus* (from now onto referred as SAD), which contains 250 posts selected from the Slow Art Day blog (SAD-blog) over an eight-year (2020-2012) in the typical reverse chronological order of blog posts. Texts were encoded according to the year and month of publication, using the following denomination: Year_SAD_Blog_MonthDay (e.g., 2014_SAD_Blog_January14). Table 1 shows the number of posts for each month and year from 2020 to 2012 and provides a general idea of how posts are distributed across time.

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[1] Further information on the Appraisal Framework can be found on the official Appraisal Website, developed by Peter White (2015) and available at https://www.grammatics.com/appraisal/ (16.6.2021).

Table 2 mirrors Table 1 showing the number of tokens contained in the posts, which are again divided by month and year, reaching 51,660 tokens for the whole corpus. Similarly to Table 1, Table 2 shows that 2012 and 2020 are the years that contain the highest number of tokens. This might coincide with the opening of the blog (2012), and therefore more publicity might have been needed, and with the pandemic outbreak (2020) that forced people to stay at home and engage with online activities.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
JANUARY	-	9	2	1	-	1	-	-	8
FEBRUARY	1	3	2	-	2	1	1	-	1
MARCH	2	2	5	-	6	2	7	1	3
APRIL	13	6	16	3	8	7	6	14	3
MAY	3	2	2	-	-	5	-	-	8
JUNE	1	4	2	-	-	1	-	9	3
JULY	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
AUGUST	5	1	-	-	-	-	-	5	2
SEPTEMBER	3	1	-	-	1	1	2	2	3
OCTOBER	5	2	-	-	-	-	-	4	4
NOVEMBER	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	7
DECEMBER	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	4	3
TOTAL	41	34	29	4	17	18	16	42	47

Table 1
Number of posts on the SAD blog.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
JANUARY	-	4,435	163	259	-	117	-	-	1,513
FEBRUARY	514	1,170	780	-	534	161	54	-	334
MARCH	824	446	732	-	1,465	289	1,144	81	628
APRIL	2,630	2,603	2,222	851	1,036	1,503	904	2,179	580
MAY	570	513	862	-	-	1,570	-	-	2,838
JUNE	386	996	199	-	-	403	-	1,603	1,502
JULY	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	659
AUGUST	1,042	321	-	-	-	-	-	728	1,117
SEPTEMBER	915	228	-	-	74	158	235	332	1,722
OCTOBER	523	972	-	-	-	-	-	811	1,621
NOVEMBER	2,350	919	-	-	-	-	-	567	2,031
DECEMBER	1,087	185	-	-	-	-	-	898	816
TOTAL	10,823	2,561	4,959	1,110	3,109	4,201	2,337	7,199	15,361

Table 2
SAD Blog: number of tokens per month.

To investigate the promotional features and values promoted in the SAD blog, I divided my analysis into two stages. First, I generated a wordlist and identified the most frequent nouns that best represented the promotion of the

event. A collocation analysis of such nouns allowed me to create a set of semantic preferences (Sinclair 2004), which were denominated "semantic dimensions" and which best reflect the representation of the SAD.

In the second stage of my analysis, I focused on the use of appraisal (Martin, White 2005) in the blog to explore the evaluative lexicon used to promote the SAD. The corpus was qualitatively and quantitatively analysed with UAM CorpusTool software, which not only provided me with statistics and comparative elements from the data, but it also allowed me to annotate sentences and clauses at both a macro and microlevel of analysis. At a macrolevel, the texts were tagged according to year of publication, while segments of texts were manually annotated according to the semantic dimensions found in the first stage of analysis. Segments that fell into more than one dimension were tagged more than once. At a micro-level of analysis, I annotated the speaker's/writer's evaluation, perception, and descriptions of the specific SAD event using Martin and White's (2005) annotation scheme already embedded in the UAM CorpusTool. This allowed to analyse the evaluative lexicon used to promote the SAD event, as well as identify values linked to *slow* within the SAD context. Lexical items were annotated and analysed following two of the three categories of Attitude: Affect and Appreciation (Table 3).

ATTITUDE TYPES	
SUB-SYSTEM	SUBCATEGORY
AFFECT Evaluates an entity, process or state emotionally. E.g. *That makes me happy.*	UN/HAPPINESS - Happiness (+ve): Affection. E.g. *adore*, *be fond of*, *love*; Cheer. E.g. *buoyant*, *cheerful*, *jubilant* - Unhappiness (-ve): Antipathy. E.g. *abhor*, *dislike*, *hate*; Misery. E.g. *down*, *miserable*, *sad*
	DIS/SATISFACTION - Interest (+ve). E.g. *absorbed*, *engrossed*, *involved* - Ennui (-ve). E.g. *flat*, *stale*, *jaded* - Pleasure (+ve). E.g. *chuffed*, *pleased*, *satisfied* - Displeasure (-ve). E.g. *angry*, *cross*, *furious*
	IN/SECURITY - Security (+ve). E.g. *assured*, *confident*, *trusting* - Insecurity (-ve). E.g. *anxious*, *astonished*, *uneasy*
	DIS/INCLINATION Assessments as to the desirability attached to any object, person or undertaking. - Desire (+ve). E.g. *keen*, *long for*, *miss* - Fear (-ve). Eg. *fearful*, *wary*, *terrorized*
APPRECIATION Evaluates things, processes, and states of affairs aesthetically or with the social value accorded to the object. E.g. *They consider it beautiful.*	REACTION Values referring to, or derived from values of AFFECT but where the emotional rection has been detached from any human experience of the emotion and attached to the evaluated entity as if were some property which the entity objectively and intrinsically possesses. E.g. *depressing*, *boring*
	COMPOSITION How the parts of the entity fit together. Positive (+ve). E.g. *balanced*, *harmonious*, *well-formed* Negative (-ve). E.g. *confused*, *convoluted*, *ill-formed*
	SOCIAL VALUATION Whether something is 'socially' valued for its usefulness, worthiness, efficaciousness,

health-giving properties: its contribution to the community or its values to consumers.

Table 3
Attitude annotation scheme – adapted from UAM Corpus Tool.

Table 3 shows the built-in UAM CorpusTool annotation scheme of the appraisal subcategory of Attitude which provides users with specific questions that are useful in classifying a lexical item.

4. Results

4.1 The SAD semantic dimensions

Starting from the wordlist that was generated by AntConc 3.5.8 software (Anthony 2019), I grouped items into three main categories that could best represent the promotion of the SAD: Arts, Occasion and People (Table 4).

ARTS	OCCASION	PEOPLE
art (2145)	*day* (1204)	*you* (381)
museum (445)	*event* (228)	*participants* (214)
gallery (219)	*experience* (193)	*people* (174)
		hosts (96)
		visitors (87)
		artists (84)

Table 4
Categories of the most frequent items in SAD blog (adapted from Martin, White 2005).

In the category of Arts, I observed the collocations of the words *art*, *museum*, and *gallery*; for the category of Occasion, I investigated the words *day*, *event*, and *experience*; while for the last group, People, I examined the collocations of the items *you*, *participants*, *people*, *hosts*, *visitors*, and *artists*.
        Looking at the collocations of each of these nouns, I next identified six key semantic dimensions that were recurring in all elements belonging to each one of the three macro-categories Arts, Occasion, and People. These are not linked to the semantic preferences of each individual word form, but rather to the semantic preferences (Sinclair 2004) that characterize the representation of the slow art day event as a whole, as seen through the word forms initially identified as characterizing the event, its object and its participants. The dimensions that I identified are the following:

1. Education: this includes elements regarding empowerment and learning through SAD activities (examples 1-2).

(1)   Slow Art Day was created to *empower* museum *visitors* to change their experience themselves and help them *how to* look at and love art. [SAD-Blog/26 Mar2013]

(2)   Not only do we want people to come to our programs, we also want them to be more active *participants* and to *encourage* conversation. [SAD-Blog/21 Aug2019]

2. Inclusiveness: includes elements of co-working, collaboration, and accessibility (examples 3-4). It also comprises terms connected to internationality (i.e. if the event is reachable and accessible to everyone).

(3)   Slow *Art Day* is an *accessible* and *affordable* activity that mirrors the 'fair go', non-elitist attitude of many aspects of Australian culture and life, i.e., that everyone should have *access to the same opportunities and experience*. [SAD-Blog/22 Sept2012]

(4)   We invite *artists all over the world* to open their studio for Slow Art Day (…). [SAD-Blog/19June2019]

3. Innovation: focuses on the originality and the uniqueness of the event (examples 5-6).

(5)   If you're in the area, stop for a *unique experience*. [SAD-Blog/11Apr2013]

(6)   In the webinar, Sara spoke about how engaging all senses helps participants to engage with *art* in a *new* way, and how it brings *pleasant and unexpected* element to the *visitor's experience*. [SAD-Blog/11Apr2014]

4. Time: focuses on elements of taking time to relax and engage with art and the activities of SAD (examples 7-8).

(7)   *Looking slowly and taking time* to move in and around this artwork completely changed my perception (…). [SAD-Blog/9Oct2019]

(8)   Slow *Art Day* and the *value of spending time* looking at pictures. [SAD-Blog/24Apr2012]

5. Value of Art: focuses on the fact that SAD is a non-profit organisation, relying on the support of volunteers (examples 9-10).

(9)   Slow Art Day is an *all-volunteer*, self-organized, annual global *event* that aims to transform the art viewing experience. [SAD-Blog/27Apr2012]

(10)   (…) and are quite avantgarde, subcultural, *non-profit art event*. [SAD-Blog/7Mar2013]

6. Wellbeing: is related to the positive effects that SAD has on participants, i.e., mindfulness, relaxation, etc. (examples 11-12).

(11) We look forward to seeing what *mindful* and *immersive experiences* the Yorkshire sculpture park programs for Slow Art Day 2020. [SAD-Blog/15Apr2012]

(12) Read on to find out Carol's approach for an *inspiring yet meditative* Slow *Art Day* this year. [SAD-Blog/20Aug2020]

Table 5 shows how collocates were recategorized into the six dimensions. The collocates include all the verbs, adjectives and nouns that collocated with each one of the search words listed in Table 4.

DIMENSIONS	LINGUISTIC FEATURES
Education	art *and education*; *conversation about*, *how to look at*, *learn*, *think about*, *value of* art
Inclusiveness	*accessible*, *global* event; events, hosts, museums *around the world* *include more* participants visitor *engagement*; *empower* visitors
Innovation	*challenging*, *enjoy*, *really look at* art *rare*, *unique* experience, event
Time	*experience*, *look at*, *slowly enjoy* art *slow*, *long*, *full* day participants *are asked to spend an hour looking at…* people *spend their valuable time…*
Value of Art	*affordable*, *all volunteers*, *free*, *non-profit* event
Wellbeing	art *and wellness*, *makes love go around* *spiritual*, *rare*, *sublime* event people *feel more relaxed* slow art day *with mindfulness and meditation*

Table 5
Linguistic features characterising the dimensions of the SAD blog.

Table 6 shows the general statistics of the tagged dimensions, which were calculated using the Statistics Tab on the UAM Corpus Tool.

DIMENSIONS	N.	PERCENTAGE
Education	256	20.50%
Inclusiveness	391	31.31%
Innovation	163	13.05%
Time	212	16.97%
Value of Art	45	3.60%
Wellbeing	182	14.57%
TOTAL UNITS	1249	100%

Table 6
Relative frequencies of the semantic dimensions tagged in the SAD blog corpus.

Table 6 also provides details on the total number of segments ("Total Units" and "N") that were tagged in the corpus, as well as the total number of

segments tagged for each dimension. It also shows the relative frequency of each of the dimensions in relation to the total number of tags in the corpus. As can be seen, Value of Art (3.60%) is the dimension that is mentioned the least, while Inclusiveness is the one mentioned the most, with 391 segments tagged and a relative frequency of 31.31%.

The graph in Figure 1 highlights the diachronic change in the relative frequency of each semantic dimension in its reported year.
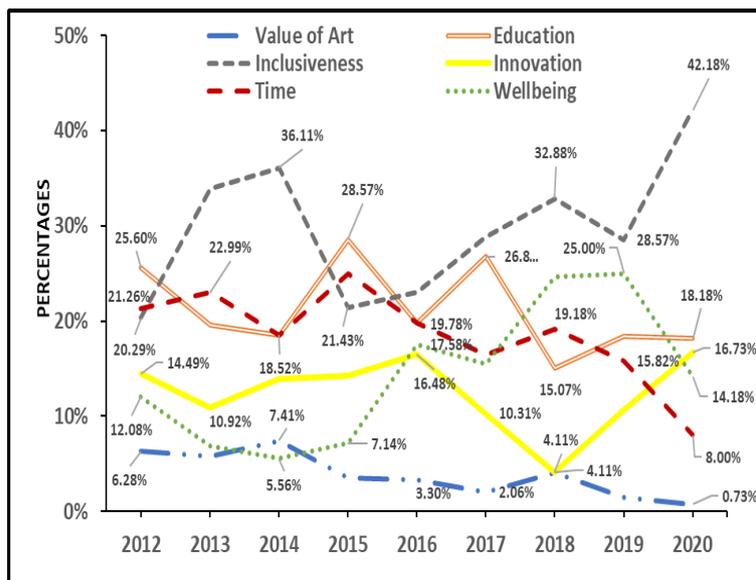

Figure 1
Diachronic trend of dimensions in the SAD Blog from 2012 to 2020.

The Value of Art dimension (related to the field of money, ticket prices, volunteers etc.) is rarely mentioned in the SAD blog, thereby representing around 4% of the semantic dimensions throughout all the years taken into consideration, showing a slight decrease towards 2020. This might be due to the fact that it relies on volunteers, and that the event does not entail costs nor an explicitly stated price of hypothetical museum membership that might be intimidating to new participants. The dimensions of Time (related to taking time to relax, time spent during the visit, etc.) and Education (linked to concepts of empowerment and learning), despite showing different peaks over the years, seem to be less frequent in 2020, with Time occurring only 8% and Education in 18% of the dimensions. On the other hand, the dimension of Wellbeing (related to the positive effects that SAD has on its participants) has been slowly increasing since 2012 reaching a peak in 2019, which is followed by a sudden drop in 2020 (representing 14.18% of the dimensions mentioned the posts). Innovation (linked to elements of uniqueness and originality) and Inclusiveness (with reference to co-working, accessibility, etc.), emerge as the most frequent dimensions occurring in the blog over the years. Reference to Innovation increased by 2% from 2012 to

2020 in the SAD blog, while Inclusiveness is the dimension mentioned the most, representing 20% of the dimensions in 2012 and increasing to around 42% in 2020. This might be because the participants' approach towards museums might have changed over the years, suggesting that museums are not only seen as places of education and culture but also of entertainment and relaxation.

4.2. Attitude in the SAD blog

In the following subsections, I will explore in further detail how appraisal features reinforce the purpose of each dimension. However, the dimension of Value of Art will not be analyzed in detail, as there is almost no evaluative language to boost this non-profit and volunteer-based organization.

4.2.1. Attitude in Education

With regards to Education, Table 7 and Table 8 provide us with a detailed overview of the word forms that have been used to evaluate education in the SAD blog. It is worth pointing out that, for both categories of Appreciation and Affect, all collocates carry connotations.

COMPOSITION	*diverse*, *wide* audience *complex*, *unmediated* conversations *clear*, *compelling*, *creative*, *interesting* design *rich*, *smallest* details *collaborative* drawing *deeper*, *descriptive*, *direct* engagement *brilliant*, *challenging*, *easy-to-follow*, *energized*, *exciting*, *hard*, *global*, *immersive*, *innovative*, *international*, *important*, *lively*, *meditative*, *more powerful*, *poetic*, *quiet*, *self-organized*, *spirited*, *well-planned*, *worldwide* event *contemplative*, *intense*, *multi-sensor*, *simple*, *slow digital* experience *detailed*, *great*, *good* piece of art, images *dramatically higher*, *average* time *immersive*, *interactive* tool *reflective*, *slow* walking tours
REACTION	*amazing*, *exciting*, *fantastic*, *great*, *incredible*, *meaningful*, *soul-touching*, *sublime*, *successful*, *unique*, *very mindful and peaceful*, *very well unexpected and surprising*, *wonderful* experience, (art) event, webinar *positive*, *terrific* feedback *unique and easily recognizable*, *unique and contemplative* image, approach, way of experiencing art *exhilarating*, *interesting* to learn, discuss
SOCIAL VALUATION	*effective* approach *eye-opening* discussion resources *are easily accessible* *community-oriented*, *important* opportunity *inspiring* art, reflections; look at art in a *new* way; *new* art, breath of freshness, education-based movement, perspective *insightful*, *mindful*, *rewarding*, *thought-provoking* event, exercise, experience

Table 7
Collocates of Appreciation in Education.

With regard to Appreciation (Table 7), we can classify further semantic fields that are used to describe the activities linked to education and learning. First, the level of complexity of the SAD activities is highlighted through the presence of descriptive terms such as *engaging, contemplative*, *challenging*, and *simple*. Second, there is a nuance of collaboration, as visitors learn about art through *collaborative drawing*, *direct engagement*, and *engagement activities*. SAD activities seem to suggest a form of experiential learning, promoting a new way of gaining knowledge, through principles of inclusiveness, community building and shared knowledge, achieved through *complex* or *unmediated* conversations between visitors, artists and curators. Third, wellness seems to fall under the realm of Composition with the description of *energized*, *immersive*, *meditative*, and *spirited* activities that are again a new and innovative way of learning. Moving onto the subcategory of Reaction, the use of positive adjectives emerges related to the experience of learning through a new and innovative approach to art (i.e. *it was amazing to learn/discuss about*). Within the specific aspect of learning, we find the semantic fields of awe (*amazing*, *incredible*, *sublime*), newness (*unexpected*, *surprising*) and wellbeing (*mindful*, *peaceful*). The adjectives from Social Valuation are related to empowerment (e.g. *gives more confidence*), wellness (e.g. *meditative*, *mindful*), newness (e.g. *eye-opening*, *new*, *thought-provoking*) and to elements of accessibility (e.g., *accessible*).

Examples (13) and (14) below provide some instances of Appreciation in the context of Education.

(13) The discussions after each exercise and at the end (we took two hours) were very *inspiring*. [SAD-Blog/17Apr2017]
(14) One participant noted it was "*meaningful* to exchange our drawing with a partner, interpret each other's, then explain our own". [SAD-Blog/29Apr2019]

Allowing visitors to not only gain new skills, but also leave the exhibition with positive feelings and a high level of self-confidence, the SAD proves to be valuable and useful from an educational perspective. Education seems to be intertwined with the dimensions of wellbeing, innovation, and inclusiveness: while learning, visitors acquire the skills of independence and empowerment, as well as gaining a sense of wellbeing and relaxation.

This sense of wellbeing and relaxation can also be seen in the results conveyed in Table 8, which shows in detail the use of Attitude in Education, and in particular, the effects and feelings that learning has on visitors during the SAD.

ATTITUDE IN EDUCATION	
Happiness	*enjoy*, *joy*, *love*
Inclination	participants/we *actively*, *deeper*, *deeply*, *slowly* engage with
Satisfaction	*delighted*, *inspired*, *pleased*, *surprised*

Security	*Empowered*

Table 8
Expressions of Affect in Education.

Table 8 does not display the nodes of the collocates as they mostly coincide with the experiencer (e.g., *we are delighted with*, *visitors enjoy taking time*, *we feel empowered by…*). Moreover, as all the adjectives and adverbs carry a positive connotation, I named the subcategories leaving their positive type of classification (Figure 1), hence Happiness, Inclination, Satisfaction, and Security. We can see that Happiness and Satisfaction share the sense of wellbeing and pleasure from learning. Security, which is related to the sense of confidence and trust that a person has towards something, provides further support to the findings already discussed in the social evaluation of education, namely that SAD activities leave the visitor with a sense of empowerment (example 15).

(15) I feel *relaxed* and *empowered* with a new tool – how 'to be' with art. [SAD-Blog/9Oct2019]

Concerning Inclination, adverbs such as *deeply*, *slowly* and *actively*, refer to the way visitors approach the activities that are proposed for the event. I would like to pay particular attention to the adverb *slowly*, which would normally be linked to notions of time, and that in this case is actually used as a synonym of 'with detail', 'closely', or 'attentively'.

When learning about art during SAD, visitors seem to create a deep connection to what they are learning, they become active viewers, totally and actively engaging with the work of art they have in front of them.

4.2.2. Attitude in Inclusiveness

Table 9 below shows the linguistic features used to enhance inclusiveness in the SAD blog.

COMPOSITION	*accessible*, *compelling*, *poetic* words
	easy-to-follow instructions
	global, *local*, *multi-sensory* event, experience
	important for everyone
	simple exercise
	wide audience
REACTION	*a universal* experience
	it *was delightful*, *great*, *reaffirming* to …
	invigorating, *wonderful* slow art day
	very well received
SOCIAL VALUATION	*accessible*, *community-oriented*, *encouraging*, *informative*, *new and varied*, *valuable*, *worldwide shared* experience

Table 9
Linguistic features of Appreciation in Inclusiveness.

Looking closely at Composition, it emerges that inclusiveness is conveyed mainly through two aspects of accessibility: I have labelled the first 'physical accessibility', and the second 'educational accessibility' (examples 16-17). 'Physical accessibility', is mainly related to the reachability of the event, namely its audience (how widespread it is, how many people it includes, nationalities, etc.); its dimension (i.e., whether it is large, small, or virtual), and how important and reachable it is (i.e. *accessible*, *global*, *local*, or *virtual*). Physical accessibility is also promoted in an implicit way through periphrases such as "*multisensory* experience at home", referring to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak and the new solutions adopted by museums. In terms of 'educational accessibility', activities organized during the SAD are *accessible*, *easy to follow*, and *simple* so that anyone can take part in them. The simplicity of the activities is also indicated in the absence of complicated and difficult jargon, in favor of simple language, which suggests an inclusive approach that takes into account all kinds of readers.

(16) I guarantee it will put you in a good mood and show you some of the magic of this *global/local* Slow Art Day phenomenon. [SAD-Blog/8Apr2019]
(17) We recommend that other Slow Art hosts consider this *simple* but powerful memory drawing exercise. [SAD-Blog/25Nov2020]

In terms of Reaction, the response to the event with respect to inclusiveness is again positive. Positive reactions emerge concerning community-building activities, such as group discussions with other visitors, artists, and museum curators (i.e. *it is great to have artists and spectators communicating*; *it was well-received across social media...*; *It was delightful to see that participants engaged...*). In the SAD blog, inclusiveness also emerges indirectly (hence not through the description of the accessibility of the event), by using questions which are directly addressed to the reader (*Was the experience of*

the Slow art day invigorating?), or by using the imperative so that readers can follow instructions and be directly involved with the activity (*take your time*; *take a deep breath before…*), increasing the level of engagement of the visitors/readers (Ravelli 2006, p 70).

Social Valuation focuses mainly on the usefulness of the SAD in terms of community building, which justifies the presence of modifiers such as *accessible*, *community-oriented*, and *encouraging*. The global dimension of the SAD also helps to shape the importance of the event and to make it "*valuable for a wide audience*" as well as emphasizing the sense of belonging and the feeling of "*encouraging to be part of a community*".

Table 10 below shows the linguistic items for each of the subcategories of Affect.

AFFECT IN INCLUSIVENESS	
Happiness	*excited, fun, hugged each other, joy, loved*
Inclination	*mindfully, openly, quickly, slowly*
Satisfaction	*enriched, grateful, impressed, inspired*
Security	*active, feel like a part of slow art day beyond their immediate …*

Table 10
Linguistic features of Affect in Inclusiveness.

Happiness and Satisfaction (example 18) include positive feelings deriving from learning through discussion groups and community-building activities, such as the sense of excitement (e.g. *excited*, *fun*, and *joy*) and that of pleasure (*grateful*, *impressed*). The sense of enrichment and inspiration obtained from activities of inclusiveness are linked to the sense of empowerment the education and sharing provide for the SAD participants.

(18) I am *extremely grateful* for the family-friendly drawing program – my kids benefited more than I did! [SAD-Blog/25Jan2020]

The subcategory of Security deals with elements of calm and trust, which assess the level of confidence that people experience in certain situations. In this case, participants are described as *active co-creators*, who do *not feel intimidated* by taking part in activities, and feeling *included*, *relaxed*, and *part of a community*, while *naturally* engaging with new activities (examples 19-20).

(19) That connection helped them feel *a part of* Slow Art Day beyond their immediate circle, appreciating the event as part of a universal experience overall. [SAD-Blog/10May2012]
(20) Slow Art Day and All Stars project are working together to help more people how to learn and love art – how to walk in a museum and *not feel intimidated*, to approach art as if we were *all included* because we are. [SAD-

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Blog/13Jan2017]

This confirms, once more, the feeling of empowerment that visitors have when engaging in discussion activities where their opinion is considered valuable and important in co-creating meaning and interpretation of a piece of art.

4.2.3. Attitude in Innovation

Table 11 provides a general overview of the lexicon adopted in the dimension of Innovation.

The subcategory of Composition contains elements related to the digital world, such as *asynchronous*, *online* and *social-media-based* (example 21). Such elements were more frequent in 2020, with the sudden increase of online activities due to the pandemic, which challenged museums to organize the SAD event virtually, with the support of digital platforms and social media.

Concerning Reaction (example 22), most evaluations are related to how the SAD strikes and has an impact on visitors. Positive adjectives (*meaningful*, *well-received*, *wonderful*) not only refer to the innovative idea of SAD activities, in other words to the originality of dedicating time to connecting with a piece of art and discussing ideas with other participants, but also refer to the impact and reaction of the use of innovative social-media and technological platforms in the age of Covid-19 (as in *"beautiful transition to virtual platforms"*).

COMPOSITION	*asynchronous*, *online*, *social-media-based* event *complex*, *interesting*, *unmediated* conversations *creative innovative* process, programs, ways, works *different*, *meditative* approach looking in a *different* way *diverse* perspectives *multi-sensory* activities, experience doing something *radical*
REACTION	*amazing*, *creative*, *great*, *immersive*, *meaningful*, *unexpected and surprising*, *powerful*, *unique*, *well-received*, *wonderful* idea, event *beautiful* transition to virtual platforms *different*, *fascinating*, *innovative*, *involved and thoughtful* activities a *great privilege* to have this experience
SOCIAL VALUATION	*accessible*, *different*, *exciting*, *good*, *immersive*, *important*, *interesting*, *new*, *powerful*, *rare*, *special*, *thought-provoking*, *truly inspiring* event, opportunity *slow potential* as physical interactions

Table 11
Linguistic features of Appreciation in Innovation.

The originality of the event also emerges in its Social Valuation, where innovative activities are targeted as *an opportunity*, or as *powerful* and *inspiring* occasions to learn and to connect with art (example 23). Again, the different elements are intertwined with one another: innovation is linked to learning that triggers the development of useful skills lead to independence of thought and empowerment.

(21) A number of organizations is experimenting with *different* formats, including *online* sessions, *asynchronous* techniques, and *social-media-based* approaches. [SAD-Blog/4Apr2020]
(22) "The event was *wonderful*, *thought-provoking* and *well-received*." [SAD-Blog/7Apr2019]
(23) To look slowly and to engage oneself with art is a *truly inspiring* experience. [SAD-Blog/4May2017]

Table 12 displays a close-up of the linguistic features expressing Affect.

AFFECT IN INNOVATION	
Happiness	*joy, love, very excited*
Inclination	*differently, powerfully, strongly*
Satisfaction	*attentive, delighted, electrified, gratified, inspired, surprised*
Security	*without being compelled*

Table 12
Linguistic features of Affect in Innovation.

In line with previous results, as visitors' feelings and reactions are all positive, the subcategories have been named according to their positive type (Happiness, Satisfaction, Security, and Inclination).
Examples (24) and (25) provide two instances of Affect in the context of Innovation.

(24) But afterwards, many of us shared how quickly the 10 minutes passed and *how surprised* we were by what we noticed, especially with the pieces weren't attracted to. [SAD-Blog/22Apr2019]
(25) At Slow Art Day HQ, we are *excited* to see the Museum build *new* programs based on the success of its Slow Art Day initiative. [SAD-Blog/9Dec2020]

Visitors' sense of cheerfulness while embracing something new and different is visible in the positive feelings of love and joy belonging to the subcategory of Happiness.
In particular, the subcategory of Satisfaction seems to gather experiencers' feelings of awe related to the innovative and creative events of the SAD, such as *delighted*, and *electrified*, *inspired*, *gratified*, and *surprised*. These indicate the feeling of excitement that SAD visitors have when facing new activities. Elements of newness are also visible in the subcategory of

Inclination where the adverb *differently* refers to the new approach to art that visitors have towards art, allowing them to think outside the box.

4.2.4. Attitude in Time

Examining how Time is appreciated in the SAD blog (Table 13) the connotations of Composition in relation to time are not always fully positive. Adjectives *not easy*, *hard* and *too long* refer to the challenge of looking at a piece of art for more than five minutes, which appears to be a difficult skill to learn in the age of multitasking (example 26).

Concerning the impact that spending time before a piece of art has on visitors, the reaction is extremely positive (*great*, *interesting*, *surprising*, *wonderful*, etc.) (example 27). Spending time on a piece of art is connected to elements of innovation and learning: by looking at and dedicating time to something, one discovers more details while experimenting something new (i.e. "*it is surprising what you can see and learn*"). This is also true in the Social Valuation of time, where one of the most frequent adjectives is *new* (example 28). Again, when dedicating time to looking at art, one sees *new*, *important* details, as well as learning more about oneself (*insightful*). Therefore, the value of education is linked to that of time, where time is not only seen as the part of existence that is measured in seconds, minutes and hours, but it also becomes a useful and *important* skill in the age of multitasking, which can be acquired through exercise.

COMPOSITION	the average time spent on their website was *dramatically higher* than … *hard*, *not easy* looking at … *slow and long* day discussions seem *too long*
REACTION	we had *great* time it was *interesting* to be spending time looking at … taking my time with art was a *positive and rewarding* experience making time for *slower digital experience* some works of art seem to inherently invite a *slower, more involved* viewing experience *surprising* nature of slow time *wonderful* to take time to absorb and chat about
SOCIAL VALUATION	it is *great* to be spending time looking at … slow looking *brought new aspects* of … we think this *simple* concept is *important* *wonderful and insightful* time

Table 13
Linguistic features of Appreciation in Time.

(26) The recommended 10 minutes of slow looking without discussion seem *too long*. [SAD-Blog/10May2014]

(27) "*Wonderful* and *insightful* time. It opens up the art world to spend time with others discussing the works. [SAD-Blog/18Jun2019]

(28) (…) how the experience of slow looking brought *new* aspects to the surface that only emerged over time. [SAD-Blog/24Jun2019]

AFFECT IN TIME	
Happiness	*enjoyed*, *loved*
Inclination	*mindfully*, *really*
Satisfaction	*always pleased*, *amazed*, *slowly*
Security	-

Table 14
Linguistic features of Affect in Time.

Happiness (Table 14) includes aspects of cheer and affection, and in particular the positive feelings of enjoyment of the experiencer when engaging with art at length. This also emerges in the positive feelings of the sense of pleasure (*pleased*, *amazed*), which again links time and education (example 29).

Attitude of interest is also assessed by the adverb *slowly*, which not only carries its connotation of time, but it is also used as a synonym of 'attentively' (e.g., "*take time to slowly look at art*"). It seems that time intrinsically carries a meaning of precision and education: the more time one spends looking at something, the more one sees and learns. Regarding Inclination, adverbs such as *mindfully* and *really* again refer to the way visitors approach art while slowing down, as shown in examples (30) and (31).

(29) I'm *amazed* at what I've seen in twenty minutes. [SAD-Blog/13Jan2013]

(30) Taking time to *really* look at this seemingly simple painting, our visitors were surprised at the details they were able to pick out and discuss. [SAD-Blog/4May2017]

(31) (…) and this year we are shifting to unique virtual techniques to help us all *mindfully* slow down. [SAD-Blog/4Apr2020]

Really is connected to the dimension of education, of learning and of seeing beyond the piece of work, while *mindfully* is connected to the semantic dimension of Wellbeing. Slowing down not only becomes a way of taking time to learn and to try something different but is also related to a positive feeling of relaxation and mindfulness.

4.2.5. Attitude in Wellbeing

Composition provides insight into how Wellbeing is evaluated in terms of

Appreciation with the innovative activities connected to Wellbeing that were organized during the SAD (Table 15).

COMPOSITION	*contemplative*, *decelerated*, *rich* learning experience *immersive*, *mindful* activities, drawing, events, exercises, programs *quiet*, *meaningful* art event *reflective* dialogue
REACTION	*a heck of a lot of fun* *fabulous*, *fantastic*, *great*, *immersive*, *mindful*, *multidimensional*, *new*, *really nice*, *peaceful*, *soul-touching*, *sublime*, *wonderful* event, experience *relaxed heightened* emotions
SOCIAL VALUATION	*emotional and intellectual*, *full*, *helpful*, *joyful*, *meditative*, *mindful*, *powerful and simple*, *relaxing*, *rewarding*, *spiritual*, *truly inspiring* (way to) experience (art)

Table 15
Linguistic features of Appreciation in Wellbeing.

In fact, for the SAD event some museums organized physical activities to help visitors slow down, relax, and better engage with the work of art. Activities include yoga sessions, *mindful breathing*, or sitting in front of *rich landscapes* in a *quiet* space to connect with nature or with an *immersive* work of art. The adjectives used to describe such activities are connected to the semantic sphere of peace and calm (e.g., *calm*, *mindful*, and *still*) which are essential characteristics to find inner wellbeing and relaxation (example 32).

The impact related to such activities shows that reactions include extremely positive adjectives to assess the wellbeing activities (*great*, *mindful*, *sublime*, or *wonderful*). The adjective *new* reinforces the idea that innovation and wellbeing are intertwined, where certain activities are seen as innovative, as exemplified in (33).

With Social Valuation, the positive effects and social worthiness of such activities are highlighted again by the positive elements, such as *emotional, intellectual*, or *powerful*.

The social worthiness of wellbeing activities is not only found in the positive physical effects they leave (e.g. *relaxing*, *spiritual*) (example 34), but it also emerges in the sense of empowerment that certain relaxation techniques leave visitors, creating a *mindful* and *rewarding* experience.

(32) The easy-to-follow instructions involved *mindful* breathing, slow-looking (…). [SAD-Blog/8July2020]
(33) "*Soul-touching* and *relaxing*, with a *new* breath of freshness." [SAD-Blog/7Oct2020]
(34) … some participants found it a *spiritual* experience. [SAD-Blog/13Apr2016]

Concerning Affect (Table 16), the feelings related to wellbeing are again extremely positive and related to happiness and joy.

AFFECT IN WELLBEING	
Happiness	*awe and joy*, *excited*, *happy*, *love*
Inclination	*mindfully*, *really*
Satisfaction	*centered*, *entranced*, *gratified*, *leisurely*, *lightened and uplifted*, *moved*, *peaceful*
Security	*at peace*, *calm*, *comfortable*, *ease*, *empowered more relaxed*

Table 16
Linguistic features of Affect in Wellbeing.

Within the subcategory of Satisfaction, pleasure is enhanced by positive feelings related again to peace and relaxation, such as *entranced*, *lightened*, and *uplifted*. Security gathers elements of tranquility and quietness that are reinforced by visitors' feelings of comfort (e.g., *at peace*, *calm*, *comfortable*, or *ease*). Such feelings indicate a sense of ease that visitors have when engaging with any of the SAD activities, once more linking education with wellbeing.

5. Conclusions

Within the specific context of Slow Art Day, the adjective *slow*, used to define a special event, already carries new meanings other than that of time. This is in line with how Petrini's movement has attributed new meanings to *slow,* which have been then reborrowed by English, especially in the context of slow movements (Nocella, Bondi Submitted). In fact, with *Slow Art Day slow* does not only refer to issues related to time, but it implicitly carries within it the meaning of most of the semantic dimensions that were identified when analysing the related corpora. In this context *slow* means dedicating time to *really* look at art (Time and Education), to learn something new (Education and Innovation), to meet people, to share thoughts (Inclusiveness), to relax, and to connect with one's inner self and with the piece of art (Wellbeing). Studying the promotion of the event revealed the use of positive language within each of these five semantic dimensions that were initially identified as core aspects of the representation of the event.

Attitude analysis of the evaluative language adopted in the Slow Art Day blog revealed that Appreciation is the most represented subcategory. Additionally, evaluative language tagged under the subcategory of Composition is used either to reinforce the meaning within each semantic dimension of the SAD event, or to emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the event. Reaction is used similarly throughout all dimensions, underscoring

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the positive effects of the SAD on participants. As for Social Valuation, evaluative language is used to emphasize the worthiness (i.e. *new*, *insightful*, and *useful*) of each dimension as well as highlighting their interconnection. Concerning Affect, outcomes reveal that evaluative language is used similarly throughout all the dimensions, confirming the sense of happiness and satisfaction that visitors experience after a SAD activity. Results are in line with how blogs have become an important space for self-promotion and for the creation of group identity (Davies, Merchant 2007; Luzón 2012; Myers 2010), which is why the analysis of the Slow Art Day official blog is fundamental to trace elements of self-promotion and community-building.

Further research on this topic could be carried out by investigating people's perceptions and the importance of slowness and of slowing down in other contexts such as the effects of the pandemic outbreak, looking at how technology has changed our relationship with slowness and with the various slow movements. In addition, the analysis of the SAD Blog could be expanded by carrying out a multimodal analysis of its webpages to explore whether and if so, images help convey the idea of slowness. Further lines of investigation could be also explored in terms of slow discourse, looking into the introduction of other/new elements in language related to slowness and that may support the need of social deceleration (Rosa 2003).

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ON THE VERGE BETWEEN ANCIENT AND MODERN TIMES
A linguistic analysis of Urban Exploration practices[1]

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Abstract – Recently the fascination with the aesthetics of abandoned places has stepped into the limelight as a new form of tourism known as *Urbex* or *Urban Exploration*, which involves discovering abandoned places and reporting the exploration with documentary evidence on specialized websites and blogs. This paper aims to investigate online discourse on Urbex by analyzing how urban exploration is talked about in two different online spaces, i.e., interest-based communities where discussion about the activity of visiting abandoned places among members is fostered and encouraged (*Reddit*), and more public, monologic spaces, such as blogs and websites, where longer texts are produced with a more descriptive/commercial purpose. To reach this goal, a comparative analysis of keywords and selected key terms was carried out on two ad-hoc corpora, i.e., the *Urban Website Corpus* (UW-Corpus) and the *Urban Reddit Corpus* (UR-Corpus). Results show that the linguistic choices of urban explorers highlight the existence of tension between the core tenets and ethical principles of urban exploration - avoiding disclosure of exact location, focusing on sites disregarded by preservationists, awareness of legal repercussions for trespassing - and a shift towards a more mainstream, regulated type of activity. In the UR-Corpus, distinctive language forms suggest that Urbex aficionados constitute a discourse community.

Keywords: corpus linguistics; online tourism discourse; Reddit; urban exploration.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the processes of globalization have deeply influenced the ways in which people organize their leisure time and how they approach leisure traveling, or tourism. To this extent, the United Nations World

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[1] The research for this article has been carried out jointly by the three authors. Silvia Cavalieri authored sections 4, 5, 6.2 (from after example 20 to the end), 7; Sara Corrizzato authored sections 1, 3, 6.1; Valeria Franceschi authored sections 2 and 6.2 (from the beginning to example 20).

Tourism Organization (UNWTO) clarifies that internationally there were just 25 million tourist arrivals in 1950. 68 years later, in 2018, the number of tourist arrivals had increased to 1.4 billion per year, confirming that the tourist industry, as well as tourists themselves, have become one of the main pillars of contemporary society. Despite the considerable decrease in tourist flow during the Covid-19 pandemic, global international tourist arrivals more than doubled (+130%) in January 2022 compared to 2021, proving tourism practices have once again become central to people's life and consolidating the subcategories of tourism that have emerged in the recent past.

Therefore, trying to define who tourists are and categorizing them according to pre-established classification parameters seems an almost impossible task, as people travel for a wide range of different needs and reasons. If an interested person relies on Google for a rough overview of how many types of tourists exist, they can immediately realize how the web offers numerous categorizations based on different analytical frameworks, which take into account diverse aspects, such as the places tourists want to visit, the reasons why they take a break from their every-day life, how much they want to become familiar with the target culture or how much they want to spend.

This reflection also applies to the academic context, as different hypotheses have been put forward depending on the discipline and the analytical perspectives adopted. In fact, the first eye-opening categorizations given by some of the pioneers of this field of study (Cohen 1979; Dann 1996; Lennon, Foley 2000; Plog 1973; Rojek, Urry 1997; Urry 2002) were later followed by numerous studies that implemented the theories and added new research perspectives.

Thus, new definitions have been added to the most common categories, such as experiential/experimental tourism, allocentric/psychocentric tourism or dark tourism, trying to identify other specific forms of tourism. Some of the most popular forms are ecotourism (Fleischer 2010), gastronomy and wine tourism (e.g. Madeira *et al.* 2019), shopping tourism (UNWTO Report 2014), sex tourism (Oppermann 1999), sport tourism (Gammon, Robinson 2003), rural tourism (Lopez-Sanz *et al.* 2021) and health/medical tourism (Hall 2011). As the labels suggest, each option involves a different type of tourist, whose choices depend on the needs and desires they want to fulfill by choosing "an alternative solution to the 'undesired' type of tourism, that is, 'the mass tourism'" (Triarchi, Karamanis 2017, p. 43).

The multifaceted identity of tourism is reflected in the language used in the industry: indeed, Chiwanga (2014, p. 148) states that "tourism as language has got a discourse of its own. Its vocabulary, jargon, registers, structure, grammar, stylistics, semantics, expressions and neologisms are exceptional". Maci (2020, p. 10) highlights the "multi-dimensional nature of the language of tourism", which emerges preeminently in lexical choices and

in different generic forms pertaining to both specialized – between specialists – and non-specialized – aimed at laypeople – communication. In addition to professionally-produced content, in the last few years interest has extended to tourist-generated content, which may contribute to shaping the destination's image and, as a result, to influencing destination choices and travel behaviors (e.g. Peralta 2019; Mak 2017).

Studies on tourism discourse, especially in its non-specialized, promotional functions, have suggested that lexical and syntactic choices can infuse texts with perlocutionary force in order to promote target destinations: the semantic evolution of general words, the use of metaphors and similes, language crossing, ego-targeting, superlatives, evaluative adjectives, modal verbs to encourage actions and behaviors are just some of the features that characterize tourism discourse (e.g. Chiwanga 2014; Maci 2020, p. 16-25; see also Cacchiani 2014; Jaworski *et al.* 2003; Pierini 2009). In addition, lexical choices may be ascribed to the traditional perspectives of tourism as theorized in Dann's 1996 landmark study: the authenticity perspective, which pertains to the desire for authentic and typical experiences; the strangerhood perspective, which represents a search for strangeness and novelty; the play perspective, which sees tourism experiences as games and spectacles; the conflict perspective, based on an interest in locations where wealth and power distribution is unbalanced.

Established research on the language of tourism may be applied to the study of texts produced within the various sub-categories of tourism in order to investigate the specificities of their language and how they fit within broader tourism discourse. In this paper, the recent popular phenomenon of Urban Exploration, or *Urbex*, is going to be investigated from a linguistic perspective and, more particularly, by looking at promotional and user-generated content about urbex activities and destinations.

2. Urban Exploration

Ascribed to unconventional forms of tourism, also defined by Klausen (2017) as "an alternative form of organized action" (372) or "ruin tourism" (Wadbled 2020, p. 1), Urban Exploration "revolves around locating, documenting, and physically exploring (temporarily) abandoned and derelict (urban) spaces" (Klausen 2017, p. 372), "discovering, infiltrating […] little-seen parts of the built environment" (Fassi 2010, p. 146). Such places may be described as "TOADS (Temporary, Obsolete, Abandoned and Derelict Spaces)" (Paiva 2008, p. 9).

The term itself is attributed to urban explorer Ninjalicious, who founded the fanzine *Infiltration: The Zine About Going Places You're Not Supposed to Go*[3] in 1996. Over time, this practice has grown, attracting aficionados from all over the world, who share their experiences on online fora, blogs and websites, and who have created archives of abandoned places that map and describe abandoned locations (Mott, Roberts 2014, p. 230). This fascination with the aesthetics of abandoned places is applied to a wide range of locations:

> urban explorers recreationally trespass into derelict industrial sites, closed mental hospitals, abandoned military installations, sewer and drain networks, transportation and utility tunnels, shuttered businesses, foreclosed estates, mines, construction sites, cranes, bridges and bunkers, among other places. (Garrett 2014, p. 1)

Among the places not mentioned in the quote above we can also include castles, theaters, hotels, theme parks, swimming pools, train stations and malls. The presence of different types of locations also depends on the different geographical areas where the exploration takes place. For example, Russia and Eastern Europe are rich in abandoned locations dating back to the Soviet and Cold War eras, whereas castles may be more frequently found in France, alongside abandoned metro stations and sewers that are popular with explorers in bigger metropolitan areas. In Germany, places tied to the Third Reich may be the object of Urban Exploration (Devirieux 2016).

For its very nature, Urban Exploration does not develop through its explorers seeking permission to visit the sites, as in most of the cases the places are not part of conventional tourist tours, but they are private or public buildings abandoned for a (not so) long period. In other less common situations, sites can be visited by buying tickets, but such cases only refer to specific popular places, for instance the French catacombs, several Italian Roman ruins or some English or American tours of haunted buildings related to Halloween.

Offering a closer look at this phenomenon, urban explorers are particularly interested in past events to which ruined or abandoned sites bear witness and they are also guided from a desire for aesthetic contemplation, as they are attracted by the state of ruin of where they are. Mental asylums, metro stations, prisons, half-built shopping centres, bunkers or private houses are visited because they bear the marks of degradation (Klausen 2017). This behind-the-scene world (Ninjalicious 2005) allows the community of explorers and photographers to testify and spread the physical condition of the place, promoting a twofold reflection: on the one hand, ruins appear as

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[3] http://www.infiltration.org (17.5.2022).

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ancient witnesses of the past, which cannot come back anymore; on the other hand, they can symbolize the influence of the past within the contemporary landscape (Massey 2021). Explorers look for "sites of haunted memory, seeking interaction with the ghosts of lives lived" (Garrett 2011, p. 1049).

As anticipated in the introductory paragraphs, urban exploration is positioned outside the beaten path of mainstream tourism, sometimes seen as a degraded version of the romantic fascination for ruins (i.e., ruin porn) or ascribed to the phenomenon of dark tourism (Morisson 2021, p. 93). As Garrett posits, the initial push "to go into interstitial urban spaces is to observe (and often photograph) unimpeded material decay" (2014, p. 5), but he states that more than that it is the value of the experience that drives explorers, "unregulated by sensory filters and mediating social conditioning" (2014, p. 6).

The experience of Urban Exploration is indeed connected to both time and place: this practice "gives agency to places with an appreciation for the life of an architectural feature or system that continues after abandonment, with an acknowledgement that, though the capitalist use-life of all places will inevitably end, places do not 'die'" (Garrett 2011, p. 1050).

The community of explorers appears to discourage discourse popularization of abandoned locations with the mainstream public to avoid drawing attention to these places, as access to them may become increasingly difficult or impossible due to action on the part of local authorities (Garrett 2014, p. 3). While some websites dedicated to Urban Exploration do provide detailed descriptions of where to find the locations described, if not the precise coordinates, others avoid doing so. This may be due to the reasons detailed above, but also to ensure "the safety of visitors, prevent destruction and acts of vandalism" (Jasiūnas *et al.* 2013, p. 65).

The visual aspect of Urban Exploration is also crucial to the experience and to the dissemination of the experience within and outside the community. Both explorers and professional photographers dedicate their shots to these *res derelictae*, displaying the downfall of such locations: "[i]n prose and photography, they document scenes of ruin and decay ignored by preservationists, tourists, municipal governments, historians, and everyday city" (Fassi 2010, p. 145). Pictures also act as proof of the existence of the locations described and of the exploration, which may be perceived as an exciting, when not dangerous, adventure (Morisson 2021, p. 94).

Although Garrett (2014) calls urban explorers "recreational trespassers", and other scholars highlight the illegal nature of Urban Exploration, Urbex has by now drawn the interest of tour guides and operators, who have started offering Urban Exploration tours among their services. Other popular destinations for aficionados of abandoned places offer

licensed tours, such as Pripyat and Chernobyl in Ukraine,[4] or the *Manicomio di Volterra* (Volterra psychiatric hospital) in Italy.[5] Interest for abandoned places has indeed shifted beyond the original community and has drawn the interest of the wider public, who may recognize the potential that certain locations have "to become official sites for historic, cognitive, extreme or some other type of tourism" (Jasiūnas *et al.* 2013, p. 65). Photo books and gallery exhibitions dedicated to this phenomenon have also been produced (Klausen 2017, p. 373), further highlighting the development of an alternative, more mainstream conceptualization of urbex.

Indeed, as Fassi (2010, p. 145) suggests, urban explorers "face a paradox familiar to those who struggle to represent the invisible or unspeakable; while they engage in a form of cultural resistance by encouraging awareness of defamed industrial ruins, they also risk transforming these ruins into artistic commodities".

Urban Exploration has been looked at by scholars from multiple perspectives and across different disciplines, including but not limited to geography studies (e.g. Garrett 2010, 2011, 2014; Mott, Roberts 2014; Jasiūnas *et al.* 2013) and anthropology (e.g. Martínez, Laviolette 2016). This phenomenon is however understudied from a linguistic perspective, with the discourse of urban explorers and the budding interest for private or group urbex tours still largely unexplored.

3. Aims of the study

This paper aims to add to the existing literature on tourism by investigating online discourse on Urban Exploration. As Urban Exploration is still a niche type of tourism and its discourse still largely takes place within the explorers' community, a choice was made to explore how Urban Exploration is talked about in two different online spaces, that is, interest-based communities where discussion among members is fostered and encouraged, and more public, monologic spaces, such as blogs and websites, where longer texts are produced for an imagined community that is more often silent.

Comparison between these two types of data has the purpose of showing how discourse on Urban Exploration available from online public spaces (where texts have a more descriptive purpose and may also have a commercial purpose, e.g., selling photographs, offering guided tours) differs from discourse characterizing private online spaces, where anonymous users share and discuss locations and topics pertaining to the activity of visiting

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[4] https://www.chernobyl-tour.com/ (20.5.2022).
[5] https://manicomiodivolterra.it/visite-al-manicomio-di-volterra/ (20.5.2022).

abandoned places. This investigation will be carried out through a comparative analysis of selected keywords.

4. Data collection

To achieve the objectives illustrated above, two corpora were collected: the *Urbex Websites Corpus* (UW-Corpus) and the *Urbex Reddit Corpus* (UR-Corpus).

The *Urbex Websites Corpus* (UW-Corpus) was compiled collecting all the descriptive sections of Urban Exploration tours as found in personal websites, blogs, tour guides' websites and travel platforms including information on abandoned places to explore. We focused on websites dealing with urban exploration in both European and extra-European areas. A choice was made to combine Western Europe and the US (the so-called Western bloc)[6] and Eastern Europe with Russia (the so-called Eastern bloc), due to the political and cultural affinity of the territories involved in each category. The choice of which websites to include in the corpus began by simply typing into the Google search engine the keywords "urban exploration" plus the country concerned and by subsequently downloading descriptive texts until we arrived at the number of words included in Table 1. We also decided to limit the number of texts downloaded from travel platforms that collect descriptions of different places to a maximum of 5 in order to avoid having data biased by the fact that these texts may be written by the same author or follow a specific "editorial" style. Data was saved in Word format to be then analyzed using corpus linguistic analytical tools. Table 1 shows the word distribution in the UW-Corpus.

Reddit, launched in 2005 by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian, is a popular social news website where user-generated content is posted in interest-based communities known as subreddits, marked by the prefix 'r/'. Subreddits may be dedicated to a range of different topics, from current world news and internet phenomena such as memes to minority groups or fan communities (Yadav *et al.* 2022, p. 1286).

PLACE	TOKENS
Western Bloc (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, UK, US)	78,502
Eastern Bloc (Albania, Bosnia & Herzogovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland,	68,317

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[6] The terms Western and Eastern bloc were coined after WWII to identify the coalition of countries respectively allied with the United States and under the influence of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Russia)	
TOTAL	146,819

Table 1
Data distribution in the Urbex Websites Corpus (UW-Corpus).

As of January 2021, Reddit includes over 100,000 active subreddits, over 13 billion posts and comments, and over 50 million daily active uniques (DAU),[7] that is, users active on a given day.

Reddit's structure is similar to that of a forum, fostering interaction among registered users, who create posts and threads in subreddits with content (text, videos, images, links, etc.) that is then commented on and discussed by other members of the community. Disclosure of personal identity and location is not compulsory on Reddit. Therefore, the majority of users are completely anonymous. Each subreddit has its own rules and one or more moderators enforce these rules and maintain a civilized atmosphere in the community. Usually, such rules are clearly visible on the right-hand side of the page, alongside the description of the subreddit.

One of the defining characteristics of Reddit is the possibility of voting (upvoting and downvoting) on both posts and individual comments, which adds another level of engagement to the content on the platform. Posts which receive many upvotes are featured more prominently within the subreddit and on the Reddit homepage (Michellebrous 2017).

The *Urbex Reddit Corpus* (UR-Corpus)[8] was created by collecting all data available in the r/urbanexploration subreddit between May 2021 and May 2022, for a total period of a year. A Python[9] script was employed to obtain the data from the PushShift archive, a service that collects and archives Reddit posts and comments[10]. The data was gathered in two different batches, one representing submissions or posts, and the other containing comments. Before saving them as CSV files, the separate batches went through an anonymization process in which all usernames were changed into a format of 'id' plus six randomized numbers such as 'id679841'. This guaranteed further protection for users, while also retaining important repeat posting information. Additionally, many non-relevant data columns were removed, except for the anonymized 'author', the text or 'selftext', the time

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[7] https://www.redditinc.com/press (16.5.2022).

[8] We would like to thank Hunter Paul Youngquist, who cooperated in compiling the UR Corpus.

[9] Python is an interpreted, object-oriented, high-level programming language with dynamic semantics. Its high-level built-in data structures, combined with dynamic typing and dynamic binding, make it very attractive for Rapid Application Development, as well as for use as a scripting or glue language to connect existing components together. (https://www.python.org/doc/essays/blurb/) (18.5.2022).

[10] https://www.reddit.com/r/urbanexploration/ (10.4.2022).

of the posting or 'created_utc' columns, and other various features, depending on whether the post was a submission or a comment. The two batches were then cleaned by removing posts that had no 'selftext', posts that were deleted or removed (marked by [deleted] and [removed] respectively). The 'created_utc' column contains date and time in epoch form after being pulled from the Reddit API. Therefore, we converted it to the more readable structure: "Year-Month-Date Hour:Minute:Second" in UTC. Before merging the batches, each received a new column, 'type', and every post was designated within this column as either a 'submission' or a 'comment' to allow for future subcorpora analysis. The second to last step was the merging of the submission data and the comment data. Finally, the new CSV file was reformatted into XML, allowing for the meta data annotation (such as 'author', 'created_utc', and 'type') to be separated from the 'title' and the body of the 'selftext', as well as to be readable for any corpus linguistic analytical tool. At the end of the entire data preparation process, the corpus consisted of 539,780 words.

5. Methodology

Drawing on Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, the study adopted a mixed method approach and data was investigated both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. In the first phase of the investigation, the corpus tool *SketchEngine* (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014) was used to automatically calculate single-word and multiple-word keywords. Amongst the numerous reference corpora available on Sketch Engine, the English Web 2020 (*enTenTen20*) was selected as a reference corpus, since it represents an example of a text corpus collected from the Web. We extracted keywords and multi-word terms for both the UW-Corpus and the UR-Corpus, setting the 'simple maths' option of SketchEngine (Kilgarriff 2009) at 100 and with a minimum frequency of 5. The resulting output was filtered for noise, and terms not pertaining to the purpose of the present study were excluded from the final list. In other words, we excluded place names as well as names of the local areas involved in urban exploration (e.g. Volterra, Porto or Kupari), alongside words that only occurred in a single website, grammatical items, phrases, and redundant terms that appeared in Reddit comments automatically due to active bots.[11] We chose to take into consideration keywords scoring higher or equal to 3.0 and multi-word terms scoring higher or equal to 1.5 and, as a

[11] Bots are programs on Reddit that are able to carry out automated tasks. Reddit has different types of bots with several functions, from moderation and anti-spam action to automatic responses or votes (upvoting or downvoting) to posts and comments containing certain elements.

third step, the lexical items (adjectives, nouns, verbs, exclamations, interjections, written representations of non-verbal phenomena such as laughter) related to urbex tours emerging from the previous quantitative selection were classified into thematic categories.

This first quantitative process enabled us to pinpoint the predominant themes for the subsequent qualitative analysis of Urbex discourse and we thus decided to look more specifically at how these places and exploration activities are talked about by people who are part of the Urbex community in both the UW-Corpus and the UR-Corpus, to see whether we could relate any difference to the different genre and to the peculiar writing environment of the users. To this aim, the final part of the analysis focused on concordances and more specifically on the adjectives found 5 tokens left and right of some of the highest scoring key items in both corpora: the verbs *abandon* and *explore*, the adjective *abandoned*, the nouns *explorer* and *exploration,* all in their forms as lemmas.

In the next sections, the findings are presented, starting from the quantitative overview to arrive at the detailed qualitative description of the results.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Urban Websites Corpus

As specified in the previous section, the first step of the project included the automatic calculation of single-word keywords within the corpus: out of the first 200 keywords identified by *SketchEngine*, only those keywords with a keyness higher than 3.0 were selected. Thus, the final list includes 79 keywords. Excluding from the list proper names of places, proper names of specific sites, and words that did not directly pertain to the topic under investigation, the final keyword list contained 66 terms, which were grouped according to their semantic area, as Table 2 shows.

CATEGORIES	SINGLE WORDS
Descriptors of Places	*abandon*, *abandoned*, *beautiful*, *close*, *concrete*, *crumble*, *decay*, *demolish*, *empty*, *former*, *ghost*, *relic*, *ruin*, *still* (adj.), *urban*
Types of Places	*asylum*, *building*, *bunker*, *castle*, *church*, *city*, *complex*, *facility*, *factory*, *hospital*, *hotel*, *house*, *mansion*, *mill*, *mine*, *monument*, *palace*, *park*, *sanatorium*, *shuttle*, *station*, *tower*, *town*, *tunnel*, *villa*, *village*
Parts of Building	*ceiling*, *entrance*, *fence*, *floor*, *graffito*, *inside*, *roof*, *room*, *wall*

Attributes Referring to Geographical and/or Historic Context	*communist*, *industrial*, *nuclear*, *Russian*, *soviet*, *war*
User Activity	*exploration*, *explore*, *explorer*, *locate*, *tourist*, *trip*, *urbex*, *visit*, *walk*
Multimodality	*photo*

Table 2
Keyword categories in the UW-Corpus.

As shown in the table, the keywords can be classified in six different, but intertwined, semantic fields. The first category, Descriptors of Places, includes keywords that are typical of urban exploration: thus, they clearly focus on the degraded conditions of the sites considered. The most frequent verbs portray this degradation, as in the case of *abandon*, *crumble, decay*, *demolish* and *ruin*. In line with this perspective, the second group of keywords aims at precisely identifying the buildings and their original function; the high diversification of keywords pertaining to this field mirrors the heterogeneity of the abandoned sites which explorers are interested in.

As anticipated, the preliminary quantitative results show a consistent mapping of locations according to the geographical area involved: *castles*, *churches, mills, towers and villas* occur more frequently used in Western Europe websites, whereas *bunkers*, *factories*, *mines* and *tunnels* appear to be more common in Eastern Europe, where echoes of the Cold War are still present. The territorial distribution of other places, such as *asylums*, *hospitals*, *parks* and *hotels*, does not seem to be characterized by a specific geographical area, but is probably more linked to the evolving socio-cultural context. From the list of keywords, some parts of the building prevail, as the descriptive passages of *entrances*, *fences*, *roofs*, *rooms* and *walls* have a double function: on the one hand, the writers describe the specificities of the places they visit (or they suggest visiting); on the other hand, the references to the architectural details of the sites are useful to depict the practicability of buildings.

As far as the category "Attributes Referring to Geographical and/or Historic Context" is concerned, some adjectives occur more often than others and, except for one, they refer to the Russian war context of the last century.

In addition to that, a category related to user activities has been included: *explore*, *exploration*, *explorer*, *urbex*, *visit* are frequent terms often used when discussing exploration activities.

Unlike the results offered by the UR-Corpus, only one word, *photo*, occurs in the list of keywords, as the reference to the multimodal dimension is less prominent.

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CATEGORIES	MULTI-WORD TERMS
Descriptors of Places	*bay of the abandoned hotels, beautiful decay, former glory, main building, main road*
Types of Places	*abandoned building, abandoned castle, abandoned church, abandoned hospital, abandoned hotel, abandoned house, abandoned site, abandoned village, amusement park, brush park, coal mine, cooling tower, former missile site, ghost town, haunted place, lost place, manor house, mental asylum, military base, missile base, power plant, power station, psychiatric hospital, small garage, small village, space shuttle, swimming pool, urban ruin, water park, water tower*
Parts of Building	*barbed wire, broken glass, broken window, central shaft, control room, dining room, ground floor, stained glass, upper floor*
References to the Geographical/Historic Context	*Cold War, early 20 century, Russian attack, Second World War, Soviet Union, Treaty today, United States army cops, World War II, world war*
User Activity	*urban exploration*
References to War	*capsule in a small garage, former missile, machine tool, missile in reaction, nuke missile, nuclear arm, nuclear tip warhead, nuclear tip, site container nuclear tip, tip warhead*

Table 3
Multi-word term categories in the UW-Corpus.

Table 3 lists the multi-word terms (total: 64) divided into semantic categories: as in the previous case, the most frequent nominal compounds and noun phrases are related to the types of places visited and specific parts of buildings. More prominence is given to history, especially to World War II and the Cold War. In line with this theme, several multi-word terms focus on missiles and nuclear weapons.

Among the selected keywords, we qualitatively analyzed those through which urbex website writers talk about the places identified in the list and the activities of exploring urban relics to see their use in context. Thus, as for the other corpus, this second stage of the analysis takes into consideration the verbs and *abandon*[12] (411 o.) and *explore* (140 o.), the adjective *abandoned* (174 o.), the nouns *exploration* (69 o.) and *explorer* (52 o.)

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[12] All frequencies have been normalized using a common base of 100.000 for comparative purposes across the two corpora.

A closer look at the selected words shows that the word *abandon* is frequently found as the adjective *abandoned* and often goes hand-in-hand with adjectives that describe the place:

(1)   There are two shuttles from the Buran Space Program left and they sit in idle, turning into historic relics, within a forgotten and *abandoned* building located in Kazakhstan. [UW\doc.91]

(2)   We were all delighted to discover there were so many haunted and *abandoned* buildings in and around Barcelona to explore. [UW\doc.102]

(3)   Lot of people ask me - what is do (sic.) great about destroyed and *abandoned* buildings? I simply can't explain it – you just love it or don't understand it. [UW\doc.58]

Abandoned often co-occurs with the adjective *beautiful*, which stresses the uniqueness of the site and highlights the peculiarity of this type of tourism, which sees degradation as a desirable feature, as the following three examples demonstrate:

(4)   Why was this *beautiful abandoned* villa, with its treasures, left to itself? [UW\doc.27]

(5)   These *abandoned* buildings are full of *beautiful* sadness and enriched with history [UW\doc.133]

(6)   Today I want to show you pictures of *abandoned* and visited by me hospitals: *abandoned* mansion with a *beautiful* stained glass [UW\doc.58]

The state of decay of the places visited by the "urban wanderers" (Bennett 2010) is constructed as an element that aims at reinforcing the magic around them: in this sense, *abandoned* strongly collocates with the adverb *completely* to highlight the second life of these places, which cannot be remembered for their original function but for the "crucial role [they play] in the formation of the late-modern urban public space (Klausen 2017, p. 381).

(7)   Dating back to the 1800's, the building and its grounds have been *completely abandoned* and left to the mercy of the elements for many years, giving this once grand structure a far more imposing aura. [UW\doc.23]

(8)   This made it impossible to re-open as a tourist facility without major renovations. By the late 1990s, the hotel was *completely abandoned*. [UW\doc.18]

A set of words which describes the exploration of abandoned sites aims at positively describing the places, recalling in the reader's mind a fascinating past that will never return. Adjectives such as *amazing*, *fascinating*, *gorgeous*, *impressive* and *spectacular* help represent the places as having interesting spaces to visit, unique details to photograph and old corners to explore.

(9)   The beautiful Casino Royale is a *spectacular* abandoned Romanian Casino.
      [UW\doc.69]

The extensive use of the verb *explore* is often combined with technical and
structural details about the sites: thus, descriptive passages give information
on what people can find and see.

(10) We explored building 25 and *it contained cells, solitary seclusion rooms, a
      refectory and day room with strange paintings on the walls*. [UW\doc.120]
(11) We explored factory loading bays, engine rooms and storage vaults *whose
      thick steel doors hung heavy and wide open*. [UW\doc.94]

Shifting the focus from the locations to their human guests, two themes are
mainly discussed: on the one hand, writers warn of possible repercussions
related to the crime of trespassing and/or to the structurally compromised
buildings; on the other, they give advice to their audience on the most
appropriate choices of clothing, shoes and on the best hours to visit places.

(12) Obviously, you explore *at your own risk. Shoes, preferably thick-soled, are
      absolutely mandatory* with the amount of broken glass throughout the
      building. [UW\doc.71]
(13) Depending on where you will be exploring, your dress code may slightly
      differ. However, *it is generally safer to wear long sleeved shirts and pants and
      secure shoes*. [UW\doc.3]
(14) Note: *do not attempt to trespass* on these properties unless it is specified you
      can do so. [UW\doc.111]

Taking the noun *explorer/s* into consideration, some further reflections on the
use of the language within the UW-Corpus can be shared: the role of those
who are interested in visiting "unconventional" areas or sites seems to have a
heroic nuance, as the explorers are described as *brave*, *courageous* and
intrepid who look for adventurous experiences, prefer darkness and want to
stay away from crowds.

(15) Even though some parts of the hospital are being restored, the more
      courageous urban explorers still enter inside. [UW\doc.8]
(16) Other *intrepid* urban explorers, however, have braved even the nearby
      radioactive mines at their own risk. [UW\doc.73]
(17) We wouldn't be the first to attempt this, and indeed a few *brave* souls had
      ticked them off before us, but it's certainly not a trip for the faint hearted.
      [UW\doc.86]

6.2. Urban Reddit Corpus

As with the UW-corpus, the keywords and multi-word terms extracted from
the UR-Corpus were classified into thematic categories, filtering out

grammatical items, pronouns, temporal adverbs, city and country names, and redundant terms that appeared in Reddit comments automatically due to active bots. The final output resulted in 69 keywords and 32 multi-word terms, as can be seen in Tables 4 and 5 below.

CATEGORIES	KEYWORDS
Descriptors of Places	*abandoned, demolish, ghost, inside, location, spot, stuff*
Types of Places	*asylum, building, bunker, factory, hospital, house, mall, mansion, mine, tunnel*
Parts of Building	*floor, graffito*
Evaluative Terms	*amazing, awesome, beautiful, cool, crazy, creepy, definitely, interesting, like, love, nice, old, pretty, sad, shit, vibes, weird, wow*
Reddit Features	*bot, oc, op*
User Activities	*climb, exploration, explore, explorer, look, urbex*
Interactive Features	*anyone, comment, guy, info, someone, thank, thanks, wonder, yeah, yes*
Informal Writing Features	*damn, dude, fuck, haha, lol, oh, wanna*
Multimodality	*photo, pic, picture, shot, video, youtube*

Table 4
Keyword categories in the UR-Corpus.

The categories are similar for both keywords and multi-word terms, except for Parts of Building and Informal Writing Features which appear only with keywords. The latter category includes items that characterize an informal writing style which is typical of online discourse, including informal contractions (*wanna*), representations of vocalizations (*oh*) and laughter (*haha*) as well as acronyms (*lol* for laughing out loud) and interjections (*damn, dude, fuck*). The textual genre of this corpus is also visible in the presence of interactive features, that is, linguistic elements used by posters to interact with one another (e.g. *guy* appears frequently as part of the greeting 'hi guys') and Reddit features, which refer to the language typical of this and other discussion fora. In addition to *bot*, we find, *OC*, which stands for Original Content (as opposed to materials or descriptions shared from other sources) and *OP*, that is, Original Poster (i.e. the author of the post starting the discussion).

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CATEGORIES	MULTI-WORD TERMS
Descriptors of Places	*exact location, time capsule*
Types of Places	*abandoned building, abandoned church, abandoned factory, abandoned home, abandoned hospital, abandoned hotel, abandoned house, abandoned mansion, abandoned place, abandoned school, bowling alley, ghost town, high school, military base, power plant*
Evaluative Terms	*cool place, great photo, great pic, great shot*
Multimodality	*full video, video link, video tour, youtube channel*
Interactive Features	*info in comments, link in comments, thanks for sharing*
User Activities	*urban exploration, urban explore, urban explorer*
Reddit Features	*good bot*

Table 5
Multi-word term categories in the UR-Corpus.

References to multimodal aspects, especially images (e.g. *pic*, *picture*, *photo*, *shot*) and audiovisuals (*channel*, *full video*, *video*, *video tour*, *youtube*, *youtube video link*), are also found in the corpus. The presence of such keywords and multi-word terms highlights the importance of the visual experience in urban exploration, with pictures and even videos that provide an immersive experience for users partaking in virtual exploration. Closer examination of concordances for these keywords shows that community members share or ask for recommendations on YouTube channels dedicated to urban explorations, or again comment and criticize the practices these YouTube explorers adopt and display in their videos. The majority of the selected keywords and multi-word terms belong to the categories of descriptors of places and types of places: the first includes items that are used to refer to the locations explored (*abandoned*, *location*, *places*, *spot*) and other characterizing elements. The term *time capsule* in particular highlights the link between urban exploration and the documentation of dilapidated places that belong to a city's cultural and historical heritage and display, untouched, a snapshot of a specific point in time (Pokojska 2015; Fassi 2010). Types of Places illustrates on the other hand the different types of locations described and commented on by users in the corpus, which includes a variety of different abandoned places, such as *asylum*, *bowling alley*, *bunker*, *factory*, *mansion*, *mine*, *tunnel*, and others, attesting to the wide variety of places that attract urban explorers.

The last category to take into consideration and which clearly sets the UR-corpus apart from the UW-corpus is that of "evaluative terms". Probably due to the presence of comments rather than to the descriptions in the post, these terms are used to appraise, mostly in positive terms, the places and exploration activities shared on the subreddit (*amazing*, *awesome*, *beautiful*, *cool*, *nice*, *wow*) as well as the materials posted by users (*great pic*, *great photo*, *great shot*). This further reinforces the crucial role of the visual aspect of urban exploration, and the tension between not wanting to disclose too much information about the location and sharing evidence of the exploration with other people who are similarly attracted by such derelict places. Another type of tension, that between fascination with the ruins and the desolation of a lost place and time, is also shown in evaluative terms, with positive adjectives (*amazing*, *beautiful*, *cool*, *interesting*, *pretty*) appearing alongside terms highlighting the unusual (*crazy*, *weird*) and dilapidated state of such places (*creepy*, *old*, *sad*).

Let us now look more specifically at how these places and exploration activities are talked about by people who are part of the community. The analysis focuses on the adjectives found 5 tokens left and right of some of the highest scoring key items, notably: the verbs *explore* (238 o.) and *abandon* (257 o.), the adjective *abandoned* (107 o.), the nouns *explorer* (25 o.) and *exploration* (45 o.), in their forms as lemmas. The output was first filtered to eliminate those occurrences where the key word and the adjective occurred in different posts or comments, and irrelevant items were marked as adjectives.

The close reading of the remaining occurrences showed some recurring topics in the subreddit. The term *abandoned* is often found in combination with adjectives describing the location visited, often in terms of size, a qualitative evaluation of the location or of the experience, or adjectives that are part of the name of the visited location, as exemplified in the extracts below:

(18)   Massive *abandoned sanatorium* I found in a German forest. [UR\]
(19)   This is one of the most amazing *abandoned places* I've ever visited. [UR\]
(20)   I explored an *Abandoned Juvenile Detention Center*. [UR\]

The adjective *old* (206 o.) was a common descriptor found in combination with abandoned – adjectives marking a specific historical period were also found in the corpus in two instances:

(21)   The old *abandoned soviet hangar* [UR\]
(22)   Recently visited two *abandoned Victorian churches/chapels* … [UR\].

This appears to point to an interest for older places that may also have a historical significance, although it should be stated that urban explorers do not seem to display a preference in terms of the age of the location explored,

as "urban explorer[s] may find as much significance in an abandoned grocery store closed down last week as in an 18th century castle in Belgium" (Garrett 2011, p. 1050).

Common topics of discussion relate to whether the exploration may actually count as 'urban', or to the actual status of a location as abandoned in the first case, redditors lament that some of the locations posted would better be ascribed to "rural exploration" than Urban Exploration, as rural locations cannot be considered part of urban environments.

(23) I kinda miss when this sub was about urban exploration and not *abandoned rural buildings*. [UR\]
(24) In the second case, users may question that *the location under discussion is abandoned as opposed to just empty* but still maintained by the owners, or even open for people to visit. [UR\]
(25) This doesn't appear to be abandoned, just an empty house not currently occupied. [UR\]
(26) Hardly abandoned, its [sic] open to the public to walk through. [UR\]

This aspect is also closely linked to the definition of Urban Exploration as "recreational trespassing". Redditors in the community appear to be aware of the legal repercussions of trespassing when exploring an abandoned location:

(27) *There is a fine line between exploring abandoned buildings and breaking and entering*. [UR\]
(28) They watch it and expect it, *they have caught many urban explorers trying to get in*. [UR\]

The comments above, among others in the corpus, suggest that the community does discuss the issue of trespassing and the consequences explorers may face if caught by guards or policemen patrolling the area. In (27), redditors are warned that they may face more serious charges than trespassing, whereas in the following example a user is trying to dissuade fellow urban explorers from visiting a specific location during the Halloween period.

The possibility of taking objects from the locations visited is also discussed by the community, and two main reasons may be identified for discouraging explorers from taking things during their visits. The first relates to legal consequences and ethics, as this redditor states:

(29) There's a fine line between thief and explorer, *stay on the ethical side*. [UR\]

The reference to the ethical side can be traced to one of the tenets of the Urbex community, that is, leaving no traces in the places explored so that other people are able to find them in their original state. Indeed, this is clarified in other extracts from the corpus:

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(30) Genuine *explorers* will *always respect what they find*, but unfortunately abandoned places often attract vandals. [UR\]

One of the other principles of the communities is not sharing the exact location of the explored places and there appears to be a certain tension between sharing and not sharing locations within the community. In a couple of occurrences, redditors clearly state that locations should not be disclosed:

(31) It's not what you do in urban exploration. *Places are not to be shared you have to find them yourself*" [UR\];
(32) [m]ost of the modern maps are not something people are going to post online, as the exploration and *mapping is illegal*. [UR\].

In spite of this, many redditors who are new to Urban Exploration ask the community about where they can find abandoned places to explore in their area. In particular, the verb e*xplore* is often used by redditors in interrogatives to question the community on new sites to visit, or to find people interested in exploring together as in the following examples:

(33) Does anyone know of any *good spots* to explore in CT? [UR\]
(34) Urbex Buddy in Austria ᴀᴛ [sic] Is anyone here from Austria [sic]? *I am looking for someone* to explore with ☺. [UR\]

Even though redditors are often portrayed by data as solitary explorers describing their wandering among ruins in the first person singular, some of them rely on the platform to find people sharing the same interests who could become "urbex buddy" or "urbex friends."
    The UR-Corpus shows that the activity of exploring is often connoted positively and associated with the positive evaluated description of places that are defined as *awesome, beautiful, cool, good*, and *super.* However, when redditors *explore* the urban abandoned landscape, they expose themselves to a *dangerous* activity, which should be done in a *careful* way. In addition to potentially facing criminal charges, entering old buildings that have not been upkept may hold risks for the explorers' health, including encounters with ill-intentioned people; hazardous substances such as asbestos; structural compromission of buildings. Redditors warn the community of possible dangers and give advice to their audience on the safest choices when exploring. The next example shows this evaluative tension that swings from positive description to risk perception:

(35) I found this place and thought it looked so *cool*! There were a couple of broken and not boarded up windows on the ground floor, but it looked to [sic] *dangerous* to explore inside. [UR\]

Writers in the UW-Corpus are also aware of the dangers of urban exploration, but on the other hand they appear to provide practical advice on what type of equipment to use in individual locations.

Interestingly, in the language of redditors the noun *exploration* is often substituted by *explore* used as a noun (also inflected in the plural form *explores*) to identify the redditors' urbex experiences. This occurs especially when they provide multimodal support (e.g. *pics*, *photography*, *photos*, *YouTube videos*) to describe their adventure to their readers. This use could be seen as a functional syntactic shift of the term from verb to noun, through the morphological process of zero derivation, that has entered the urbex community of redditors, as a symbol of this new discourse community of explorers. The following examples show the linguistic phenomenon described above:

(36) Follow my Instagram for more urbex photography from my *explores*. [UR\]
(37) But if you're interested, and would like to see the video of my full *explore*.
       [UR\]

In the UW-Corpus, users talk about the activity of exploring abandoned places in first person: this can highlight that redditors perceive Urban Exploration as an individual "adventure" rather than a collective activity. As described by the following examples, the frequent use of the personal pronoun *I* clearly shows that those who write tend to explore alone and then share their personal experience to the Reddit community of urban explorers:

(38) *I* explored an abandoned 747 in Bangkok, It was super cool inside. Amazing
       experience. [UR\]
(39) *I* explored it years ago but I can't remember the name or location for the life of
       me. […] It had a gate to prevent vehicle access (no trespassing sign per usual).
       [UR\]

The words *explore* and *abandon* seem to be used with a promotional focus in the UR-Corpus with all positive connotations. The nuances of "being first somewhere" and "facing the unknown with curiosity and enthusiasm" emerge from the analysis of their concordance lines, thus indicating a semantic specialization of otherwise general terminology.

7. Concluding remarks

This study has attempted to shed light on the discourse surrounding Urban Exploration in different online contexts. Through the language used on the websites two main thematic axes pop up: abandoned places and their explorers. As far as the buildings are concerned, the spotlight is put on the

magnificence of the crumbling sites, where the connection between present and past takes shape, highlighting how the modern decay embeds the inheritance of history and shares fascinating traces of the lives of those who lived in those places. The descriptive passages as well as pictures shared on the websites give the chance to sink into different social contexts: rich families' glamorous lives spending time in sumptuous hotels, villas or castles; prisoners' and patients' miserable existence in prisons, hospitals and asylums; or soldiers' terrible experiences during World War II or the Cold war. Parallel to that, explorers within websites have a role of paramount importance, as they are the ones who actively visit the abandoned places sharing their reflections and practical suggestions.

The analysis appears to highlight the existence of a tension between the core tenets and ethical principles of urban exploration and a shift towards a more mainstream type of activity. This is visible in both corpora, with both redditors and bloggers highlighting the principles by which locations should not be disclosed, and others providing exact locations and asking for recommendations of which places to visit. A further shift towards a more 'passive' way of exploring abandoned places may be identified in the presence of guided tours, offered by both private guides and tour operators, which also include abandoned places. This also contradicts the core nature of Urban Exploration, which often includes potentially illegal practices, and a focus on derelict places that are ignored and forgotten by preservationists and other official figures (Fassi 2010).

Compared to the UR-Corpus, the UW-Corpus appears to refer to a more traditional idea of tourism. The identity of *explorer* appears to be something temporary, to impersonate for the duration of the activity, which is sometimes carried out in special organized tours that may be booked directly from the websites.

The Reddit community shows a distinctive use of language, with the coinage, through the morphological process of zero derivation of the noun *explore* (see examples 36 and 37), used to refer to the activity of urban exploration. This sets the urbex community apart from other explorers and other types of tourists by using a noun that can encompass the specific set of practices that characterize urban exploration.

Urban explorers live their experiences on the verge between strangerhood and tradition, past and present, as they are fascinated by the traces in the abandoned structures that refer to old uses and appropriations of places, but at the same time through their explorations they exercise their imagination by living through possible scenes from the past in the present time as well as being part, for a moment, of the ghostly shells of their former glory.

Further research needs to examine more closely the discursive domain of urban exploration as a type of tourism that seems to be specializing. Focus on the specialization of general terminology and the creation of neologisms could produce interesting findings that may account for the development of the discursive practices leading this niche tourism through a process of massification.

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WINE PROMOTION ON FACEBOOK
A linguistic comparison of posts by producers from English-speaking countries

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Abstract – Facebook can be considered one of the main social marketing tools used by companies who decide to advertise their products online and who aim to keep in touch with customers quickly and effectively. Social media in general and Facebook in particular are characterised by a high level of interactivity, and visual, textual and linguistic features are strategically used to attract and involve potential customers and to get their feedback, thus enhancing the company's visibility on the market as well as the company's knowledge of the market. This paper analyses the language used to advertise wine and wine events through Facebook posts by producers from New Zealand, South Africa and the UK. Method-wise, this study applies the same analytical methods used by Manca (2021) in her analysis of the interactive and interactional strategies employed by Australian and US wine companies to advertise their products and activities on Facebook, and also some of the analytical methods used by Bianchi (2017a, 2017b) in her studies on Facebook posts written by travel agencies to advertise their destinations. Besides describing the metadiscursive features which are mostly used on Facebook by wineries (Hyland 2005), this paper aims to establish whether the forms of interaction and the positioning of the writers depend on cultural factors, the medium used or other variables.

Keywords: corpus linguistics; cultural tendencies; Facebook; metadiscourse; wine promotion.

1. Introduction

Promotional communication is a fundamental form of discourse between business companies and their (potential) clients and customers. It is a primary form of external communication (Stevanović, Gmitrović 2015) whose aims are not only to advertise products and services, but also to develop the company's brand image and to receive informative feedback from the market environment. According to Rudczuk (2017, p. 14), choosing the most appropriate external communication is of utmost importance, because even

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[1] Although the two authors have closely collaborated con the paper, Francesca Bianchi is responsible for sections 4, 4.1, 4.2, 5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 6, while Elena Manca is responsible for sections 1, 2.1, 2.2, and 3.

the best products may not produce the expected outcome if potential customers are not properly informed about them.

Linguistic analysis of promotional discourse in English has shown that many factors influence the language and the strategies used in advertising, such as cultural differences (e.g. Manca 2016a, 2016b, 2020 for cultural differences across English-speaking countries), medium (e.g. Bianchi 2017a), and/or market sector (e.g. Bianchi 2017b).

Among the various tools available to companies to interact with the market environment, websites and social media are increasingly used. Facebook, for example, sits at more than 2.89 billion monthly active users[2] and has been chosen as a marketing tool by 92% of social marketing companies (Emrich *et al.* 2015; Tran 2017). Furthermore, many companies choose to create online ads on Facebook, as it is cheaper than other traditional tools or media. The experience offered by Facebook brand pages is also associated with benefits, such as enhancing ad credibility (Xu 2006), and improving brand awareness (Johns, Perrott 2008; Tran 2017). At the same time, customers' reviews and feedback on social media provide a better understanding of the market on the part of companies and help improve the level of customer satisfaction (Ramanathan *et al.* 2017).

One of the main features of social media in general and of Facebook in particular is interactivity. In the status updates, users can express opinions, feelings and moods and receive comments and reactions from their followers. On brand pages, customers can interact with a company by using liking and commenting posts, a type of communication that leads to increasing the brand's popularity (de Vries *et al.* 2012). On the other hand, companies use Facebook posts to advertise their products and activities, and to keep in touch with their customers. This strategic form of digital communication is characterised by a number of visual and linguistic features whose ultimate aim is attracting and involving potential customers.

As we will see in section 3, linguistic research on Facebook discourse is quite recent and although a number of studies provide interesting insights, they are still limited because of the restricted amount and variety of material investigated. For this reason, this paper extends the existing literature by analysing the metadiscursive devices used in the Facebook posts of wineries located in New Zealand, South Africa and the UK and the way in which these wineries perceive themselves and their customers. In particular, the study applies to this new set of data the same analytical methods used by Manca (2021) in her analysis of the interactive and interactional strategies employed by Australian and US wine companies to advertise their products and

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[2] https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/
    (1.4.2022).

activities on Facebook, but also some of the analytical methods used by Bianchi (2017a, 2017b) in her studies on Facebook posts written by travel agencies to advertise their destinations. The current paper – besides describing the metadiscursive features which are mostly used on Facebook by wineries – also aims to establish whether the forms of interaction and the relative positioning of the writers depend on cultural factors, on the medium used or on other variables.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: section 2 illustrates Hyland's framework for metadiscursive analysis, section 3 provides an overview of previous studies on the linguistic strategies used to engage readers on Facebook and describes Manca's (2021) work in detail. Section 4 illustrates the materials and methods used for the current analysis, section 5 illustrates and discusses the findings, and section 6 attempts to draw some general conclusions.

2. Metadiscursive resources

Hyland (2005, p. 37-38) defines metadiscourse as "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community". His theory of metadiscourse is based on the idea that language is always a consequence of interaction between people, and metadiscourse options are the resources through which these interactions are constructed (Hyland 2005, p. 3). Language is dynamic and, through verbal expressions, we negotiate with others and make decisions about the effects that we want to achieve on the people we are interacting with.

Hyland (2005, p. 49ff) elaborates a metadiscursive model that includes two dimensions of interaction: the interactive dimension and the interactional dimension.

2.1. The interactive dimension

This dimension includes those resources that reveal that writers are aware of their audience and construct the text to meet the needs of their readers and guide them through the text. There are five subcategories: Transition markers, Frame markers, Endophoric markers, Evidentials, Code glosses. Transition markers are additive, comparative, consequential or contrastive conjunctions and adverbial phrases used to guide readers through the text and make them interpret the connections created by the writer. Examples are: *and*, *furthermore*, *moreover*, *by the way* for additive markers; *similarly*, *likewise*, *equally*, *in the same way*, *correspondingly* for comparative conjunctions and

phrases; *thus*, *therefore*, *consequently*, *in conclusion* as resources to show consequentiality and *admittedly*, *nevertheless*, *anyway*, *in any case*, *of course* for contrastive resources.

Frame markers include elements that help create the structure of a text. They can be used to sequence or order parts of the text (*first*, *then*, *1/2*, *a/b*, *at the same time*, *next*), to label and signal text stages (*to summarize*, *in sum*, *by way of introduction*), to announce discourse goals (*I argue here*, *my purpose is*, *the paper proposes*, *I hope to persuade*, *there are several reasons why*), or indicate topic shifts (*well*, *right*, *OK*, *now*, *let us return to*).

Endophoric markers are verbal resources which refer to additional material or which refer to the presence of further material or contents in other parts of the text. These expressions aim to facilitate comprehension and include *see Figure 2*, *refer to the next section*, *as noted above*.

Evidentials are items and expressions that indicate who is responsible for a position or a statement; they provide support for arguments. An example is the expression *according to* or, in academic writing, a reference to a scholar's name as in *Hyland's model*.

Code glosses describe the writer's hypothesis on readers' knowledge and, for this reason, they include items that are used to rephrase, explain or elaborate. Examples are *this is called*, *in other words*, *that is*, *this can be defined as*, *for example*, etc.

2.2. The interactional dimension

This dimension concerns the ways in which writers make their own views explicit and involve their readers. As Hyland suggests (2005, p. 49), in this dimension, metadiscourse is essentially evaluative and engaging and reveals the extent to which the writers jointly construct the text with readers. It includes five broad categories (Hyland 2005, p. 52ff): Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self-mention, and Engagement markers.

Hedges are resources that allow information to be presented as an opinion rather than as a fact. Information is based on the writer's plausible reasoning and it is thus open to negotiation. Examples of hedges are *among the others*, *possible*, *might* and *perhaps*.

Boosters, on the other hand, reflect the writer's willingness to close down alternatives by emphasising a single confident voice. This explains why boosters emphasise certainty and the author's involvement. Examples are *clearly*, *obviously* and *demonstrate*.

Attitude markers express the writer's affective attitude to propositions and are mainly constituted by attitude verbs (*agree*, *prefer*), sentence adverbs (*unfortunately*, *hopefully*), or adjectives (*appropriate*, *logical*, *remarkable*).

Self-mention concerns the author's presence in a text and describes how authors stand in relation to their arguments, their community and their

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readers. This category is linguistically expressed by first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives (*I*, *me*, *mine*, exclusive *we*, *our*, *ours*).

Engagement markers focus on readers' participation and have a twofold function: attracting the readers' attention and including them as discourse participants. Reader pronouns (e.g. *you*, *your*, inclusive *we*) and interjections (e.g. *by the way*, *you may notice*) are used to include readers into the communicative exchange, while questions, directives such as imperatives, obligation modals, and references to shared knowledge aim to pull readers into the discourse and guide them in the interpretation of contents and ideas.

3. Engaging readers on social media

Several studies have been carried out on the discourse features of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media. Research about CMC (Barton, Lee 2013; Herring 2007) has investigated the linguistic features of this language variety and its use of speech-like features in synchronous communication. Colloquial language and syntactic constructions have also been identified by Crystal (2004) and by Herring (2012). The latter describes the syntax of Internet English as fragmented, particularly if compared to standard syntax. Moving on to Facebook, two interesting studies on its discourse features have been conducted by Bianchi (2017a, 2017b). The first of the two studies (Bianchi 2017a) investigates six months of Facebook posts of three large international travel operators based in English-speaking countries. Findings show that the posts considered for analysis are characterized by features typical of spoken communication. The linguistic and rhetorical techniques adopted include direct dialogue with readers, euphoria terms, reference to a magical dimension, reference to discovery and adventure, expressions of social control, ego-targeting techniques, metaphors, attempts to engage readers in immediate action and deictics. The travel companies under investigation seem to build a relationship with their prospective customers through these posts. To achieve this, on the one hand, the posts emphasize the companies' authorial presence, as suggested by the use of first-person pronouns; on the other hand, they trigger a high degree of reader involvement by using resources such as second-person pronouns, but also a large range of questions and directives. They also give suggestions, describe offers, provide descriptions and information, and guide the readers' interpretation. For this reason, readers feel as if they were the main and only focus of the companies' attention, thus reinforcing the perception of booking a unique, tailor-made holiday.

Bianchi (2017b) analyses and compares six months of Facebook posts by international tourist operators specializing in luxury holidays, and compares them against the posts by the three general or low-cost tourist

operators which were investigated in Bianchi (2017a). Regarding the linguistic items signalling operator-customer interaction, possessive adjectives and pronouns, imperative forms, and questions are all present, but with different frequencies. Luxury tourism operators use fewer first- and second-person adjectives and pronouns than general tourism operators. In those posts where destinations are described, both types of operators use second-person pronouns more frequently than first-person ones. Conversely, in those posts which do not advertise destinations, luxury tourism operators frequently use second-person pronouns, while general tourism operators make a more frequent usage of first-person pronouns. Imperative forms of verbs have a higher frequency in general tourism operators' posts, whereas questions are used with a particularly high frequency in those posts in which general tourism operators describe destinations. In the case of luxury tour operators, the operators are less visible than the destinations described, dialogue with readers is monodirectional, and readers are addressed primarily as customers; in non-luxury operators, instead, both operators and readers appear as highly active subjects, and the readers are engaged in a wider range of lively forms of interaction.

The analysis of advertising on social media from a metadiscursive perspective has been the object of recent research by Al-Subhi (2022), who selected a number of ads from the official social media accounts (Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter) of global cosmetic companies and beauty brands. Results show a very low occurrence of interactive features, with conjunctions being the most used resource. As for interactional resources, attitude markers and engagement markers display the highest frequency of occurrence. Attitude markers are explicitly signalled by adjectives, attitude verbs and sentence adverbs. Engagement markers are mainly directives followed by reader-inclusive pronouns and questions. Most of the questions in the posts analysed require no answer and are employed to arouse the consumers' interest and encourage them to explore the advertised products without a proper verbal answer (Al-Subhi 2022, p. 29).

These findings are very similar to those described by Manca (2021) in her analysis of Facebook posts of US and Australian wineries, carried out using Hyland's framework of metadiscourse and with the help of the analytical tools provided by Corpus Linguistics. Manca (2021) assembled two corpora, the Australian Wineries Facebook Corpus (AusWiFaC) containing 273 posts from 5 different wineries, for a total of 13,957 running words; and the US Wineries Facebook Corpus (USWiFaC) including 309 posts from 4 different wineries exclusively based in California, for a total of 12,577 running words. A first analysis of the interactive and interactional features of the posts was carried out using Stephen Bax's Text Inspector, a professional web tool that identifies metadiscourse markers based on Hyland

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(2005) and on Bax *et al.* (2019). In order to further check the metadiscursive resources used in the posts, the two corpora were uploaded on Sketch Engine and the wordlists of adjectives, adverbs and verbs were run separately. The analysis of interactive resources of the AusWiFaC reveals a low frequency of occurrence of frame markers, evidentials and code glosses and a relatively high frequency of endophoric markers. Transition markers are frequently used, particularly additive conjunctions used to connect content and ideas. The posts in the AusWiFaC do not contain items for signalling text stages or sequences, indications of discourse goals or topic shifts and have a very limited use of explicative glosses. As for interactional resources, Australian wineries frequently use attitude markers, mainly signalled by positive qualifying adjectives, and self-mention, expressed by the first-person plural pronoun *we* and the possessive adjective *our*, thus suggesting a high degree of authorial presence. Engagement markers are also used and are mainly expressed by the reader pronoun *you*, followed by imperatives and questions. Regarding questions, it is interesting to notice that out of a total of 46 questions in the posts, 39 provide an answer in the post itself in the form of a text or message. Hedges and boosters have a very low frequency of occurrence, probably due to the fact that expressing certainty or cautiousness is not a feature of winery Facebook posts. The analysis of metadiscourse resources in the USWiFaC displays similar findings to those observed in the AusWiFaC. Frame markers, evidentials and code glosses have a low frequency of occurrence and transition markers are mainly signalled by the subcategory of additive conjunctions. Hypertextual interactivity, which may be considered an example of endophoric markers, is frequently used and is visible in the presence of links, hashtags and tags. USWiFaC posts do not signal text stages or sequences, discourse goals or topic shifts and have a very limited usage of clarifying glosses. The most frequent interactional resources are attitude markers, particularly qualifying adjectives, attitude verbs and sentence adverbs. Self-mention and engagement markers have the same percentage of occurrence and show a balance between authorial presence, expressed by the first-person plural pronoun *we* and the possessive adjective *our*, and readers' involvement, achieved through the use of second-person pronouns *you* and the possessive adjectives *your*, verbs in the imperative form and questions. In 30 out of the 64 questions in the USWiFaC the answer is not in the post and readers are covertly invited to interact by answering in the comment box. Hedges and boosters do not occur very frequently, as already observed in the AusWiFaC.

Considering the three studies reported above, a strong similarity of usage of metadiscursive features can be observed in the Facebook posts investigated. Posts are short texts whose contents and ideas are mainly linked together by additive conjunctions. They are characterized by attitude markers

used to convey highly positive descriptions and by engagement markers including directives and rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions, all acting as strategies to involve potential customers and persuade them to take action. This may suggest that this genre possesses some general features which are not influenced by cultural factors. However, more quantitative studies on a series of corpora from other English-speaking countries would be needed to highlight whether and to what extent cultural difference may or may not apply in this highly globalised medium. For this reason, the present study aims to analyse the interactive and interactional resources used in the Facebook posts of a selection of wineries from South Africa, New Zealand and the UK, as described in the following sections.

4. Materials and methods

In order to guarantee comparability of findings, this study adopts the same methods and analytical tools used in Manca (2021), and applies them to three new corpora of Facebook posts by wineries located in English-speaking countries. Furthermore, both Manca's (2021) data and the data from the new corpora are further investigated in order to establish the communicative role of specific relevant elements. This facilitates comparison of the current data to the other linguistic studies of the language of Facebook posts, namely Bianchi (2017a, 2017b). The materials and methods used in the study are described in the following sections.

4.1. Materials

Manca's (2021) study collected data from wineries in the two topmost English-speaking wine-producing countries in the world – the USA and Australia;[3] this study extends the analysis by considering data from the next two English-speaking wine-producing countries in the global list – South Africa and New Zealand – and also from the UK, this latter being an interesting 'emerging' English-speaking country in the production of wine. For each country, an Internet search of the top wineries provided a list of candidates; however, inclusion of a winery in the corpus depended on the winery's presence and frequency of posting on Facebook. This explains the eventual unevenness in the number of wineries considered per country (see Table 1).

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[3] https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/wine-producing-countries (accessed April 2022).

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All corpora were collected during the time span from 1 January 2021 to 31 August 2021; all the Facebook posts belonging to that time span were manually saved into separate text files, one file per country. Table 1 provides a summary description of the five corpora.

CORPUS	COUNTRY	N. FACEBOOK POSTS	N. WINERIES	TOTAL N. WORDS
Australian Wineries Facebook corpus (AusWiFaC)	AUS	273	5	13,957
US Wineries Facebook corpus (USWiFaC)	US	309	4	12,577
South African Wineries Facebook corpus (SAfWiFaC)	SA	238	4	11,619
New Zealand Wineries Facebook corpus (NZealWiFaC)	NZ	301	3	17,323
UK Wineries Facebook corpus (UKWiFaC)	UK	451	5	35,147

Table 1
Description of the five corpora selected for analysis.

4.2. Methods

Each corpus was analysed using Text Inspector, an online language analysis tool created by Stephen Bax. Among other things, Text Inspector retrieves and quantifies metadiscourse markers according to Hyland's list (e.g. Hyland 2005), then modified by Bax *et al.* (2019).[4] The metadiscourse markers retrieved by the software were manually checked, and incorrect identifications were assigned to the correct category or removed from the final counts. To this aim, a corpus oncordance was used. Furthermore, to make sure that all attitude adjectives, adverbs, and verbs were identified, the oncordance was set to produce separate word lists for each grammatical category and the lists were manually scanned searching for candidate items. The frequency of occurrence of items was normalised to percentages. Similarly, questions – belonging to the engagement markers category – were counted in MS Word, and the row figures retrieved were transformed into percentages over the total number of words of the corpus, for direct comparison with the other markers.

Quantitative analysis was followed by a qualitative analysis of selected relevant markers. Qualitative analysis aimed at establishing the communicative role of the observed elements.

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[4] https://textinspector.com/help/metadiscourse/ (1.4.2022).

5. Findings

In this section, for an easier and clearer comparison, Manca's (2021) data are reported on a par with the data from the new corpora. The data are provided in table format and also graphically by means of bar charts. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 report quantitative findings, while section 5.4 offers a qualitative analysis of specific markers; furthermore sections 5.3 and 5.5 discuss the quantitative and qualitative findings, respectively.

5.1. Interactive resources

Table 2 reports percentage counts of interactive resources for the different countries, while Table 3 zooms in on transition and frame markers. The same values are graphically shown in Charts 1 and 1a, respectively.

INTERACTIVE RESOURCES	NZ	SA	UK	US	AUS
Total transition markers	4.62	4.29	3.98	4.40	3.55
Total frame markers	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.04
Endophoric markers	0.69	0.39	0.70	0.25	0.11
Evidentials	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.05
Code glosses	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.02

Table 2
Percentage counts of Interactive resources, by type.

TRANSITION MARKERS	NZ	SA	UK	US	AUS
Additive	4.16	3.78	3.57	3.90	3.20
Comparative	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00
Consequential	0.14	0.13	0.16	0.20	0.14
Adversative	0.20	0.33	0.15	0.20	0.09
Temporal	0.12	0.05	0.10	0.10	0.12
FRAME MARKERS	NZ	SA	UK	US	AUS
Sequencing	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02
Text stages	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01
Discourse goals	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01
Topic shifts	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01

Table 3
Percentage counts of Transition and Frame markers, by type.

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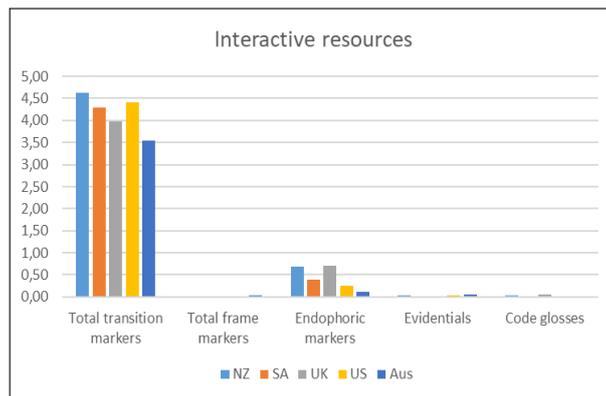
Chart 1
Interactive resources, by type.
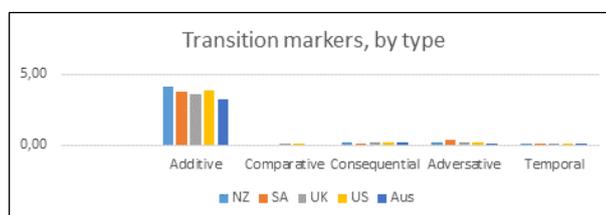
Chart 1a
Transition markers, by type.

As Chart 1 shows, the five corpora share the same general picture. The most frequent type of interactive resource is represented by transition markers, extensively present in the form of additive markers, and rarely in that of consequential, adversative or temporal markers (Chart 1a). Comparative markers are almost totally absent (Chart 1a). In all these posts, ideas are thus linearly connected, and no comparisons are made.

Next for frequency of use come endophoric markers (Chart 1), almost exclusively represented by links to the winery's website or to other Web or Facebook pages connected to the winery's activities. This is no surprise, given the medium we are investigating.

Finally, evidentials, code glosses and frame markers are present, but very rare (Chart 1).

5.2. Interactional resources

Table 4 reports percentage counts of interactional resources for the different countries, while Table 5 zooms in on attitude, self-mention and engagement markers. The same values are graphically shown in Charts 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c, respectively.

INTERACTIONAL RESOURCES	NZ	SA	UK	US	AUS
Hedges	0.38	0.21	0.35	0.30	0.30
Boosters	0.16	0.51	0.32	0.30	0.20
Total attitude markers	3.99	4.45	5.35	4.60	4.10
Total self-mention	3.19	3.62	9.90	3.40	3.50
Total engagement markers	4.26	3.39	3.86	3.65	2.42

Table 4
Percentage counts of Interactional resources, by type.

ATTITUDE	NZ	SA	UK	US	AUS
Attitude verbs	0.22	0.28	0.47	0.70	0.80
Sentence adverbs	1.23	1.27	1.19	1.30	1.00
Attitude adjectives	2.54	2.90	3.69	2.60	2.30
SELF-MENTION	NZ	SA	UK	US	AUS
1st person pronouns	1.30	1.51	1.70	1.40	1.30
Possessive adjectives	1.88	2.11	2.19	2.00	2.20
ENGAGEMENT	NZ	SA	UK	US	AUS
Reader pronouns	1.54	1.51	1.83	2.30	1.40
Interjections	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Directives	2.55	1.81	1.69	1.10	0.90
Questions	0.17	0.07	0.34	0.25	0.11

Table 5
Percentage counts of Attitude, Self-mention and Engagement markers, by type.
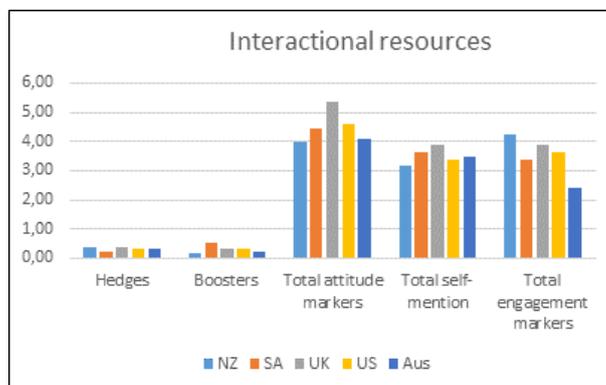

Chart 2
Interactional resources, by type
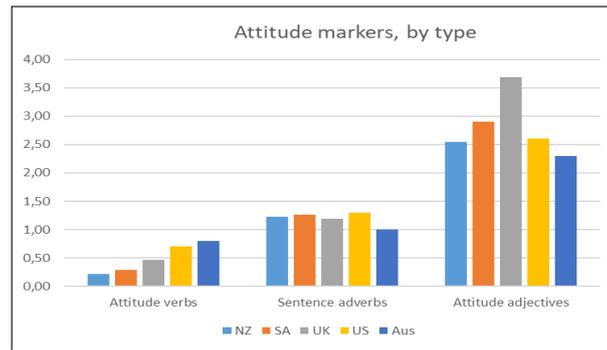
Chart 2a
Attitude markers, by type.
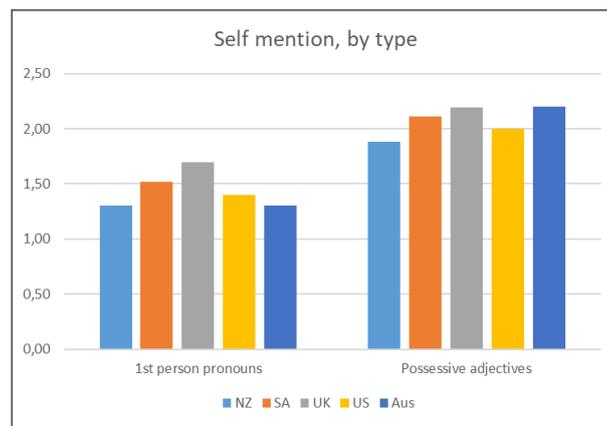
Chart 2b
Self-mention, by type.
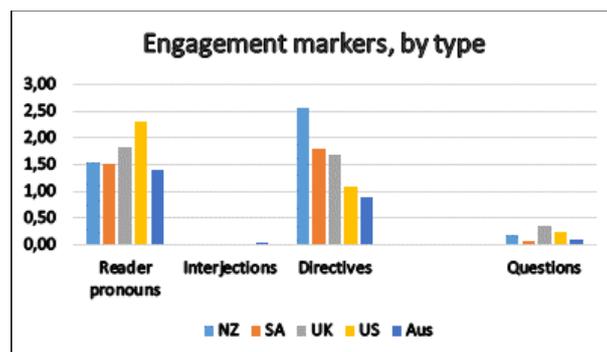
Chart 2c
Engagement markers, by type.

Once again, the general picture is characterised by similar trends across the five corpora (Chart 2). Hedges and boosters are infrequent. Of the other types of markers, attitude markers are the most frequent category in all corpora except the New Zealand one, where it is just below engagement markers. Self-mentions exceed engagement markers in the posts of South African and

Australian wineries, while the opposite is true for New Zealand and US producers.

A close-up view on attitude markers (Chart 2a) and self-mention markers (Chart 2b) shows a picture common to all the corpora. In all posts, attitude is conveyed primarily through adjectives, while sentence adverbs are less frequently used, and verbs are rarely used. Self-mentions appear in the form of both first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives, with a neat preference for the latter in all corpora.

A look at engagement markers by type (Chart 2c) shows the absence of interjections in all posts. On the other hand, reader pronouns and directives are both largely used in the five corpora, though with some frequency differences: while New Zealand and South African wineries seem to show some preference for directives over reader pronouns, the opposite is true for American, Australian and UK wineries. Finally, questions also appear, but in small percentages.

5.3. Discussion of the quantitative findings

As we have seen in the previous sections, in all the five corpora the transition category is dominated by additive markers, attitude is conveyed primarily through adjectives, and self-mentions are principally represented by possessive adjectives. These features depict a generalised, culture-independent tendency of wineries towards creating Facebook posts containing text with descriptive rather than argumentative or narrative purposes. Furthermore, the very limited presence of evidentials and code glosses could be due – as Manca (2021) suggests – to a high level of shared knowledge between the posts' authors and their readers.

The relatively significant presence of attitude markers, self-mention markers and engagement markers can all be interpreted in the light of the fact that, more or less directly, these posts promote products or services. Key elements in this form of self-promotion are attitude adjectives, first-person pronouns and first-person possessive adjectives. In fact, as Manca (2021, p. 129) points out: "Winery owners seem to emphasize and describe with a positive attitude everything having to do with their activity and with what they produce, with the aim of convincing customers to take advantage of sales and offers, to join tasting events, and to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and important days by drinking their wines".

Finally, as expected in social media communication, some level of reader involvement is always present, which the wineries achieve by addressing the readers directly – through reader pronouns, directives and questions – and by including links in their posts. However, qualitative analyses of these features will offer greater insight into the kind of dialogue that is established between writers and readers. This will be illustrated in the

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next section.

5.4. Qualitative analyses of selected features

Analysis of the relation between post and link, when such endophoric marker is present, suggests that most of these texts are self-standing (example 1), even when links to external pages are present (example 2).

(1) We're honoured to announce that our Vicar's Choice 2020 Bright Light Rosé has been awarded the Viinisuositus Rosé of the Year 2021 title [NZealWiFaC]

(2) A refreshing and lively wine, our Vicar's Choice Sparkling Sauvignon Blanc has an elegant mineral note enhanced by an effervescent sparkle, that is perfectly balanced by the creaminess of a camembert cheese. The higher acidity in this wine and acts as a cleanser when enjoying this rich and creamy style of cheese. Pick up yours for next weekend's wine and cheese night. bit.ly/3BIsKo7 [NZealWiFaC]

In a few other cases, the external pages to which the endophoric reference leads complements the main self-standing text with additional, more detailed information (example 3). These links are most frequently introduced by an imperative form that explicitly invites the reader to access the link (e.g. *Visit bit.ly/SWE_Wine to…*) or explains the presence of the link. In the latter case, specific phraseology can be observed: imperative verb [direct object] [adverb of time] [adverb of place] (e.g.: *Read the full article here: bit.ly/ESW21*; *Order today - https://hushheath.com/balfour-pink-fizz/*; *Read the article below and get planning. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/...*; *Order yours now at www.hushheath.com/shop*). Less frequently, links are introduced indirectly, and lexically marked by adverbs *here* and *below* (e.g. *They can all be viewed and booked here: https://hushheath.com/visit/).* Finally, sometimes the reason for the presence of a link is found away from the link itself. This is the case of example (4), where readers should use the link (set at the end of the post) to "sign up […] and write a personal message" (written at the very beginning of the post).

(3) Our Wairau Reserve Sauvignon Blanc was grown in the lower Wairau Valley, where the proximity to the ocean sees stronger maritime influences on the vines, in the lower Wairau Valley where the fruit for the Daytime temperatures are warm, facilitating ripening, while the night temperatures are typically cooler, promoting flavour development. Find out more about this highly awarded wine here: bit.ly/3rNmrdQ [NZealWiFaC]

(4) Sign up now and write a personalised message, and our very own winery cupid will get it delivered in time for Valentine's Day. Free to the first 100 entries - https://hushheath.com/balfour-pink-fizz/ [UKWiFaC]

Prompting readers to open a link is certainly a form of interaction with users ('hypertextual interactivity'; Manca 2021). However, it does not evolve into a real form of dialogue.

A type of resource which is expected to trigger dialogue is questions. However, a closer look at the types of questions present in these corpora shows that, overall, they are very frequently (and for some wineries exclusively) rhetorical, and their aims are limited, as illustrated in the examples below; in fact, they are typically used to attract the reader's attention on a specific topic (discussed in the lines immediately following the question; see example 5) or to suggest products (example 6).

(5)   What happens when our NZ Winemaker of the Year teams up with one of New Zealand's top chefs? An incredible winemaker's dinner at Otahuna Lodge, of course! And - best of all – there's just a handful of spaces left for the incredible evening event, held this Saturday 27th February. Nab yourself a table before they disappear: https://www.otahuna.co.nz/.../Winemaker-s-Dinner-Series [NZealWiFaC]

(6)   Searching for a well balanced, silky and elegant Chardonnay? We've got you. Our 2018 Omaka Reserve Chardonnay was sourced primarily from Saint Clair's vineyards in Marlborough's Omaka Valley where a combination of warm days, cool nights and clay-based soils contribute to greater retention of fruit flavours. Learn more about this drop: bit.ly/3nQApIJ [NZealWiFaC]

A few interesting exceptions to this pattern exist. In one of the UK wineries and in the US corpus (equally distributed across wineries), about 40% of the questions are real questions where the wineries ask their readers to post a picture or write a comment (example 7).

(7)   The news you've been waiting to hear! Tours at Balfour Winery are available NEXT WEEK! Whether you have been on a tour before or you have been wanting to visit for the first time, a tour at Balfour Winery is the perfect way to relax. We have a range of tours to choose from. They can all be seen viewed and booked here: https://hushheath.com/visit/. Will we see you on one of tours soon? Let us know in the comments! [UKWiFaC]

Hedges and boosters are exclusively used in the corpora under investigation to withhold commitment and emphasize certainty, respectively; in fact, they all appear in sentence-central position. As was the case with the US and Australian wineries (Manca 2021), this study identifies the following hedges in the new corpora: *would*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *almost*, *approximately*, *little*, *possible*, *in general*, *perhaps*, *seems*, and *sometimes*. Boosters, too, appear exclusively in sentence-central position. They include the following items: *certainly*, *really*, *absolutely*, *fully*, *highly*, *strongly*, *hotly*, *thoroughly*, *beautifully*, *unmistakeably*, *definitely*, *perfectly*, *gloriously*, *truly*. Thus, these two types of resources do not contribute to the creation of dialogue between

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writers and readers.

Finally, an analysis of the co-text of personal pronouns and adjectives will tell us how these wineries perceive themselves and their customers.

The pronoun *we* prevalently appears as the subject of euphorical feelings (45.7%) and as a descriptor of products, services, or procedures (26.6%). Examples of these roles are provided in instances 8-10 and 11-13, respectively. The remaining occurrences (27.7%) include the following roles, each weighing less than 2%: retelling events, announcing events, inviting customers to events, describing the winery's policy, giving suggestions, thanking, sharing the customers' opinions or feelings, other.

(8)   We adore this gorgeous #TravelTuesday inspiration from local glamping site Camp Quaives. [UKWiFaC]
(9)   we are delighted to lend our expertise & pioneering sparkling wines to their curated portfolio of […] [UKWiFaC]
(10) Happy Women's Day to all the exceptional wine-loving women we are privileged to be surrounded with! [SAfWiFaC]
(11) we have Gewurtztraminer, Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blanc [NZealWiFaC]
(12) we are offering free shipping within South Africa when ordering six bottles or more of our […] [SAfWiFaC]
(13) We have eliminated all glyphosate and other herbicides from the vineyard as of this year 2021 [UKWiFaC]

The collocates of the possessive adjective *our* clarify that these wineries portray themselves primarily as providers of products and services (48.7% in total), which include wine (37.3%; example 14), special packs and gift boxes (6.4%; example 15), food (4.4%; example 16) and other services (0.6%; example 17). They also depict themselves as possessors of specific structures and grounds (10.46%; example 18), vineyards (3.75%; example 19) and qualified staff (9.6%; example 20), for a total of 23.8%. About one third of these instances are accompanied by euphoric adjectives. Furthermore, wineries show themselves as event organizers (8.3%; example 21), and users of social media or other IT communication channels (6.2%; example 22). Other less frequent roles are also present in our corpus (13%). Of these occurrences, 8.5% depict the wineries as being surrounded by and close to a high number of clients, customers, friends and supporters (3.2%; example 23), being well inserted into the wider wine industry (2.3%; example 24), having special policies and caring about ecological matters (1.8%; example 25), having heritage or stories to tell (0.8%; example 26), and being suggestion givers (0.4%; example 27). The remaining collocates are difficult to classify in terms of roles.

Examples of the identified roles are provided in instances (14)-(27), one instance per role.

(14)   Our celebrated Chalklands Classic Cuvée 2018 reflects […] [UKWiFaC]
(15)   […] our carefully curated gift collection. [UKWiFaC]
(16)   and a takeaway special of our famous bacon & egg roll with coffee for just […] [SAfWiFaC]
(17)   our FREE Shuttle* now available [NZealWiFaC]
(18)   followed by live music in our barns garden [SAfWiFaC]
(19)   our estate's vineyards neighbour the South Downs [UKWiFaC]
(20)   This week our amazing team has been working steadfastly [UKWiFaC]
(21)   book one of our August events [UKWiFaC]
(22)   keep an eye on our social media account [UKWiFaC]
(23)   we wouldn't have achieved this without you, our incredible customers [SAfWiFaC]
(24)   we raise a glass to our fellow producers [UKWiFaC]
(25)   we are continuing to make progress with our sustainability goals and credentials [UKWiFaC]
(26)   learn about our pioneering history, how we craft our award-winning […] [UKWiFaC]
(27)   discover some of our top tips [UKWiFaC]

Furthermore, collocates of *us* show a wide range of roles, one being particularly prominent (46%; examples 28-29): wineries see and depict themselves as on a par with their readers, friends with whom to spend time (42%). The next most frequent roles in the *us* group see the wineries as interlocutors in virtual conversations (15%; example 30) and addressees of specific communications (10%; example 31), but also managers, workers and producers (13%; example 32). The remaining instances include the following roles, each covering very small percentages: commentators, opinion givers, offerers, living beings in a natural world, other.

(28)   keeping cosy? Us too. [UKWiFaC]
(29)   come and join us for a long lunch well worth the drive! [NZealWiFaC]
(30)   simply tell us which Greystone Wine embodies you the best [NZealWiFaC]
(31)   give us a call to book now [NZealWiFaC]
(32)   season and harvest were superb and have enabled us to produce a high-quality Pinot Noir wine [UKWiFaC]

On the other hand, as collocates of *you* and *your* show, the wineries make a great effort to make their Facebook readers feel they are special and worthy of the greatest attention (*you*: 27.9%; *your*: 45%; examples 33-34). They treat them as interlocutors in virtual conversations (*you*: 19.3%; *your*: 1.6%; examples 35-36), but also clearly and explicitly as clients and buyers of their services and products (*you*: 13.7%; *your*: 14.5%; examples 37-38). Addressees of suggestions (*you*: 8.5%; see example 39), information (*you*: 3.8%; example 40) and invitations (*you*: 1.04%; example 41), customers are sometimes openly spurred to act (*you*: 1.8%; *your*: 0.5%; see example 42-43). Furthermore, they appear as adventurous (*your*: 6.7%; example 44),

supportive wine lovers (*your*: 8.6%; example 45) and experts (*you*: 6.4%; example 46) whose needs and desires are well known to the wineries (*you*: 6.2%; *your* 2.1%; example 47-48).

(33) We raise our glasses to you [UKWiFaC]
(34) There is nothing we love more than seeing your amazing photos [UKWiFaC]
(35) What will you be reading today? [UKWiFaC]
(36) What is your favourite Nyetimber memory? [UKWiFaC]
(37) You can however, still SHOP our wines ONLINE [NZealWiFaC]
(38) Order your Simpsons' Discovery case at […] [UKWiFaC]
(39) […] July edition of The Balfour Dining Club. You won't want to miss it [UKWiFaC]
(40) We will also try and show you what frost damage looks like [UKWiFaC]
(41) our weekly Balfour Dining Club – and you're invited! [UKWiFaC]
(42) make sure you sign up to our newsletter [UKWiFaC]
(43) this is your ONLY chance to taste these three special wines [NZealWiFaC]
(44) ready to toast your al fresco adventures! [UKWiFaC]
(45) We are so thankful for your ongoing patronage! [SAfWiFaC]
(46) a stunning wine to add to your cellar collection [NZealWiFaC]
(47) Fresh, utterly moreish and so good for you! [UKWiFaC]
(48) YOUR ESTATE FAVOURITES [NZealWiFaC]

5.5. Discussion of the qualitative findings

These qualitative findings demonstrate that most of the posts analysed are self-standing texts, despite the presence of endophoric markers and questions: endophoric markers are limited to links to information pages; questions are mostly rhetorical, with the exception of a single UK winery and the US wineries, where about 40% of questions are real questions aimed at making readers post a picture or write a comment. Thus, on the whole, the kind of interaction these wineries' posts trigger is relatively limited, and dialogue with readers is largely mono-directional. In this respect, these wineries' posts compare to those of luxury tour operators (Bianchi 2017b) and contrast with posts of non-luxury tour operators, the latter being full of quizzes, direct questions, requests and surveys (Bianchi 2017a, 2017b).

Authors and readers are largely present through self-mention pronouns and reader pronouns. The range of roles described in these posts is wide, but the most prominent ones are those of seller/host vs. buyer/guest. Wineries depict themselves as highly capable and widely recognized providers of excellent products and services, who know the needs and tastes of their readers and give them suggestions. On the other hand, their readers are described as passionate wine-lovers and adventurous tasters, but also supportive friends of the wineries. In this respect, the wineries' posts compare to those of non-luxury tour operators (Bianchi 2017a) and contrast with those of luxury tour operators (Bianchi 2017b).

6. Conclusions

The quantitative analyses in sections 5.1 and 5.2 have shown that the posts of all the wineries considered – based in five different English-speaking countries, namely New Zealand, South Africa, the UK, the US and Australia – share highly similar interactive and interactional profiles. The distribution of interactive and interactional resources suggests a tendency of all wineries to write linear, easily accessible, informal descriptive posts with a promotional aim. In these corpora, all cultures deploy the same interactive and interactional instruments in highly similar patterns. The only exception to this is a slightly greater use of real questions by US wineries to increase reader engagement.

Analyses have also shown that the linguistic resources observed in these wineries' posts are not in themselves different from the ones detected in other Facebook posts with promotional intent, namely those of luxury tour operators and of non-luxury tour operators (Bianchi 2017a, 2017b). However, the flavour of the posts and their degree of interaction show an interesting level of coherence within each market sector, but differ across the three market sectors.

Thus, the deployment of metadiscursive resources on promotional Facebook pages in English appears to depend on the medium, as one would expect, but above all on the market sector. On the other hand, the role of culture appears very limited, when not entirely absent.

Naturally, the analyses in the current study do not exhaust all possible types of investigation on Facebook promotion. Extensions could include users' comments to posts and the study of non-linguistic features in the posts, such as the analysis of visuals based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006 [1996]) and Kumpf's (2000) theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, a look at the linguistic resources deployed in posts in other languages (non-English-speaking cultures) would provide an interesting insight into the role of culture in marketing on Facebook.

As a final adjunct, Hyland's metadiscursive framework – once integrated with very few 'new' markers that are specific to the Web as a medium (e.g. links) – has proven to be a useful tool for comparing Facebook posts, despite its being originally developed for the analysis of academic discourse. A possible further step in research in the area of metadiscourse could thus include the formalization of a revised metadiscursive framework specific for Web media and sub-media such as Facebook.

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