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# Forms of Hybridity in Travel Blogs

## Abstract

The technological revolution has changed considerably not only the way people travel and but also how they narrate their experiences. In this respect, the analysis of travel blogs can offer insights into the discursive and communicative practices which characterize this hybrid genre.

This study is based on the investigation of a corpus of highly visited travel blogs and aims to observe their hybridity from a multitude of perspectives. More specifically, hybridity is seen in terms of genre, (a)synchronicity, collaboration, modes of communication and level of multimodality, style, orientation, levels of subjectivity and pragmatic functions.

From a lexical perspective, specific attention is devoted to evaluative adjectives. In particular, the use of adjectives belonging to conceptual classes such as 'assessment' or 'deviance' is a widespread tool to express the blogger's subjectivity and may assume different communicative and pragmatic functions.

## 1.    Introduction and objectives

> "You see, I usually find myself among strangers because I drift here and there trying to forget the sad thing that happened to me"
>
> (Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*)

New technology has progressively affected our concept of travel and how tourist practices are represented, due, for instance, to the use of travel blogs (Pudliner 2007). Indeed, being 'always on' (Baron 2008) has led to new ways of expressing and narrating our experiences in a world where the borders between real and virtual are becoming increasingly blurred. Following Androutsopoulos (2006), this study purports to move from a merely descriptive approach to the 'language of the Internet' (a concept which needs constant problematization) adopted in travel blogs, to attempt to investigate the uniqueness of blogs from a wider discursive, social and communicative perspective. Thus, this work may be broadly placed within the area of study often described as Computer-Mediated Discourse[1] Analysis (see Herring 2001) or Digital Discourse (Thurlow 2018). In particular, it may be said to draw loosely on an adaptation of Herring's (2004) description of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis[2] with a focus on travel blogs.

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1   Discourse is here intended as language in use and with a particular focus on "language and participation in social media" and on the complexities which relate social practices and linguistic repertoires (Androutsopoulos 2014: 4).
2   More exactly, Herring (2004) identifies four levels of analysis, namely: structure, meaning, interaction management, and social phenomena. The two particularly relevant to this study are meaning and social phenomena.

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The overall aim is not just to describe the language of blogs *per se* in relation to the technology on which it is based, but to analyze it as one of the expressions of Internet discourse and as a form of social practice. Indeed, as Myers (2010: 4) claims, blogs (as well as wikis), "lead out from linguistic issues to wider issues about […] the ways we use language to locate ourselves, to state facts, to argue and to define ourselves in relation to other people." In other words, going beyond purely media-deterministic approaches[3], the intent is to focus on the community of users and on the role played by contextual parameters (Georgakopoulou 2003) in shaping travel blog discourse. More specifically, this analysis aims to offer insights into the functions and characteristics of travel blogs, comparing popular claims about this genre with the observable characteristics emerging in a corpus compiled to this end. From a discursive perspective, the study stems from the assumption that the discourse of travel blogs is particularly hybrid. The uniqueness of blogs is investigated through factors such as modes, linguistic aspects, pragmatic functions and orientation (both external and internal) and levels of adjectival subjectivity. The focus is also on the role of weblogs within the current debate on the ecology of Internet genres and on their possible developments in relation to linguistic, sociological and technological changes. Thus, this analysis also aims to offer some preliminary considerations towards the demythologization of Internet language as a homogenous phenomenon.

## 2.    The discourse of travel blogs

In recent years, blogs have been widely examined from different perspectives (for an exhaustive review see Myers 2010). Travel blogs have also been the object of numerous studies, ranging from the investigations of linguistic elements (e.g. Orlando 2009) to the impact of travel narratives on the public sphere (e.g. Thurlow/Jaworski 2014), from analyses focusing on post-modern reflexivity (e.g. Banyai 2012; Banyai/Glover 2012) to genre-based approaches (e.g. Lomborg 2009).

Travel blogs constitute important tools in online tourism communication, especially as they provide information which is linked to direct experience and is thus congruent with experience-attribute belief communication (Wright/Lynch 1995). Moreover, their multimodal nature also suits a tourism industry in which communication is inevitably based on the interplay of various semiotic resources (Thurlow/Jarowski 2010).

Different definitions of blogs have been offered (see Hoffmann 2012). Firstly, whether blogs should be defined as a genre or a medium has been the subject of extensive debate (see Garden 2011). Indeed, by and large, it may be argued that a blog is a particularly complex tool which aims to reach a series of social and interactional objectives, such as sharing information of interest or providing a form of self-expression, as well as fulfilling a promotional and persuasive function. At the same time, it can also be defined as a genre and, more specifically, from a Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) perspective, as "an author-driven, asynchronous and informal genre of CMC that uses various modalities and entails some interactivity" (Lomborg 2009). However, offering a concise definition for such a complex concept inevitably implies some necessary shortcomings. Firstly, it should be pointed out that the author-driven aspect can also infer the existence of multiple authors and the active contribution of readers and other sources. Secondly, the asynchronicity of a blog is manifest in that posts are made available in reverse chronological order with specific dates. However, a blog itself may also include specific tools such as synchronous chats. It may therefore be argued that asynchronicity characterizes this genre without excluding the potential coexistence of synchronous tools. Thirdly, the informality of the genre is what expressly typifies personal blogs, but the level of formality may be said to develop along a continuum, to the extent that other forms of blogs, especially those of a specialized nature, such as professional, political, or legal, may be highly formal. Finally, the level of interactivity is also adjustable and may be implicit and presupposed, or more explicit and made evident through readers' posts.

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3   For a discussion of media or technological determinism see Bainbridge (2016).

As a matter of fact, new-media texts are often explicitly heteroglossic, comprising multiple types of voices (Androutsopoulos 2010, 2011). In particular, blogs are one of the tools which epitomize the participatory nature of Web 2.0, in that users' participation and interaction are made manifest. For instance, comments are contributed by different readers, who somehow become reader-writers. However, it should be pointed out that their influence is rather limited as they do not have any specific decisional power in the definition of the structure and organization of the blog.

Dialogicity is a particularly distinctive trait of a blog, which may also be seen as polylogic, given the (potential) multitude of voices involved. The dialogic/polylogic aspect makes a diaristic blog considerably different from a personal journal. Indeed, a personal weblog, while sharing some of the characteristics of a traditional diaristic genre, is meaningfully different not only in terms of medium and technological aspects, but also as regards content, language, audience, interactional dynamics, level of interactivity and dynamicity. In other words, a travel blog shares some macro thematic aspects with a travel journal, while displaying completely new contours. In particular, the expressive function is significantly combined with informative and persuasive purposes, which are certainly not as palpable in a paper journal, which is generally meant to be read exclusively by the writers themselves. In this regard, existential authenticity and self-branding, two seemingly irreconcilable concepts, often intersect in a blog (van Nuenen 2016).

Mortensen and Walker (2002) see blogs as existing between the private and the public sphere, and thus they may be described as privately public or publicly private (Lange 2007). According to Miller and Shepherd (2004), it was indeed the emergence of new social trends, such as the blurring of the borders between public and private, that created a demand for the blog. Travel blogs lie in between these two spheres in that they may range from more personal instruments intended as a diary (nevertheless made available for public perusal) to thematic blogs where the personal aspect seems less evident. Notably, blogs may also be divided, following Hartelius (2005), into topic blogs (group blogs) and individual blogs (personal blogs). The former are generally characterized by polyphonic participation, whereas the latter are the expression of a single voice, which, however, is inevitably intertwined with other views.

## 3. Materials and method

For the purpose of this analysis, a small corpus consisting of 40 travel blogs (TB corpus) was compiled, amounting to approximately 105,000 tokens. More specifically, the blogs selected at the time of collection were identified according to the following criteria: they were the most popular ones during the fourth quarter of 2015 in terms of visitor traffic[4] (Stabile 2016), they included elements posted in the two weeks prior to corpus compilation and they were written in English. As popularity, recency and language were the main criteria adopted, the themes display some heterogeneity, ranging from backpacking to luxury travelling.

Constructivist in scope, this work aims to investigate the forms of hybridity which typify and operate within the sphere of travel blogs, adopting a multi-perspectival approach. Indeed, hybridity in travel blogs may be observed from a variety of perspectives, among which we find: (a)synchronicity, collaboration, modes of communication, style, and orientation (Section 4.1), genre (Section 4.2), as well as pragmatic functions and levels of subjectivity (Section 5).

These aspects were analyzed through the observation of the sites in their entirety. However, for practical reasons, only the first level of site structure was considered for the investigation of the expression of subjectivity through adjectival elements, as that required a detailed linguistic analysis.

Starting from the consideration that the incidence of evaluative adjectives is generally significant in tourism communication, the analysis also aimed to describe the functions that different evaluative adjectives assume and the multiplicity of communicative objectives that they perform.

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4   The list can be found here: http://www.theexpeditioner.com/the-top-50-travel-blogs-4th-quarter-2015/.

The study is inherently qualitative in that it intends to contribute knowledge about TBs through description, interpretation and understanding (Patton 2015) of the communicative and linguistic processes that emerge. In particular, although some data on statistical frequency are offered for clarifying purposes, the main aim is to attempt to problematize the role of evaluative adjectives and to describe the multiple functions that the same adjectives can fulfill.

Adjectives were automatically identified through the POS tagger 'Stanford Log-linear Part-Of-Speech Tagger'[5] (Toutanova et al. 2003); the automatic tagging process was subsequently checked manually. The assignment of adjectives to specific classes was also conducted manually. In this case, the researcher's intuition unavoidably played a role. However, two coders evaluated the documents independently and, despite the apparently elusive nature of evaluative adjectives, the level of intercoder agreement was initially 85%. Disagreements were resolved through consensus discussion.

## 4.     Multi-perspectival investigations of hybridity

### 4.1.  Forms of hybridity

In her classification, Baron (2008) distinguishes between synchronous and asynchronous forms and between one-to-one and one-to-many in terms of participants. Following Baron (2008: 14), a blog may be defined as an asynchronous one-to-many form of communication. As mentioned above, regarding synchronicity, the communicative process generally implies a certain time span between the production of a text and its reception. However, blogs may also include synchronous tools such as chats, thus emphasizing the hybrid nature of the genre.

Blogs imply readers' co-participation. This happens, for example, through the assumption of the importance that readers attach to the existence of the blog itself, and the consequent need to create and maintain a link with the users:

> Get updates (for free): I invite you to receive my free food and travel updates. Just enter your name and e-mail below, and click 'Get Updates'. I'll send you a couple messages per month with some of my best food and travel tips.

Moreover, co-participation can also assume active contours, for instance thanks to the comments posted by the users, when this function is available. In particular, blogs tend to include specific 'leave a comment' sections, where people can write their opinions or add information about a certain topic:

> 4 days ago: I've just returned from Namibia and loved it. It is so different from South Africa, Swazi, etc. We stayed at four Gondwana properties and loved them but Kalahari Anib was the best! Stayed about 16 days but that wasn't long enough either! Love it there!

Thus, hybridity of users also emerges, and creators and readers of texts belong to a virtual community which inevitably displays multifaceted traits (for a description of online/virtual community see Androutsopoulos 2006).

A blog is also hybrid in terms of communicative modes and is inherently multimodal, as written texts are combined with a plethora of other elements such as podcasts, video and audio material, pictures or drawings. Moreover, electronic language has been defined as a fourth dimension beyond spoken, written and gestural language (Crystal 2011). However, it may also be seen as a supra-dimension which somehow incorporates the others. From another perspective, blogs may also be placed along a continuum extending from written to spoken language (Frehner 2008).

The linguistic hybridity of travel blogs is a particularly complex aspect. Indeed, the existence of Netspeak as a monolithic linguistic and discursive entity is highly questionable from an empirical perspective. The fact that a blog is, by its nature, an Internet-related genre does not necessarily imply that it automatically presents all features generally associated with Netspeak. For

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5   The program can be downloaded from http://nlp.stanford.edu/software/tagger.shtml.

example, Crystal (2011) lists the use of phonological approximation, acronyms, lack of punctuation, spelling variation (among others) as elements of Netspeak. In the blogs analyzed here, these elements appear quite sporadically, are limited to user comments and generally do not pertain to blogger content:

> REPLY: Agreed with what Dave said, stick to goal *u*'ll be there!

In a similar vein, Soffer (2012) also shows that CMC generally makes vast use of onomatopoeic expressions and words, in line with the processes used in comics, and different strategies are employed to indicate paralinguistic elements and prosodic aspects. However, these features often emerge in text messages, chats or social networks, but their presence in blogs, although interesting, is more episodic.

Blogs may include graphic forms, such as emoticons, where the importance of visual communication is made self-evident. As the term itself suggests, emoticons are particularly useful to synthetize the expression of an emotion through simple symbols. A preliminary investigation seems to indicate that these forms are also statistically more frequent in users' comments rather than in bloggers' texts:

> REPLY: So, let's see next time in Barcelona! :-)

However, some bloggers may also sporadically make use of them:

> My 2 months trip in the Philippines is coming to an end :([6]

Clearly, the specific type of blog influences the style used. Some blogs maintain a formal style which is closer to written language, while others tend to include conversational features and move towards a colloquial style typical of oral communication (Myers 2010). The professional or semi-professional[7] travel blogs investigated here, while maintaining a certain level of informality, do not frequently present the colloquialisms or spelling peculiarities typical of other forms of CMC.

Travel blogs are also hybrid in terms of orientation. Djonov's (2005) framework focusing on logico-semantic relations in websites offers a useful interpretation which can be successfully applied to blogs, especially as regards the concept of orientation. Drawing on Martin (1992), Djonov (2005) distinguishes between *external* and *internal* orientation. Externally oriented elements construe a connection with the text-external world. Thus, hyperlinks creating external relations are considered externally oriented. Conversely, the elements of the blog which have an intratextual or metatextual function are internally oriented.

Links permeate travel blogs and may refer to other parts of the blog or to external resources, and, in some cases, there may be affiliate links:

> You can read about my experience using rail passes by clicking this link.

> The link below is a super thorough guide to creating a successful travel blog. In the next few months I will expand this guide but the link below is a great place to start.

> Some of the links on Solo Traveler are affiliate links. If you buy a product or service by clicking on an affiliate link Solo Traveler will get a small commission.

The blogs analyzed show hybrid orientation forms. Indeed, they contain a series of externally and internally oriented elements, such as menu titles, which metatextually anticipate the content accessible within that menu. Thus, for instance, the word *videos* is a form of internal orientation,

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6   Any inaccuracies present in the original texts have been preserved.
7   The level of professionalism also varies considerably. While blogging may represent an activity for amateurs, popular blogs worldwide are often highly professional. This is confirmed by the existence of professional associations of travel bloggers (e.g. PTBA, Professional Travel Bloggers Association).

which provides the user with information about the media available on that page, which can in turn lead to a text-external resource.

## 4.2. Generic hybridity

With the advent of internet technologies, many novel genres have emerged (Crowston/Williams 2000). A classification of web-based genres is particularly complicated, especially from a user perspective, as confirmed by Santini (2006), who demonstrates the high level of disagreement among users asked to label these genres.

Some very broad criteria to classify Internet genres have been suggested (Crowston/Williams 2000), namely: reproduced/replicated; adapted/variant; novel/spontaneous. The first group includes those paper genres which are simply reproduced or replicated on the Internet, e.g. an eBook. The second category implies an adaptation, as in the case of an eBook containing modifications (e.g. hyperlinks). Novel/spontaneous genres are those whose creation has been directly determined by the advent of the Internet, e.g. FAQs.

However, these distinctions are not exempt from criticism (see Herring 2013) and are not automatically applicable given the inherent hybridity of Internet genres. Rather, these categories have to be intended as flexible, dynamic and ever-changing, in line with the constant evolution of language used in digital genres and their progressive creolization.

A product like a blog is inevitably difficult to classify according to these criteria which ultimately place genres along a continuum, from pre-existing to novel forms. Indeed, while some scholars have defined them as somehow indigenous to the web (Wagner 2004), others (Miller/ Shepherd 2004) would rather conceive them as adapted genres. Herring *et al.* (2004) underline the strong relationship between web- and paper-based personal journals so that weblogs may be seen as a reproduced genre to a certain extent. Thus, they are intended as being significantly sourced from an existing genre, but the distinctiveness of new technical affordances renders them new from a number of perspectives. Ekdale et al. (2010) conceptualize the blog in terms of medium, which can in turn include several different genres.

Blogs may also be intended as a supra-genre containing different sub-genres[8], such as the travel blog. Travel blogs, in particular, are constantly enlarging the scope of possible sub-genres and, while generally keeping the format of a public diary, they have the potential to move beyond the constraints of this form.

Consequently, travel blogs are characterized by generic hybridity, which is determined by the coexistence or constant reference to a multitude of genres, and is determined *in primis* by the intertextual and hypertextual nature of a blog. The notion of blog generic hybridity is particularly germane, given the complexity of the genres at play and the (relatively) new issues generated by forms of communication in which multimodality and the interplay of different semiotic resources assume a key role.

## 5.   Fulfilling multiple pragmatic functions through adjectival evaluation

### 5.1. Categorizing subjective adjectives

Subjectivity may be investigated by focusing on the use of specific classes of subjective adjectives and how they are rhetorically exploited within texts. It should be noted that several classifications[9] of adjectives have been suggested, ranging from morphological to semantic, as well as

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8   As Puschmann points out, "while virtually all formal technical criteria and at least some formal-linguistic aspects are shared between the super and subgenres, it is (ironically) function which differs among subgenres and remains unspecified in the supergenre" (Puschmann 2009: 54).
9   See Marquez (1998) for an extensive review.

from syntactic to functional approaches[10]. In this work, I draw on Kerbrat-Orecchioni's (1980) seminal classification as well as that of Edo Marzá (2011), which are in line with a functional-pragmatic approach and can thus prove useful to investigate pragmatic hybridity, intended as the concomitant realization of multiple pragmatic functions. Kerbrat-Orecchioni bases her classification on the existence of objective and subjective adjectives. The latter are then divided into emotional and evaluative, and evaluative into non-axiological and axiological. According to her interpretation, non-axiological adjectives imply an evaluation of the modified noun from a qualitative or quantitative perspective, have a gradual nature and do not express any emotional compromise on the part of the utterer (e.g. *ample, cold, small*). Conversely, axiological items are completely subjective by nature and the evaluation of the modified noun is expressed through a positive or negative judgement (e.g. *excellent, incorrect, lovely*).

Obviously, such distinctions are to some extent inevitably dependent on the researcher's interpretation and in some instances a clear collocation within a specific conceptual class may not be possible. Moreover, some shortcomings are inexorably present. For instance, it has often been pointed out that the existence of a non-axiological category is problematic in that its items seem to exist as a contrast to axiological examples rather than because they share a specific set of common characteristics. A detailed quantitative investigation of axiological and non-axiological adjectives in travel blogs would go beyond the scope of this study, but understanding their characteristics is purposeful in that some classes of axiological adjectives have been included in my framework of analysis. Indeed, these distinctions are functional to this investigation, not so much as to determine the type of adjectives prevailing, but rather to observe, from a qualitative perspective, how they may fulfill different pragmatic purposes and be used by bloggers to achieve their communicative objectives.

The use of subjective adjectives seems an endemic characteristic of travel blogs, especially given that very often bloggers aim to emphasize the uniqueness of their journeys, as well as their very personal nature. In particular, evaluative adjectives can be used for argumentative and persuasive purposes (Swales/Burke 2003) and are indicative of the type of relationship which the bloggers strive to establish with their potential audience. More specifically, different classifications of evaluative adjectives have been proposed. Drawing on Kebrat-Orecchioni (1980), Felices Lago (1997) presents a functional classification of the axiological parameter which is based on the following concepts: aesthetics; emotion/behavior; function/pragmatism/adequacy; importance; intellect; truth; vitality; religion; economy/material. Other useful categorizations taken into account in this analysis are Hewings' (2004), Swales and Burke's (2003), and Edo Marzá's (2011), which are outlined in Table 1.

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10  For instance, different classifications have focused on aspects such as: prototypicality ('central' vs 'peripheral'/ 'non-central'; see Quirk et al. (1972: 234) *inter alia*; see also Fragaki (2009) for a critical review); semantics (e.g. Morzycki 2015); syntax (e.g. Ferris 1993).

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| Felices Lago (1997) | Hewings (2004) | Swales/Burke (2003) | Edo Marzá (2011) |
|---|---|---|---|
| aesthetics | interest | acuity | aesthetic appeal |
| emotion/behavior | suitability | aesthetic appeal | general appraisal |
| function/ adequacy pragmatism | comprehensibility | assessment | deviance |
| importance | accuracy | deviance | emotional appeal (not aesthetic) / sensory |
| intellect | importance | relevance | size/strength |
| truth | sufficiency | size | |
| vitality | praiseworthiness | strength | |
| religion | perspectiveness | | |
| economy/ material | | | |

Table 1. Parameters for the classification of adjectives

## 5.2. Framework of analysis

My framework of analysis is based on the identification of ten classes of evaluative adjectives, namely:

- intellect
- aesthetics
- assessment
- deviance
- relevance/prominence
- size
- strength
- sensory
- function
- veracity

Intellect includes both Swales and Burke's (2003) conception of acuity and Felices-Lago's (1997) notion of intellect and refers to adjectives defining features of the human mind, especially in terms of intellect and intelligence (e.g. *silly, clever, smart*). Following Edo Marzá (2011: 118), the aesthetic appeal includes "instances based on visual appeal, appearance, image and beauty." Thus, it moves away from the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values, which are instead included in the sensory appeal (e.g. *ugly, smart, handsome*). Assessment, in Swales and Burke's (2003) terms, refers to a general evaluation of things. In this case, adjectival evaluation is offered from an overall perspective and often emphasizes the extraordinary/excellent (or terrible/bad) nature of an item (e.g. *good, horrible, incredible, terrible*), which can be expressed more or less overtly. Deviance adjectives are based on the relationship between a certain entity and the expectation linked to such an entity (Swales/Burke 2003). In particular, I suggest a distinction between basic deviance and extended deviance. The former exclusively includes elements which specifically refer to variation in relation to a reference standard from an overall perspective (e.g. *funny, odd, standard, typical, unusual*). Conversely, what I define as extended deviance also includes all adjectives expressing a comparison with other elements according to specific characteristics (e.g. *unique, safe, famous, easier, exclusive*). The relevance/prominence class includes both Swales and Burke's

(2003) notion of relevance and Felices Lago's (1997) interpretation of importance. These adjectives denote how close the entity is to the field or the area of knowledge being discussed and what their prominence and importance is within the field (e.g. *central, essential*). Loosely drawing on Edo Marzá's (2011) emotional/sensory category, sensory adjectives denote appeals to human senses (e.g. *cold, sour, soft*). Size adjectives subjectively qualify entities in terms of size (e.g. *wide, tiny, huge*), while strength ones do so in terms of strength (e.g. *weak, strong, powerful*). Function comprises Felices Lago's (1997) concepts of function/pragmatisms/adequacy and includes adjectives denoting a certain level of pragmatics, easiness, difficulty (e.g. *complex, hard, easy*). Finally, veracity refers to the level of truth, probability, and correctness of an item, in line with Felices Lago's concept of truth (e.g. *false, faulty, right*).

## 5.3. Results

Table 2 presents the different classes investigated and relative evaluative adjectives, listed by frequency within each class. *Hapax legomena* and words which did not have a frequency > 0.01% within the corpus, corresponding to the (rounded) value of 10 occurrences, are not listed in the table, but are calculated in the total number of occurrences.

| *Classes* | | *Adjectives (by frequency)* | *Occurrences (per 100,000 words)* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intellect | | creative, interesting, interested, smart, aware, clear | 29 | |
| Aesthetics | | beautiful, gorgeous, picturesque, luxurious, bright, smart, stylish, elegant, panoramic, attractive, styled, lovely, pretty | 157 | |
| Assessment | | good, amazing, perfect, real, interesting, super, fantastic, wonderful, incredible, natural, exciting, excellent, amazing, fabulous, terrible, gorgeous, ideal, spectacular, fair, fascinating, ultimate, impressive, dramatic, positive, boring, awful, bad, horrible, special, committed, magnificent, outstanding, exceptional, exquisite, dull, unbelievable | 1,023 | |
| Deviance | Deviance (1) | crazy, typical, weird, standard, unusual, funny, odd | 172 | 977 |
| | Extended Deviance (2) | easy, cheap, popular, unique, safe, famous, easier, exclusive, professional, ancient, traditional, fast, affordable, hidden, classic, original, rich, busy, lower, frequent, exotic, secure, innovative, modern, antique, informal | 905 | |
| Prominence/ Relevance | | important, major, crazy, typical, weird, central, essential, standard, serious, successful, key, unusual, leading, effective, suitable, convenient, funny, relevant, famous, major, important, efficient, successful, odd, top, fundamental, remarkable, basic, peripheral | 865 | |
| Size | | small, little, huge, large, big, minute, tiny, teeny, tremendous | 573 | |
| Strength | | powerful, strong | 10 | |
| Sensory appeal | | delicious, fresh, sweet, comfortable, smooth, refreshing, soft, airy, yummy, tasteful, good, sour, smooth, cool, hard | 117 | |
| Function | | easy, practical, ready, hard, complex, useful | 73 | |
| Veracity | | possible, wrong, true | 25 | |

Table 2. Classes of adjectives in the TB corpus

The results show that adjectives included in classes such as 'assessment' or 'deviance' are predominant. As will be discussed later, they allow bloggers to express their subjectivity through adjectival evaluation and may assume multifaceted pragmatic functions, ranging from informative to persuasive, from expressive to social ones.

Before proceeding, on a practical note, it should be pointed out that, clearly, the same adjective may belong to different classes according to the contextual elements. The figures indicated for each class refer exclusively to the number of occurrences considering the specific sematic value of different adjectives in context. As Swales and Burke (2003) themselves admit, categorization processes inevitably imply (yet again) subjective choices. For instance, Edo Marzá (2011) includes the qualitative adjective *gorgeous* in the assessment category, but Table 2 shows that its usage in the corpus can be ascribed to both the aesthetic and assessment classes according to the contextual features. As a matter of fact, in the following example, this word may be intended as an overall positive assessment of the city Rio de Janeiro:

> Daily Rio Life – A Canadian girl living life to the fullest in gorgeous Rio de Janeiro.

In other cases, its aesthetic value may be identified as the predominant:

> Gorgeous handwoven bowls – watch as the artisan makes them in front of you.

Similarly, adjectives such as *smart* had to undergo a contextualization process in order to be assigned to a specific class (for instance, intellect rather than aesthetic appeal):

> Moreover, much of Kangaroo Island's wildlife is nocturnal, so a night tour is often a smart option.

> Tip: As a hot spot in the professional circle for after-work drinks, it is advisable to dress smart casual to blend in with those style city workers.

Moreover, in the coding process, the evaluative meaning of the adjective was considered. Indeed, some items may have an evaluative or non-evaluative meaning, as happens in the case of *active*:

> as your account is open, active and in good standing (Non-evaluative)

> but as an extremely active outdoors kind of gal (Evaluative)

This categorization of evaluative adjectives necessarily needs manual intervention in that decontextualized analyses may lead to the inclusion of adjectives into competing classes. Dubious instances inevitably remain, but this kind of classification can offer a general understanding of the main forms of adjectival subjectivity present in popular travel blogs. Consequently, the same evaluative adjective may display a flexible and dynamic nature and fulfill different functions.

Table 3 offers an overview of the main classes of adjectives present in another tourism genre, namely the promotional hotel website.

| Classes | Occurrences | Frequency (per 100,000 words) |
|---|---|---|
| Aesthetic appeal | 321 | 201 |
| General appraisal | 1306 | 822 |
| Deviance | 721 | 454 |
| Emotional/sensory appeal | 924 | 581 |
| Size/strength | 32 | 20 |

Table 3. Classes of adjectives in hotel websites (adapted from Edo Marzá 2011)

Although this classification is based on a different number and different types of classes (in relation to Table 2), it is clear that the incidence of evaluative adjectives is significant in both tourism genres, especially compared to other fields. For instance, given their nature, it is predictable that

academic genres present a smaller number of evaluative adjectives. For merely illustrative purposes, one can take into consideration the frequency of evaluative adjectives[11] emerging in the MICASE corpus[12] (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English).

In this regard, the most significant class (from a frequency point of view) is 'Prominence/Relevance'. However, it includes only 317 occurrences (per 100,000 words) in the MICASE corpus, whereas the TB corpus presents 865 adjectives (per 100,000 words) belonging to this class.

The higher frequency of evaluative adjectives in the TB corpus emerges clearly in all classes. This is obviously linked to the different nature and the different pragmatic functions displayed, but this difference is also determined by the fact that a travel blog is by definition based on personal recollections of travel experiences which include creative processes and are characterized by a significant level of subjectivity in terms of adjectival use. Indeed, the use of adjectives belonging to conceptual classes such as 'assessment' or 'deviance' represent a widespread form of expression of the bloggers' subjectivity, which may assume different pragmatic functions.

In particular, the most recurrent adjective is *good*, which is unsurprising given its multifaceted nature and its pervasive use, followed by hyperbolic choices such as *amazing* and *perfect*:

> Not only is Milan is (*sic*) Italy's fashion and business center, it's also home to da Vinci's The Last Supper and the amazing Duomo Cathedral.

> Why Airbnb is the Perfect Way to Explore Europe

All classes include instances of adjectives which contribute to fulfilling specific functions. The informative, expressive and persuasive functions, for instance, are cross-sectionally present. By means of an example, the following excerpt shows a vast series of evaluative adjectives which belong to classes such as aesthetics, assessment, deviance, and sensory:

> This *cute* café right on the main drag is *famous* and serves what I can only call American fare: burgers, pasta, sandwiches, and salads. While *expensive* (it's Iceland, yo!), it's also damn *tasty*. They offer *excellent* coffee and pastries, and you'll find lots of people reading and writing in their *comfy* chairs and at tables

Evaluative adjectives contribute to providing information about the café, always through the blogger's lenses of subjectivity, but they also allow him/her to expressively narrate personal experiences. Finally, they also assume an argumentative and persuasive function. By convincing the user about the quality of the café, the author also nurtures the readers' involvement and promotes the blogger's self-image, thus increasing the perceived usefulness and value of the blog.

Declarative subjectivity is expressed through the semantic and rhetorical value of adjectives, in particular of axiological nature. Indeed, axiological adjectives such as *good*, *nice* and *correct* permeate the texts:

> Where do I find *good* travel deals?

> […] meaning you could book a *nice* hotel for 120/130 euros per night

These adjectives are linked to the expression of a judgment. In particular, by providing a qualitative evaluation based on the expression of a positive or a negative judgment, they reflect the blogger's subjective evaluation in relation to the modified noun and thus may represent a fruitful argumentative tool within the rhetorical pattern of the blog. Somehow, these adjectives may be seen as an epitomization of the subjectivity of human language at large and in particular of a genre which presents a high level of personalization. Consequently, this process contributes to achieving an expressive objective. At the same time, these adjectives also assume a clearly persuasive

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11 Only the classes contemplated by both categorizations – those offered in Section 5.2 and in Swales/Burke (2003) – have been investigated.

12 The MICASE corpus includes approximately 1.8 million words of transcribed speech from the University of Michigan (see Simpson et al. 2002).

meaning in that they support the logical argumentation of the text aiming to lead the user to share the blogger's view. The expression of subjectivity through adjectival usage also seems to be characterized by the presence of positive adjectives, which is also to some extent related to the process of emphasizing those aspects which are beneficial to the blogger's online avatar (Papacharissi 2012). Indeed, the self-promotional features of blog narrative are manifest and clearly mark a line between the personal, intimate account typical of traditional diaristic writing and blogging.

## 6. Conclusions

The observation of contextualized linguistic elements within travel blogs may allow us to delve into the complexities which characterize the hybrid nature of these digital products. Each item is observed through localized, contextual and particularistic lenses, starting from the assumption that what is mostly interesting for the investigation of travel blogs is "not so much people's use of 'the Internet', but rather how they assembled various technical possibilities which added up to their Internet" (Miller/Slater 2000: 14).

Moving away from the study of blogs as a form of Netspeak and focusing rather on their relevance as social constructs, this study has observed some of the characteristics which allow us to define blogs as discursively hybrid. In particular, hybridity in blogs may be observed from a variety of perspectives, among which we find: genre, (a)synchronicity, collaboration, modes of communication and level of multimodality, style, orientation, levels of subjectivity and pragmatic functions.

In particular, as regards generic characteristics, instead of heralding the existence of a homogenous new text type which is clearly distinguishable from others, it may be argued that we are dealing with the constant creolization of a genre, which is remarkably hybrid and subject to contamination from other genres, as happens with most new media products. Indeed, digital genres constantly cross-fertilize from linguistic, formal and technological perspectives and assume dynamic and often unstable contours.

In terms of adjectival evaluation, this analysis also advocates that this type of evaluation represents a resource for the *in situ* management of pragmatic functions, as well as for the promotion of self-presentation and the maintenance and creation of interpersonal relationships. In other words, this investigation suggests that the realization of different pragmatic functions also occurs through the use of specific evaluative adjectives, thanks to the dynamic unfolding of adjectival evaluation in relation to given pragmatic purposes.

Indeed, blogging assumes a series of functions, one of which is a social one. In particular, being much more than a personal journal and having a multifaceted and varied target audience, a blog may serve as a way to maintain social relationships and, especially, create new ones.

Travel blogs evidently play a role in the production and consumption process in the tourism industry (see *inter alia* Zehrer et al. 2011). Undeniably, not only do people use travel blogs as a form of reproduction of their experiences, often in an emotionally laden way, but they may also influence consumer choices and have an instructional nature. Thus, we may argue that travel blogging has moved from a more personal and sometimes (perceived as) narcissistic way of presenting a journey to a consolidated professional practice. In this view, a seemingly trivial and mundane activity such as the recounting of travel experiences online is instead an intricate universe in which a high level of functional and pragmatic complexity is present.

On a practical note, the study of influential travel blogs may be of interest to those involved in courses in tourism in order to understand how the objective of creating and managing readership is achieved. The specific linguistic and discursive features of travel blogs are not always included in tourism textbooks, and learning approaches based on the use of authentic travel blogs may allow students to enhance their understanding of the lexico-grammatical patterns which characterize this text type, the importance of which within the tourism industry is constantly growing.

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