Interactions with readers through online specialised genres:
Specificity or adaptability?

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Abstract

Success in written academic communication depends on the presence of elements related to author-reader interactions which supplement propositional information in the text, help readers reach the intended interpretation and shape the author’s identity. But is this claim equally valid for online genres? This new environment demands an adaptation of the role of authors, texts, and readers concerning (a) a re-structuring of texts to fit the margins of the screen; (b) a new type of non-linear structure, with no specific reading sequence, which often blurs authorial intention; (c) a new type of reader that does not read in a linear way, but often engages in multi-tasking, is used to processing small chunks of text and often browses without a predictable reading sequence; and (d) a new context of text processing. This chapter addresses these qualities of electronic genres and their implications. For that purpose, 4 different academic texts will be analysed: (1) an academic printed journal uploaded online without variations, Computers in Human Behavior; (2) an online journal, First Monday; (3) several entries of a specialised native discourse on the Internet: Second Life New World Notes; and (4) a popular native online discourse, the technology blog by The Guardian.

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to comment on the alterations that Internet may bring about in the relationship between authors and readers through academic online texts and the consequences on the use and frequency of interpersonality markers when academic discourse is located and communicated on the Net, as compared to their offline counterparts.

We are increasingly using the Internet for our research, more and more academic texts are uploaded onto the Net, and hence more and more time is spent surfing and reading academic texts online. However, compared to traditional offline printed texts, uploading texts on the Internet involves changes in academic communication, including the options for contextualization, the author’s presence and authority in the text, the level of predictability of reading sequences and the role of the reader, because this is an environment prone to multi-tasking, to multiple and alternative routes for user satisfaction, a place where texts are no longer arranged sequentially, in a linear fashion, but link-mediated, complemented by other sources of the Net, etc. (see Yus 2010, 2011). Since interpersonality “concerns the ways that writers use language to negotiate social relationships by telling their readers what they see as important, how they believe they should select and present material for them, and how they feel about what they write about” (Hyland 2010: 116), the new environment of the Internet necessarily has to affect and alter the way interpersonality is achieved online and the actual textual markers of interactivity that academic communication on the Internet exhibits. Indeed, even though
“interaction takes place every time a reader understands a written text” (Livnat, 2012: 7), traditional conceptualizations of academic interaction as dialogic and involving two people are easier in the online medium. Besides, although academic dialogues on the Internet also exhibit an interrelatedness that is inherently dialogical and an exponent of communication as shaped by “action games” (cf. Weigand, 2010), the specificity of the virtual medium may bring about alterations in the shape and extent of these academic dialogues.

2. Three types of academic texts on the Internet

As soon as an academic text is uploaded onto the Net, alterations are created in terms of options for contextualization, quality of the author’s presence and patterns of the reader’s activity. These alterations vary depending on the type of text that is made available online.

Firstly, if the text is simply reproduced on the Net as a “pdf file” with no format or page variation, as happens to journal databases, the variations as regards interpersonality and the roles of author and reader are minimal. Although the reader of the text online has a myriad of options for contextualizing the document with parallel sources of information on the Net, the readers of reproduced texts behave as if they were holding the printed version of the article. Nowadays we rarely walk along the Journals section of university libraries, since it is much more convenient to download the file from our offices. But our academic minds are still caught in the habit of picturing these “pdf articles” as undoubtedly “printed,” that is, as “faithful reproductions of printed documents.”

Secondly, if the text is initially created offline but is then adapted to the idiosyncrasy of the Net, making it fit the link-mediated quality of online discourses, breaking the text into chunks that fit the screen and complementing it with an array of complementary discourses available on the Internet, then traces of interpersonal relationships and the roles of the author and the reader are indeed affected. Authors no longer expect a particular reading sequence and readers are freer to choose what information to process and in which order. Links to external information on the Net are also frequent and one consequence is that interpersonality is blurred somehow by unpredictability.

Finally, if the text is a native document of the Net, that is, created on a web site to be read online with the aid and options typically found in Internet documents, then alterations in its interpersonal component are radical. In this case, complements to traditional reading paths are available, the text itself makes no sense without the contextual information that Internet provides one click away. Besides, the author no longer backs up the information uploaded but, rather,
simply makes information available, without any certainty of what background knowledge is expected in the readers and what reading sequence will eventually be taken. Expectations of mutuality are also affected in an environment in which much information is available, there is a myriad of possible readers, hundreds of informational resources, and a high risk of intoxification (intoxication due to an excess of information).

3. On the offline/online quality of academic texts

The Internet alters author-reader relationships and therefore also alters the way interpersonality in achieved. Specifically, typical statements in the research on the presence of interpersonal resources in academic texts are, at least, reinterpreted as the texts move from their reproduced quality into a more adapted and eventually native specificity on the Internet:

1. In offline printed academic texts, “the writer, besides transmitting information, has to consider the reader and her/his possible reaction to the text” (Gil-Salom and Soler-Monreal 2009: 176). On the Net, though, ideal readers are difficult to predict if the text is accessible all over the world and open to any readership. The level of mutuality with the author and context accessibility are unpredictable, to a certain extent. Readers’ reactions and reading sequences are not easy to foresee and authors themselves may not back up specific paths, but simply provide readers with information arranged in a link-mediated way, as chunks of text.

2. Academic writing is not simply factual and impersonal, but also depends on interactional elements for the potential readers which supplement propositional information in the text and alerts these readers to the writer’s opinion. When this “interactional supplement” is transferred to the Internet, the presence of interactional elements depends on the way the online text fits the offline quality of academic genres. If traditional academic discourses are simply reproduced on the Net, then these elements will be preserved. On other occasions, though, when the discourse exploits the typical qualities of Internet (link-mediated chunks of text, availability of additional sources of user satisfaction, etc.) the author may “dilute” his/her presence in the text and offer, instead, open-ended options for reader satisfaction beyond a unidirectional, linear reading pattern or path. The author may not want to be “visible” but, instead, leave all responsibility for eventual satisfaction to the user. In other words, even though, on paper, communication involves a “social-interactive purpose that includes intention but goes beyond the mind of an individual and reaches the dialogue partner” (Weigand, 2010: 77), eventual interpretations by users may be less sender-supported on the Net.
3. According to Hyland (ibid: 116), interpersonality has to do with how language is used by authors to negotiate social relationships, specifically by telling their readers what they see as important and their attitude to their texts. However, on the Net social relationships are blurred in an environment where the audience is scattered all over the world; therefore, negotiations may be difficult and predictions of what might be relevant to this heterogeneous audience may be a challenge for authors. What is important to authors is not truly effective if there is no mutuality of information with readers, and this may be difficult to achieve on the Internet, especially concerning native texts.

4. Gil-Salom and Soler-Monreal (2011) point out that “writers express conviction in order to stress shared information but they also reduce the degree of certainty they attribute to their individual claims, assess possibilities and modulate their commitment to the truth of propositions. They allow room for alternative interpretations and soften claims in order to obtain acceptance for them and gain the readers’ cooperation.” This quality is also valid for the Internet, especially in reproduced academic texts or adapted ones, where writers have an audience “in mind” even if they are not sure of how many people will actually access the document or of the degree of mutuality existing between the author and the potential readers. In these reproduced or adapted texts, the author “claims for the significance and originality of research have to be balanced against the convictions and expectations of readers, taking into account their likely objections, background knowledge, rhetorical expectations and processing needs” (Hyland 2008b: 7). However, as the text moves into a native quality in which there is an inherent danger of scattered reader sequences (against the desired action-reaction sequences that build up prototypical dialogues, see Weigand, 2010: 114), authors tend to leave all responsibility for acceptance of propositions to the readers. Nevertheless, they may also follow the radically different strategy of expressing a higher sense of certainty and presenting claims explicitly so as to keep users interested in their documents while, at the same time, stressing that authors are the single authorities who can make personal claims in the research.

5. Gil-Salom and Soler-Monreal (ibid.) also comment that “readers are invited to become actively involved in the discourse and participate in negotiating the status of the information presented.” This active involvement may be fostered on the Internet, where interactions with readers are more likely and easier to sustain than in traditional academic communication (for example through printed journals and books). It is thus easier to achieve an understanding with others in dialogic interaction (Weigand, 2010: 67). Indeed, and unlike printed documents, readers of Internet documents can comment on the article, engage in (a)synchronous
conversations with the authors and foster a higher sense of community than the one found offline (cf. Livnat, 2012: ch. 5).

6. Besides, “the process of writing involves creating a text that we assume the reader will recognise and expect and the process of reading involves drawing on assumptions about what the writer is trying to do” (Hyland 2010: 117). On the Internet, though, author-reader relationships are different if native online academic texts are involved, since the author loses much of the responsibility of the eventual interpretation of the text and the reader is much more active in choosing a reading pattern and complementing it with the myriad of alternative routes to satisfaction on the Net. In other words, even though authors have communicative purposes that determine their linguistic actions (i.e. Weigand’s 2009 “language-as-dialogue”), sometimes authors assume that eventual interpretations and reading sequences will differ from the ones predicted.

7. Academic communication relies on the expectation of mutual background information upon which new research is constructed. As Hyland (ibid.: 120) correctly states, “novelty is related to proximity by appealing to what is assumed about readers’ knowledge and interests. Newness is not a property of the ideas themselves, but a relation between ideas and communities as professional writers package material for particular readers.” Again, on the Internet there is less predictability of the quality of readership and the amount of information that is supposedly shared between the author and the reader. Specifically, authors of native academic texts on the Net face a loss of control over the readers’ background knowledge, mutuality of information and interests.

8. The same applies to author-reader engagement, defined as “an alignment dimension of interaction where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognising the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations” (Hyland ibid.: 125). But the very notion of engagement might be problematic in the case of native online academic texts, where authors lose much of their authority and responsibility of reader’s reading sequences, and readers are much more active in choosing what information to process, in which order, in which format, which link to follow, etc.

A typical example of how the Internet alters the traditional roles (in printed academic texts) of author and reader and also how it influences the availability and use of specific contextual information is the academic weblog. Blogs are web pages which have evolved into more interactive forms of Internet-mediated communication. Unlike the static quality of traditional
web pages, which only made manifest information to passive readers, the level of interaction that blogs achieve today makes it possible to obtain a mutuality of this information (Yus 2011: 95). Besides, blogs entail changes in the way academic communication is achieved and how the background knowledge upon which it relies is manifested. Several aspects deserve attention:

1. In the communication established through offline printed academic texts, readers look for the information that might suit their research interest in a cumulative way. Key academic sources are read sequentially and complemented with other sources of interest. The reader is active in looking for satisfaction and the author seeks involvement with the reader and enhances interpersonality with a number of linguistic markers such as hedges, boosters, etc. On the Internet, several tools such as the so-called RSS (Rich Site Summary) feeds, alert readers of new, updated content in sites of interest and hence allow readers to keep up with many weblogs (and an increasing number of other websites), without navigating the actual web pages. In fact, this convenient method for monitoring large numbers of sources has led to a widespread use of RSS feed readers (Efimova 2004). This means that on many occasions it is not the author who underlines what might be relevant to the reader, but a piece of software does the job of feeding the reader with what might be relevant to him/her.

2. In traditional printed texts for academic communication, there is a unidirectional arrangement of information that follows the strict pattern of printed pages (in Western countries, a left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading path). Information in an academic text can be later complemented with more bibliography but there are no “distributed conversations” among authors or between authors and readers beyond the traditional forms of academic interaction (an example being the typical “reply-to article”). On the contrary, academic weblogs, encourage the creation of “distributed weblog conversations” Discussions are scattered across many weblogs, also known as “blogologues” or “blogosphere stories.” These are open-ended and relatively easy to join at any point in time since many participants try to summarise earlier arguments to make their own posts meaningful and information eventually relevant to their readers (Sperber and Wilson 1995). On the other hand, they may be difficult to follow by outsiders, and weblog authors themselves need a variety of tracking tools to trace them (Efimova ibid.). Hence, even though it is true that “communicative actions will always be dialogically oriented, either as initiative actions which make a dialogic claim or as reactions which are expected to fulfil this very claim” (Weigand, 2010: 74), interpersonality towards other users may be diluted or diffused due to this scattering of traditional forms of dialogue on the Internet.

3. Printed academic texts exhibit rigid forms of connection between authors and readers.
Interpersonality markers are fixed, predictable, and part of “the jargon” of academic research publications. On the Internet, the “open nature of weblogs supports establishing cross-disciplinary connections that fuel development of innovative ideas” (Efimova ibid.). In this digital environment, we wonder whether interpersonality should be replaced, perhaps, with a more appropriate term such as crosspersonality.

4. In traditional academic communication, authors use interpersonality markers to stress and take the existence of shared knowledge and mutuality for granted. But readers are supposed to take an active role in tracing, locating and incorporating this supposedly shared information into the academic discussion. This quality differs from the use of markers on the Net. As Ewins (2005: 369) underlines,

The fact that weblog archives contain or link to things we have written in the past is of particular advantage, since so much academic endeavour is concerned with adding to bodies of knowledge and, on a personal level, building a reputation for our own contribution to knowledge. If others can see not only our presence in the sense of a contactable representation of ourselves and what we are saying now, but also what we have said in the past, it is easier for them to get to know us and our thoughts. In effect, everyone has access to our back catalogue.

5. In printed academic communication, there is a strict structuring of arguments and little room for reader involvement, and even the reader’s presence is marked textually by the author. Academic weblogs differ dramatically from printed texts, since these “are written in order to share experiences rather than just display them, and for that the readers need to be able to find the books, music or web sites mentioned. Where academic writing is structured by the rules of the causal argument, a weblog is structured by time and the impulses of the day, documenting rather than structuring the trail of thought” (Mortensen and Walker 2002: 261).

6. In printed academic texts, the links to external material are centred upon the bibliographical section. Readers do not actively take part in discussions with authors but, rather, tend to engage in ex post facto communication based on mutuality of interests. By contrast, when academic texts are located in weblogs, these texts “link to external sources as well as to other weblogs. Extensive discussions take place between blogs, with links referring to previous comments in the conversation. These dialogues, or perhaps better, polylogues, can seem complicated in that the structure is associative and idiosyncratic rather than hierarchical and
externally ordered” (Mortensen and Walker ibid.: 266).

7. Besides, printed academic texts exhibit an inherent “logic” to the way they should be processed and complemented with new information. As a contrast, weblogs are chronologically ordered, rather than ordered according to the logic of an argument or the persuasive patterns of rhetoric. Their order is determined by the time of thinking. In contrast to the logical and topical organisation usual in academic writing and note-taking, blogs are chronologically ordered. Writing in a medium... which encourages a different way of structuring thought can enable us to see differently (Mortensen and Walker ibid.: 266).

8. Finally, it should be stressed that interpersonality markers in printed academic texts are the writer’s choice and readers are, at most, implied in the writing but not present and accessible in any direct way. The reader’s knowledge of previous research is expected, maybe even taken for granted, but is not directly available to the reader at the moment of reading the printed academic text. Weblogs are different in the sense that when writing in a weblog one is forced to confront one’s own writing and opinions and to see them reflected in the words of others. The discussions are much more open and also more permanent than discussions in a seminar room or at a conference. A blog is a permanent archive (as long as the writer preserves the archives and the server remains online) and it is searchable. What you write in your blog can be quoted and discussed in any forum (Mortensen and Walker ibid.: 269).

4. Interpersonality markers of academic texts on the Net

The main issue of this chapter is to determine the extent of the aforementioned alterations that academic texts undergo in the transfer from mere reproduced texts to adapted and native texts on the Net, specifically on the role and presence of interpersonality markers within these online texts as compared to offline printed ones. In a new medium in which the roles of the author and the reader are reinterpreted and context accessibility cannot be predicted accurately, surely typical interpersonality markers will also be influenced or affected by the quality of online texts.

As academic texts abandon their offline quality in the reproduced-adapted-native evolution, they are likely to exhibit less similarity in the quality and quantity of interpersonality markers to
their offline counterparts. Specifically, the main hypothesis of this study is as follows:

General hypothesis
The more native academic texts are, the higher the alterations in the quality and quantity of the interpersonality markers (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, etc.), regarding the author’s presence, the indices of mutuality of knowledge and the reader’s engagement inside the text.

To test this hypothesis, an analysis was carried out of 4 different academic texts located on the Internet and which exhibit different qualities fitting the reproduced, adapted or native attributes:

(a) 21 issues of an academic printed journal uploaded online without variations, *Computers in Human Behavior*, a typical example of a reproduced discourse on the Internet.
(b) 24 issues of an online journal, *First Monday*, which was created online but following all the procedures of printed journals. But it also includes links and, therefore, can be labelled as “adapted,” that is, characterised by the same idiosyncrasy of printed journals but exploiting some of the potential of the Internet.
(c) Several entries of a specialised native discourse on the Internet: *Second Life New World Notes*, a blog on this 3D avatar-mediated environment, a single-authored series of texts that take advantage of all the potential of the Internet (links, videos, photos, dynamic graphs, inter-relationship with other blogs...) but whose author expects a specific audience that shares a certain mutuality of specific information on the qualities and protocols of this environment.
(d) A popular native discourse on the Internet, the technology blog by *The Guardian*, which also exploits all the potential of the Internet but has a wider audience in mind. Besides, the entries are written by multiple authors.

The total word count of the samples collected in these 4 discourses is similar in all cases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOURNAL TITLE</th>
<th>ABBREVIATION</th>
<th>WORDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computers in Human Behavior</td>
<td>(henceforth CHB)</td>
<td>132.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Monday (Web Journal)</td>
<td>(henceforth FM)</td>
<td>132.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New World Notes (blog Second Life)</td>
<td>(henceforth SL)</td>
<td>134.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Blog (The Guardian)</td>
<td>(henceforth TG)</td>
<td>134.768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following interpersonality markers were analysed: (1) common-ground markers (typical of
printed texts), (2) what I call qualification “on the fly” (typical of the popular press), (3) hedges, (4) boosters, (5) attitude markers and (6) author’s presence vs reader’s involvement.

4.1. Common-ground markers

In scientific texts, authors claim mutuality and common ground with their readers. Indeed, “readers are often familiar with prior texts and research, and can see whether procedures and materials have been used appropriately and what results mean, so writers can describe their work economically” (Hyland 2010: 121). Linguistically, authors usually indicate the existence of this mutuality of knowledge with markers which make reference to previous research such as “in previous research/studies...” Besides, authors stress the information that is not only assumed to be shared but also underlined as a foundation in the research with markers such as “it is clear (that)...,” “obvious(ly)...,” “it is (well) known (that)...,” “it is evident (that)...,” and “it is assumed (that)....”

Hypothesis 1

As the text moves into a native quality and the text is opened to a wider variety of readers with more unpredictable mutuality of information, the authors tend to use fewer markers of common ground. Besides, in many native texts authors often upload information, making it available to a wide array of readers, rather than stressing what is important, let alone assuming mutuality of previous research. This shift in the author-reader assumptions has an impact on the quality and quantity of the interpersonality markers used in online native texts.

Analysis

Several common-ground markers were counted in the data: “clear(ly),” “obvious(ly),” “(well) known,” “evident,” “earlier/previous (work, research, studies...)” and “assumed” (see Table 1; percentages are for occurrences every 10,000 words), as exemplified in (1a-f).

(1) a. It is clear that people need better strategies to cope with information overload (CHB).
   b. Obviously there is nothing inherently wrong with gathering data on individuals (FM).
   c. The use of the short message service (SMS) of a mobile phone is also known to boost social contacts (CHB).
   d. It’s evident from a series of failed legal actions against file-sharing networks (TG).
e. This study concurs with previous research based on SIDE (CHB).

f. It’s often been assumed that social pressure was the first line of defense in protecting Residents’ creations (SL).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHB</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>TG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clear(ly)</td>
<td>20 (1,504 %)</td>
<td>21 (1,580 %)</td>
<td>5 (0,370 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obvious(ly)</td>
<td>10 (0,752 %)</td>
<td>19 (1,429 %)</td>
<td>12 (0,890 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(well) known</td>
<td>13 (0,977 %)</td>
<td>17 (1,279 %)</td>
<td>13 (0,964 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evident</td>
<td>1 (0,075 %)</td>
<td>11 (0,827 %)</td>
<td>1 (0,074 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earlier/previous (work)</td>
<td>106 (7,974 %)</td>
<td>55 (4,139 %)</td>
<td>3 (0,222 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assumed</td>
<td>6 (0,451 %)</td>
<td>9 (0,677 %)</td>
<td>2 (0,148 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL: 156</td>
<td>TOTAL: 132</td>
<td>TOTAL: 36</td>
<td>TOTAL: 52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Common-ground markers (on paper, typical of offline academic texts).

As shown in Table 1, the common-ground markers are more frequent in the reproduced journal *Computers in Human Behavior* (CHB) and in the adapted online journal *First Monday* (FM), which basically reproduces the qualities of an offline academic journal (although it is created and distributed online). On the contrary, blogs such as *Second Life* (SL) and *Technology Guardian* (TG) tend to make information available to users without qualifying or making the intended or presupposed common ground explicit. This is especially noticeable in the case of the marker “previous/earlier research,” so typical in offline printed academic documents but almost nonexistent in native online texts. The explanation is clear: since the sources and previous research can be accessed with a mere click, there is no need to foreground previous research. A link will easily do the job.

4.2. Qualification “on the fly”

Unlike printed academic texts, the popular press cannot normally take for granted the existence of mutuality and common ground of the information that is essential in order to follow the text correctly and which somehow marks community membership. These claims of mutuality may have to be readjusted even more on the Internet, where anybody can access documents and there is even lesser control on the author’s side over who is accessing the text. Besides, information accepted by the members of the community as mutual and shared is not delimited and restricted to a number of core academic sources, but scattered on the Net in many cases, which makes communal claims more difficult. An effect may result, which can be labelled *common ground on the fly*, if this background information is not actually taken for granted but, instead, the necessary
Hypothesis 2a
Qualification “on the fly” will be more frequent in SL (Second Life) and TG (Technology Guardian) than in CHB (Computers in Human Behavior) or First Monday (FM). Besides, if the online journal FM takes full advantage of the potential of the Internet, qualification “on the fly” should also be more frequent in FM than in CHB.

Analysis
Several markers of the qualification “on the fly” were counted in the data (see Table 2; percentages are for occurrences every 10,000 words), as exemplified in (2a-e).

(2) a. Aion Inven is a popular online AION user community operated by Inven (CHB).

b. A key feature in the security of one system is the presence of other, more poorly secured systems (FM).

c. An inactive is defined as someone who hasn’t logged on for 30+ days (TG).

d. Extrinsic motivation refers to committing an action because of its perceived helpfulness in achieving value (CHB).

e. It corresponds to the unique parlance used in the ultra–Orthodox sector (FM).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>CHB</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>TG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>popular</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>key</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defined as</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refers to</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like... (simile)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corresponds to</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** Qualification “on the fly” (on paper, typical of popular online texts).

The hypothesis was not confirmed. The total occurrences of markers on-the-fly are not conclusive enough to confirm the hypothesis. Both reproduced and native texts exhibit markers such as “popular” (more frequent in SL, though), “key,” “defined as,” “refers to” and “corresponds to.” In any case, as the shift from purely academic journals (CHB and FM) to more popular blogs (SL and TG) takes place, a similar situation is found on the Net to the one...
commented upon by Hyland (2010: 122) when he states that authors of popular texts cannot assume shared knowledge and have to make connections to what readers are likely to know already. This involves “constantly defining new concepts as they are introduced and making explicit links between entities. They therefore tend to avoid jargon and offer an immediate gloss where this is not possible. Clarifications are often inserted on-the-fly where the writer assumes an unfamiliar usage or where complex processes are related to more familiar everyday events through simile.” Therefore, hypothesis 2b is raised in this chapter:

Hypothesis 2b
Similes, with the specific “X is like B” construction, are more frequent in SL and TG than in CHB and FM.

Analysis
This hypothesis was confirmed by the data. The native texts of SL and TG contain many more instances of similes than the reproduced CHB and the adapted FM. Examples of similes in the data include (3a-g):

(3)  a. This [demo] is much like what some species of fireflies do: there are firefly species in Africa that synchronize their flashing such that entire trees end up flashing in sync (SL).
   b. A witty, building-size vending machine designed to disgorge free Nissans like they were cans of soda (SL).
   c. Like a snowstorm in a globe, if you guard it well, it will remain, but everything else around you is changing (SL).
   d. It was sort of like being a horror film-maker and meeting Hitchcock (SL).
   e. You can’t compare Second Life with WOW because you have to pay for WOW and you don’t have to pay for Second Life. This is like comparing apples with oranges! (SL).
   f. The setting makes it look like you’re about to be brainwashed or tortured into giving up the names of “anarchists” (SL).
   g. It’s like being stopped by every single person who passes you on the street, if the street were London’s Oxford Street (TG).

4.3. Hedges
According to Hyland (2010: 123), hedges and other devices which allow writers to comment on the factual status of propositions are therefore abundant in research genres, indicating the degree of caution or assurance that can be attached to a statement. Writing for a peer audience, academics must carefully handle their claims to avoid overstating their case and risk inviting the rejection of their arguments. By withholding complete commitment to a proposition, hedges imply that a claim is based on the writer’s plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge while opening a space for readers to dispute interpretations.

On the Internet, the presence of hedges is influenced by two contradictory qualities of the Net. On the one hand, they should be more frequent on the Internet, since texts are created in an environment in which readers can easily check the extent and accuracy of the author’s claims by accessing the archive of the journal, certain web pages or previous research. As a consequence, authors should be cautious on how heartedly they make claims, and hedges are useful for that purpose. On the other hand, though, as in the popular press, many authors of native academic texts, who fight for the reader’s attention in an environment prone to multi-tasking, will probably engage in “removing doubts and upgrading the significance of claims to emphasize their uniqueness, rarity or originality. This can be seen in the way that the same research is reported in a popular science journal, with the tentativeness removed in favour of unmodified or boosted assertions which amplify the certainty of the claims and, in so doing, the impact of the story” (Hyland ibid.: 124) and therefore hedges will be removed so as to fill the text with assertiveness.

Hypothesis 3
The use of hedges in the four sources of texts is likely not to be significantly different due to the uniqueness of the Net, which favours both a decrease and an increase of their use.

Analysis
Several hedges were analysed quantitatively in the data (see Table 3; percentages are for occurrences every 10,000 words), as exemplified in (4a-g).

(4) a. Intensified group identification might or might not be welcomed depending on virtual
communities’ diverse goals or motives (CHB).

b. It *appears that* teens tend to include a lot of information about themselves on their online profiles (FM).

c. Second Life *seems to* be following the same basic path (SL).

d. Continuity of usage of a software package is *probably* some form of record (TG).

e. Mediated social relations *possibly* arouse even higher emotional levels (CHB).

f. Evidence *suggests that* individuals are more honest and realistic in the way in which they present themselves to others in anonymous environments (FM).

g. Mental health experts are beginning to recognize their appeal as *potentially* addicting (SL).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHB</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>TG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>may / might / could</td>
<td>449 (33,777 %)</td>
<td>549 (41,317 %)</td>
<td>306 (22,701 %)</td>
<td>552 (40,959 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appear(s) to / that</td>
<td>1 (0,075 %)</td>
<td>24 (1,806 %)</td>
<td>5 (0,370 %)</td>
<td>24 (1,780 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seem(s) to</td>
<td>13 (0,977 %)</td>
<td>39 (2,935 %)</td>
<td>51 (3,783 %)</td>
<td>37 (2,745 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably</td>
<td>8 (0,601 %)</td>
<td>12 (0,903 %)</td>
<td>60 (4,451 %)</td>
<td>49 (3,635 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possible / possibly</td>
<td>72 (5,416 %)</td>
<td>59 (4,440 %)</td>
<td>49 (3,635 %)</td>
<td>40 (2,968 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggest(s)</td>
<td>72 (5,416 %)</td>
<td>129 (9,708 %)</td>
<td>34 (2,522 %)</td>
<td>51 (3,784 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potential(ly)</td>
<td>47 (3,535 %)</td>
<td>65 (4,891 %)</td>
<td>24 (1,780 %)</td>
<td>42 (3,116 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.** Hedges (withhold complete commitment to a proposition).

As Table 3 shows, the number of hedges is higher in the reproduced academic text (CHB) and the adapted text (FM) but, as predicted, variations in the figures does not seem to be significant enough to draw further conclusions.

4.4. Boosters

Boosters “allow writers to express certainty in what they say and to mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with readers. While they restrict opportunities for alternative voices, they also often stress shared information and group membership as we tend to get behind those ideas which have a good chance of being accepted” (Hyland 2008a: 7). This dual value of boosters is of particular interest to the analysis of Internet texts, since authors of native online documents are not usually willing to restrict alternative voices. Quite on the contrary, in an environment that favours interaction, authors expect comments and replies, rather than a unidirectional flow of information. Since authors compete for the users’ attention, they are very interested in making
both their own and their readers’ voices heard and underlining the existence of certain shared knowledge, as part of a wider community of researchers.

Hypothesis 4
Boosters are more frequent in native academic texts due to the desire to stress community membership in an environment prone to scattered users within online communities and also due to the authors’ desire to make their voices heard among competing sources of information on the Net.

Analysis
A number of typical boosters were counted in the data (see Table 4; percentages are for occurrences every 10,000 words), as exemplified in (5a-f).

(5)  
   a. This is one that definitely wouldn’t attract any comments (TG).
   b. How severe the disapprobation is surely depends on the amount or degree of wastefulness (FM).
   c. Knowledge sharing through higher ICT utilization proves more effective (FM).
   d. Photo and video sharing websites are obviously more photo-or video-oriented (CHB).
   e. As you may expect this is a highly subjective number (SL).
   f. This data clearly illustrates that the Apple ecosystem extends far beyond the iPhone (TG).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHB</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>TG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>definite(ly)</td>
<td>1 (0,075 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>14 (1,038 %)</td>
<td>6 (0,445 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure(ly)</td>
<td>10 (0,752 %)</td>
<td>12 (0,903 %)</td>
<td>88 (6,528 %)</td>
<td>46 (3,413 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prove(s)</td>
<td>5 (0,376 %)</td>
<td>5 (0,376 %)</td>
<td>2 (0,148 %)</td>
<td>8 (0,593 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obvious(ly)</td>
<td>10 (0,752 %)</td>
<td>19 (1,429 %)</td>
<td>12 (0,890 %)</td>
<td>26 (1,929 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>highly</td>
<td>25 (1,880 %)</td>
<td>31 (2,333 %)</td>
<td>16 (1,186 %)</td>
<td>13 (0,964 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clear(ly)</td>
<td>36 (2,708 %)</td>
<td>45 (3,386 %)</td>
<td>16 (1,186 %)</td>
<td>92 (6,826 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL: 87 (6,544 %)</td>
<td>TOTAL: 112 (8,428 %)</td>
<td>TOTAL: 148 (10,979 %)</td>
<td>TOTAL: 191 (14,172 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Boosters (express certainty and mark involvement with the topic).

The hypothesis was confirmed. More instances were found in SL and TG compared to CHB and FM. This illustrates both the authors’ awareness of the quality of “unpredictable readership” that often permeates Internet communication, and the realisation that readers of the Net have multiple sources of satisfaction and, therefore, authors have to fight for their attention. Boosters,
in this sense, are part of the array of resources that writers have to make their “voice” clearly heard in their texts.

One way to obtain readers’ attention is to underline the community membership status of the author and the reader (Hyland 2008b: 6). However, it is difficult to determine the status of academic communities on the Net, since the Internet is prone to multiple heterogeneous groupings that lack the typical interpersonal markers of community that are found in offline academic communities.

4.5. Attitude markers

Attitude markers “indicate the writer’s affective, rather than epistemic, attitude to propositions, conveying surprise, agreement, importance, frustration, and so on, rather than commitment” (Hyland 2008a: 7).

Hypothesis 5
On the Net, as texts move from reproduced into native texts and from purely academic (as CHB) into more popular forms such as blogs (SL and TG), authors tend to exhibit a higher number of attitude markers. As happens with typical attitudinal exaltation in email communication (flaming), it is likely that authors will feel less pressured to refrain from providing these markers on the Internet, where less control over “attitudinal exaltation” is exerted.

Analysis
A number of typical attitude markers was counted in the data (see Table 5; percentages are for occurrences every 10.000 words), as exemplified in (6a-e).

(6) a. It may be more acceptable for an individual to disclose their sexual fantasies in a chat room (FM).
   b. This theory is particularly suitable for studying Twitter (CHB).
   c. Rieh’s (2010) recent definition is more satisfying than that of others (FM).
   d. It’s perhaps surprising on the surface that Apple is choosing to go down this route (TG).
   e. I must disagree with Robert Scoble and others who suggest 2.0 will help drive mass adoption of Second Life (SL).
Table 5. Attitude markers (indicate the writer’s affective attitude to propositions).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHB</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>TG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acceptable</td>
<td>11 (0,827 %)</td>
<td>10 (0,752 %)</td>
<td>3 (0,222 %)</td>
<td>1 (0,074 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suitable</td>
<td>10 (0,752 %)</td>
<td>2 (0,150 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>2 (0,148 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfying</td>
<td>3 (0,225 %)</td>
<td>2 (0,150 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unwanted</td>
<td>4 (0,300 %)</td>
<td>1 (0,075 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surprising(ly)</td>
<td>3 (0,225 %)</td>
<td>15 (1,128 %)</td>
<td>9 (0,667 %)</td>
<td>13 (0,964 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(dis)agree</td>
<td>26 (1,955 %)</td>
<td>14 (1,053 %)</td>
<td>12 (0,890 %)</td>
<td>12 (0,890 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL: 57</td>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL: 44</td>
<td>TOTAL: 24</td>
<td>TOTAL: 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4,287 %)</td>
<td>(3,311 %)</td>
<td>(1,780 %)</td>
<td>(2,077 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The hypothesis was not confirmed. The analysis even revealed the opposite trend. One explanation may be that authors of academic texts in the whole range of types (reproduced-adapted-native) share a convention of how to use these markers in their texts and control the uploading and publication of their texts following similar rules of academic etiquette, regardless of the type of text, either offline or online.

4.6. Author’s presence vs. reader engagement

The first person singular pronoun “I” and adjective “my” are rare in scientific research; instead, inclusive “we/our” are preferred. According to Hyland (2010: 125), it “identifies the reader as someone who shares a point of view or ways of seeing with the writer. It sends a clear signal of membership by textually constructing both the writer and the reader as participants with similar understanding and goals.” Therefore, although reader-oriented you and your are an efficient method to engage the reader, inclusive “we” is more typical.

Hypothesis 6

Blogs, typically single-authored, tend to exhibit a higher use of first person “I/my.” Hence, it is expected that “I/my” will be more frequent in SL and TG, together with the second person, reader-engaging forms “you/your” whereas inclusive “we/our” will be more frequent in CHB and FM.

Analysis

Both the typical author-centred pronouns (I/my) the group-involving ones (we/our) and the reader-engaging ones (you/your) were analysed quantitatively (see Table 6; percentages are for occurrences every 10,000 words).
Table 6. Author’s presence vs reader’s engagement (self and identity).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHB</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>TG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We / our</td>
<td>321 / 188 = 509 (38.290 %)</td>
<td>443 / 219 = 662 (49.821 %)</td>
<td>413 / 142 = 555 (41.173 %)</td>
<td>436 / 167 = 603 (44.743 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I / my</td>
<td>261 / 67 = 328 (24.674 %)</td>
<td>162 / 34 = 196 (14.750 %)</td>
<td>1988 / 526 = 2514 (186,506 %)</td>
<td>336 / 105 = 441 (32,722 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You / your</td>
<td>27 / 25 = 52 (3,911 %)</td>
<td>119 / 40 = 159 (11.966 %)</td>
<td>845 / 221 = 1066 (79,083 %)</td>
<td>703 / 204 = 907 (67,300 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL: 889 (66,877 %)</td>
<td>TOTAL: 1017 (76,538 %)</td>
<td>TOTAL: 4135 (306,764 %)</td>
<td>TOTAL: 1951 (144,767 %)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As predicted, single-authored blogs exhibit more instances of “I/my,” but there is no significant difference in the case of “we/our.” Also predictably, the typical offline use of “we” in academic research is corroborated by the data, whereas native texts exhibit more instances of “you/your” addressed directly to the user who has chosen this Internet site among many other competing ones.

5. Concluding remarks

Internet has brought about alterations in the roles of authors, readers and context accessibility. It involves a new kind of non-linear reading in which the reader takes more responsibility in his/her eventual satisfaction and in which the author’s role is devoid of the authority that is found in traditional printed academic discourse(s). As academic texts evolve from mere reproductions into adaptations and, especially, into native texts that exploit all the potential of the Net, the presence, frequency and roles of interpersonality markers tend to differ more and more from their offline printed counterparts.

The data collected for this research shows that in the gradation of texts from their reproduced, adapted and native quality, authors progressively lose control of the interactions with readers and power over the dialogic engagement with their readers. Instead, readers of native online academic texts are more active, freer to follow sequences of link-mediated chunks of text and interpret them without the explicit support or guidance of their authors. These authors are, themselves, aware of the loss of control over the interpretation of their texts, and this awareness has an impact on the quality and quantity of interpersonality markers used in the native academic texts, compared to the reproduced and adapted ones.
References


