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ESTRATTO

Christina Samson

Boosting the Company's Identity. Point of View and Promotional Discourse Style in a Corpus of Business to Consumer (B2C) Webpages

1. *Introduction*

The Internet with its internationally operating network and multimedia functions has captured the attention of companies and advertisers, thus becoming the fourth largest medium (Janoschka 2004) for building and boosting company identity. There are various types of online communication that make it possible to attain such a goal – e-mails, newsletters, screensavers, e-sponsoring, infomercials, online games and company websites – but given the scope of the current study, I will focus on company websites.[1]

Company websites offer different marketing functions such as online two-way communication, customization, content variety and job search (Tse and Chan 2005). Moreover, every single webpage has a visual organization which allows the inclusion of several texts with diverse communicative purposes. Around the main body of a webpage there can be lists of links visually dislocated in the form of isolated noun structures (Haas and Grams 2000), or snippets of text such as navigational buttons, menus, ads and search boxes (Santini

[1] The study presented in this paper is part of a wider Italian interuniversity research project on "Keywords and perceptual/evaluative point of view in art criticism and business discourse" sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research.

2005). Additionally, webpage textuality can be affected by hyperlinking interactivity which allows website browsers to pick up searched information and skip to another page or section, thus determining a non-linear reading path (Lemke 2005). However, it is not only the option of changing reading paths but the combination of multi-semiotic resources and processes into a single speech act that make webpages more complex than traditional paper or electronic documents. Webpages are complex in that they are a hypermedia computer-mediated environment (Hoffman and Novak 1996) integrating various media (verbal, visual, sound) into a single environment, as Bondi (2009) claims. In company websites, the verbal mode can include an overlapping of informational, promotional and commercial discourses used to boost a company's image, credibility, profits and identity (Samson 2009).

A company's identity is closely linked to the point of view from which it is presented in a webpage and the style used aims at "hooking on" browsers/consumers. For such exigencies, webpage promotional discourse tends to be described as light in style derived from the use of short sentences (Nielsen 1997, 1998; Pierini 2007). But is this description valid for any Business to Consumer (henceforth B2C[2]) company website? Or are there variations among companies promoting different types of products?

Research has mainly concentrated on the use of the Internet for marketing purposes (Nielsen 1997; Randall 1997); differences between advertising on the Internet and in traditional media (Hoffman and Novak 1996; Janoschka, 2004; Richards, MacRury and Botterill 2000; Calisir 2003); e-commerce (Garzone 2002; Salvi and Bamford 2007); identities in the semiotic landscape (Campagna 2007; Denti 2007; Fodde and Memoli 2007) and visual communication in multimodality (Cranny-Francis 2004; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001). By contrast, few studies have focused on the linguistic features (Posteguillo 2003) which characterize viewpoint and promotional discourse in B2C webpages (Bondi 2009; Samson 2009; Turnbull 2009).

[2] B2C refers to businesses selling products or providing services to end-user consumers (http://www.marketingterms.com/dictionary/b2c/) on the Internet.

This paper therefore investigates how point of view and promotional discourse are realized in a corpus of webpages wherein products are described, promoted and sold (henceforth P2CWPs) in business to consumer websites. Specifically, the study analyzes the lexico-grammatical, rhetorical features and their possible variations which impact on the style of promotional discourse in the three subcorpora of P2CWPs the corpus has been divided into. These are analyzed using a corpus stylistics approach, i.e., the application of quantitative methods of text and corpus analysis to a stylistic interpretation of the findings illustrated with examples from the three sub-corpora.

Although stylistics is mostly used to analyze literary texts, McEnery and Wilson (2001) point out that the concept of style rests on the notion that authors choose to express their ideas using certain linguistic resources in preference to others. These should be measurable to some degree to increase the analytical rigour of stylistic research. Computer software allows the researcher to identify potentially significant textual features by preparing Word and Frequency lists; that is, the words in the corpora are listed according to their frequency (§ 5. Findings). Frequency lists are useful for corpora comparisons and for using the concordancer, which is essentially a collector and collator of examples. It searches the corpora for a string of letters (keyword or phrase) and presents all examples in a list with a certain amount of co-text which might provide information on possible patterns, i.e., partly fixed phrases in the co-text (Partington 1998). Since these lists can be prepared and edited in several ways, the concordances presented in this study are sentence concordances, which I consider easier to read than "crude" concordance lines. The lines are saved into a text file and edited so that the co-text for each most frequent token is approximately the transcript sentence it appears in. These resources allow a more rigorous stylistic interpretation of point of view and promotional discourse in webpage texts which are likely to go unnoticed in subjective analyses of literary and/or non-literary texts (Stubbs 2005).

2. *Point of View*

The concept of point of view can refer, in the physical sense, to the spatial and limited character of perceptual experience founded in the bodily existence and location of the perceiver in relation to phenomena. Point of view, thus interpreted, informs much contemporary research on the relation between spatial language and cognition (Tucker 2009). In Langacker (2008), for instance, spatial point of view is conceptualized as *vantage point*, the location from which a situation is observed and described, by default the actual location of the speaker.

In the mental sense, point of view refers to the writer's personal attitudes not only towards phenomena s/he as perceiver has access to from his/her particular vantage point, but also towards abstract entities such as facts or belief. The concept, therefore, evokes various diverse linguistic phenomena (Tucker 2009).

These have been studied under a variety of partially overlapping concepts, such as stance (Biber and Finegan 1989; Conrad and Biber 2000; Hyland 2005), evidentiality (Chafe and Nichols 1986), or the expansion of the grammatical category of modality in classic stylistic and narratological literature (Uspensky 1973; Fowler 1986; Simpson 1993).

More recently, Hunston and Thompson (2000) have included the foregoing concepts under the umbrella term *evaluation*, which thus comprehends manifestations of i) the speaker's or writer's opinion regarding either entities or propositions; ii) the construction and maintenance of relations between writer and reader; iii) the organization of discourse.

Following Hunston and Thompson (2000: 5), I consider point of view inherent to evaluation, that is, as the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude towards, or feelings about, the entities or propositions that s/he is talking about. In this study, point of view expresses the slant the company casts on the promotional description it provides of its products, which can vary according to the degree of subjectivity (Samson 2009). Subjectivity is commonly equated with attitudinal point of view and it is frequently remarked

that some descriptions are more subjective than others. Hence, as argued by Merlini Barbaresi (2009: 34), a describer may either downgrade subjectivity by increasing the objectivity of his/her description through transparent referents and concrete denotations (as in the case of a simple technical grid wherein stance explicitness is reduced to a minimum); or upgrade subjectivity by using lexis or lexical combinations which can escape clearly defined standards, i.e., by indulging in idiosyncratic semantic collocations, as in the case of non-routine combinations of noun phrases (NPs) explicitly including the describer's attitude to be shared with the addressee while promoting a product. A case in point is 'HemaCarotid Patch Heparin UltraThin', the name of a vascular patch which describes and identifies the type of product whilst underlining its particular positive features from the company's viewpoint.

Description in promotional discourse has the pivotal role of distinguishing one company/product from another not only by informing but also by providing a favourable representation of the company itself. Through such discourse, company websites invite their webpage browsers to accept their point of view, which the average customer automatically tends to do, even when a company indicates, along the good-bad parameter, the possible risks or negative effects deriving from using their product.

3. *Webpage Promotional Discourse*

Webpage promotional discourse is usually seen as exhibiting linguistic features similar to spoken language and characterized by personalization, persuasive force and a transactional dimension. It is generally said to be typified by short and simple sentences (Nielsen 1998, 2008); a restricted range of morpho-syntactic forms; metaphors; evaluative and superlative adjectives and a restricted technical vocabulary, as Janoschka (2004) and Pierini (2007), among others, claim. Furthermore, the tendency is to consider a generic type of public not particularly interested in looking for specialized product information as the main target of webpages/sites.

Recently these features have been only partially confirmed by a study on B2C promotional webpages (Samson 2009) wherein promotional discourse appears to be characterized by brevity and a highly evaluative impact which is transmitted to the website user in only a few seconds.

Furthermore, the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features indicate that promotional discourse varies according to the communicative purposes of the company. Thus, browsers may find a long, detailed evaluative description of a product or a simple grid containing bare technical specifications. In either case, as mentioned, the company's point of view affects the text, even when evaluation is reduced to a minimum level (Merlini Barbaresi 2009), as in a grid. The function of viewpoint is indeed to underline the individuality of the product by describing either particulars or types.

This paper, thus, attempts to highlight some of the most frequent lexico-grammatical patterns and rhetorical choices adopted in P2CWPs to promote and boost a company's identity. With the use of lexical analysis software, Oxford Wordsmith Tools 3.0 (1998), the study measures the linguistic resources which together create a style used to persuade webpage browsers in the attempt to turn them into customers.

4. *Corpora and Methodology*

The data consist of a small specialized corpus of P2CWPs selected and downloaded from company websites on the Internet. It includes about 50,000 words, relating to an existing Business to Consumer Websites Corpus I created by downloading specific webpages from the Internet within the Italian interuniversity research project COFIN/PRIN 2005-07 sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research.

Specifically, the corpus comprises three sub-corpora of about 15,000 words each regarding different categories of products:

- communication devices (mobile phones, accessories, TVs);
- vehicles (jeeps, SUVs);

- surgical tools (vascular/endovascular grafts, stents, catheters).[3]

The decision to include communication devices and vehicles was driven by the high number of advertisements in the media promoting these products among the general public.

On the other hand, the decision to collect surgical tool websites was stimulated by the personal communication with a professional[4] implementing such tools and by the wish to include products targeting a highly specialized sector of the public. This, I assumed, would entail variation in the lexical items chosen with a consequential impact on the style of promotional discourse.

The corpus was therefore designed to serve the specific function of being maximally representative of a particular language domain – P2CWPs. It is crucial to underscore that in the case of specialized corpora, to focus merely on size would be naive, as Leech (1991) and Gavioli (2005) among others argue, since what matters is adequacy in representing the genre. The major properties of a genre can be identified after a certain threshold of words instantiating specialized language is reached. The threshold is not a defined number of words, but it depends on the genre and on the size that can be reached when the collection of more texts sheds light on its repeated lexico-grammatical or discourse patterning (Ooi 2001). Therefore, a corpus of 50,000 words can exemplify a specialized corpus compiled to offer insights into the form and function of business English.

In creating the corpus I decided to concentrate on the main body of the P2CWPs in which the products are described. This meant excluding from my scrutiny images and any other graphical ele-

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[3] The P2CWPs analyzed in this study were extracted from the following websites:
Nokia: www.nokia.com
Motorola: www.motorola.com
Samsung: www.samsung.com
Volvo: www.volvo.com
Rover: www.landrover.com
Jeep: www.jeep.com
Gore: www.gore.com
Medtronic: www.medtronic.com

[4] A list of companies producing vascular and endovascular surgical tools was kindly provided to me by Dr Charl Dreyer MBChB., FCS., MMED (SURG) – Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital, Cape Town, South Africa.

ments, or texts organized by lists of links, or scattered around the main body without a linear progression.

The analytical approach followed was a mix of corpus-driven and qualitative analysis. This means that the corpus drives the initial language description (Sinclair 1991), whereas my intuitive, interpretative contribution is deferred to later. The research started with a computerized compilation of the corpus which was initially processed using Wordsmith Tools 3.0 (Scott 1998) to obtain a Word and Frequency List per 1,000 tokens of each P2CWP sub-corpus (§ 5. Findings). The data were then analyzed through concordancing to underscore the recurring collocations, that is, the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text highlighting their typicality or individuality/uniqueness (*ibid.*).

Although I began with a quantitative treatment of the corpora, this is a preliminary step to qualitative assessments of the resulting output. As argued by Semino and Short (2004), corpus-based studies need not be viewed as competing with other forms of enquiry in stylistics, but rather as strengthening the analytical rigour of stylistic research. I thus carried out a contrastive analysis of the three sub-corpora and a qualitative examination of all the texts to acquire an overall sense of stylistic variation in the P2CWPs.

5. *Findings*

Textual frequency does not necessarily correspond to what webpage browsers notice and remember in a webpage text and one of the limitations of the studies which look only at the words on a page, as Stubbs (2005) has pointed out, is to pay little attention to the relation between frequent vocabulary and content. I thus began the quantitative analysis of the P2CWPs corpus[5] by examining the Word and Frequency List of the Communications, Vehicles and Surgical Tools sub-corpora. The results are listed in Tables 1, 2 and 3, below.

[5] Some of the findings in this study are reported in an earlier study (Samson 2009).

Tokens	Frequency per 1,000 words	%
YOUR	225	1.79
YOU	207	1.65
IS	92	0.73
CAN	86	0.68
MOTOROLA	60	0.48
THIS	55	0.44
NOKIA	53	0.42
IT	49	0.39
COMPATIBLE	36	0.29
HAVE	34	0.27
DIGITAL	32	0.25
HAS	29	0.23
HIGH	26	0.21
WE	19	0.15
SAMSUNG	19	0.15
WILL	18	0.14
TAKE	16	0.13
CONNECT	15	0.12

Table 1 – Communications

Tokens	Frequency per 1,000 words	%
IS	210	1.25
YOU	134	0.80
VOLVO	129	0.77
ARE	100	0.60
YOUR	84	0.50
IT	77	0.46
OUR	74	0.44
ROVER	73	0.44
VEHICLE	73	0.44
JEEP	66	0.39
CAN	65	0.39
AVAILABLE	60	0.36
THIS	58	0.35
WE	48	0.29
HAS	46	0.27
PERFORMANCE	42	0.25
HIGH	29	0.17
PROVIDE	21	0.13
UNIQUE	20	0.12
OFFERS	18	0.11

Table 2 – Vehicles

Tokens	Frequency per 1,000 words	%
STENT	203	1.13
IS	186	1.03
GRAFT	170	0.94
VASCULAR	122	0.68
USE	111	0.62
GORE	78	0.43
ARE	65	0.36
DESIGNED	50	0.28
THIS	49	0.27
PROVIDES	44	0.24
MAY	38	0.21
STRENGTH	37	0.21
FLEXIBILITY	38	0.21
EXCELLENT	33	0.18
UNIQUE	33	0.18
OPTIMAL	31	0.17
RESULTS	31	0.17
AVAILABLE	30	0.17
YOU	30	0.17
HAS	28	0.15
MEDTRONIC	27	0.15
OFFERS	26	0.14
SHOULD	26	0.14
EASY	23	0.13
REDUCE	21	0.12

Table 3 – Surgical Tools

A comparison among the data depicted in Tables 1, 2 and 3 indicates a variance in the relatively frequency per 1,000 tokens. Table 1 – Communications – shows a relatively high frequency of possessive adjectives – *your* – personal pronouns *you* – the present tense – *is* – and the modal verb – *can*.

By contrast, Table 2 shows a slight variance in the relatively high frequency of the same tokens. Specifically, the present tense – *is* – has the highest relative frequency; it is followed by the personal pronoun – *you* – and company names. The greatest variance, though, takes place in Table 3 – Surgical Tools – with a relatively high frequency of lexical items such as the name of the tools – *stent, graft* – present tense verbs – *is, use* – and company names. By contrast, per-

son markers – *you* = 0.17 – have a very low relative frequency.

Although such lists might seem to offer only a crude kind of content summary (Stubbs 2005), they can be the starting point to examine collocations creating connotations. Thus, to uncover further layers of meaning than those provided by the single tokens – *your, you, is, can* – in Tables 1, 2 and 3, their use was checked by using Wordsmiths Tools' 3.0 (1998) Concord programme:

1) **Your** Nokia 9300 device provides a number of messaging options. **You** can set up email connectivity so that **you** have access to **your** private and work email accounts.
2) **Your** mobile business is even more convenient and time-saving. The SK65 features a full size keyboard. Now **you** can type emails and text-messages just as fast on **your** mobile phone as on **your** PC.
3) This sophisticated yet simple-to-use DVD-based navigation system guides **you** to **your** destination with GPS satellite technology and an onboard computer.
4) Prime preconditions for **you** to minimise **your** total operating costs is that **you** should be able to utilise **your** bus or coach optimally, securing the highest possible vehicle uptime.

The above sentence concordances of the personal pronouns and possessive adjectives in examples 1), 2), 3) and 4), extracted from the Communications and Vehicles sub-corpora, indicate the company's interaction with the P2CWPs' browser whilst underlining the many functional options and advantages offered by the devices and vehicles.

The addressee *you* points to an exophoric singular browser and/or a general exophoric reference represented by the wider public which thus excludes a clear-cut definition of the addressee and suggests instead a continuum between specific and generic audience, as Wales (2003) argues. The deliberate repetition of the person markers within the short sentences aims at building empathy with the browser through a colloquial style, as for instance in 1) and 2). Examples 3) and 4), however, reveal that the person markers also col-

locate with a succession of NPs – *simple-to-use DVD based navigation system, GPS satellite technology, total operating costs, the highest possible vehicle uptime* – which introduce written specialized technical discourse into the webpages. This mix of colloquial style with technical discourse in the examples indicates the lack of a clear-cut distinction between informal/formal dimensions, which should be viewed as a sliding scale (Lee 2002; Leech and Short 1981) instead of a formality scale (Joos 1961).

The findings in Table 1 and 2 highlight the relatively high frequency of the present tense – *is, have, has* – and stative verbs – *provide, offer, take, connect.* These verbs co-occur with lexical items that give prominence to particular technical features of the products and to the superiority of the various companies over their competitors, as examples 5), 6), 7), 8), 9) and 10) highlight:

5) The Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT8 cabin is distinguished by power-adjustable, deeply sculpted performance front seats.
6) Defender 90 and 110 Station Wagons are equally as good at ferrying people as they are at transporting cargo.
7) At Nokia we are sensitive to concerns about mobile communications safety issues, and have committed resources not only to sponsor ongoing research programs, but also to **provide**...
8) Our company has been developing new ways for people to **connect** – no matter where their worlds take them. Even the first hand-held two-way radio used by the U.S. Army was a Motorola design.
9) Bumper-mounted halogen fog lamps light the way on the trail or the road and *tow hooks **offer** that extra "what if" assurance.
10) A built-in loudspeaker enables hands-free talking and tri-band functionality lets you **take** your business with you to all five continents. Take your office into your own hands with this...

Furthermore, as in examples 3) and 4), the promotional discourse in examples 5), 6), 7), 8), 9) and 10) is characterized by recurring long NPs indicating an overlapping of technical informative and purely promotional discourse which, as already mentioned, cre-

ate a mixed style in the webpages. Example 10) additionally encodes metaphorical movement in the P2CWPs.

The examples also show how the viewpoint of the companies underscores the technical superiority of their products. This is linked to the frequent repetition of the company's name – *Motorola, Nokia, Samsung, Volvo, Rover, Jeep.* Self-mention, is, indeed, a strategy adopted to identify companies with innovative solutions and activities (Samson 2007), since companies cast themselves in the role of ego and relate everything to their viewpoint (Wales 2003).

In the P2CWPs, the name of the company is the "eye" through which browsers must see the products. These are related to the marketing strategy attempting to persuade the browser/customer that by purchasing that specific product their lives will improve and they will be able to showcase a particular lifestyle. Examples 11), 12), 13) and 14) show this:

11) From the 1930s' first practical car radio to the latest wearable cellular phone, **Motorola** has repeatedly pioneered products for the consumer marketplace.
12) With the **Nokia** 9300 device it is easy to multi-task while on a call. Gain more freedom with the **Nokia** Wireless Boom Headset.
13) Experience an instant connection with **Samsung**'s latest Push to Talk innovation. Certain cues tell the world who is on top of their game.
14) With Genuine **Volvo** Parts, you can therefore always be sure of having access to the very latest technology.

As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, modal verbs are frequently used. Their function is to underline not only the reliability of specific products and their functions, but also the trustworthiness of the company interested in satisfying its customers' needs whilst leaving them positively impressed, as examples 15), 16), 17), extracted among many, indicate:

15) Only with Genuine Volvo Parts you **can** be entirely sure that

the vehicle always behaves as expected.

16) This Samsung gives you CD-quality sound from a number of formats (mp3, aac or aac+). So you can listen to your favourite music wherever you go – even if you're staying home.
17) Created for your ultimate pleasure, its graceful looks and seamless functions will leave a lasting impression.

The superiority of the company producing the goods described is also expressed by the use of adjectives intensifying the company's and product's value, such as *high* and *unique,* which in the Communications and Vehicles sub-corpora prevalently encode the ability to satisfy customers' expectations regarding a high level of technology. This can be seen in examples 18) and 19):

18) With the S65, Siemens mobile presents a mobile phone that meets the **high** expectations of today's business people.
19) Further contributing to its aggressive stance, the Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT8 is fitted with **unique** forged 20-inch five-spoke aluminium wheels shod with **high**-performance Goodyear tyres.

As the above examples indicate, the style of the Communications webpages tends to conform more to the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features which typify the website short-sentenced light style Nielsen (1997) claims to be crucial.

By contrast, the Vehicles webpages show a relatively high frequency of the personal pronoun *you* followed by nominalizations linked to the use of present-tense verbs which constrain the light colloquial style characterizing many company websites. As mentioned, in the Vehicles sub-corpora there is a mix of informal/formal style according to the descriptive needs of the company, as shown in the above examples.

Table 3, in contrast to Tables 1 and 2, shows a higher percentage of lexical items referring to the name of the tools and of the companies than of person markers, which suggests a variance in style. As for the Communications and Vehicles sub-corpora, a word concordance analysis enables us to investigate how the name of a surgery

tool and/or its collocates encode its excellent performance for very specific purposes. Examples are provided in 20), 21) and 22):

20) Excellent Contourability: **Micromesh** geometry and segmented design helps ensure **stent** conforms to artery wall; small-cell geometry maximizes lumen coverage.
21) ...full of twists and turns. A successful journey demands a strong yet extremely flexible **stent-graft** capable of adapting to the tortuous challenges and relentless forces.
22) **Coronary stent system** sets the standards for deliverability to small vessels.

Moreover, example 23), shows how company names, or the use of a personal pronoun referring to the company itself, even if less frequent in this sub-corpus than in the Communications and Vehicles sub-corpora, perform the same function of conveying a stance by assuming responsibility for what is declared which creates a confident image instilling trust in customers (Samson 2009; 2007). This is achieved by transmitting an impression of certainty, assurance and superiority over competitors, among other things, by addressing the possible customer/surgeon:

23) To keep pace with **your** changing clinical needs, **Medtronic** explores every avenue to enhance stent performance.

As with the Communications and Vehicles sub-corpora, the description of Surgical Tools is characterized by the use of the present tense and of stative verbs, such as *provide, offer, reduce.* Examples 24), 25) and 26) show the verbs occurring in emphatic discourse with the function of accentuating the positive characteristics of the company or its product, whilst minimizing any negative operational results:

24) **Medtronic** Vascular **combines** a host of expertise to **offer** state-of-the-art solutions for coronary vascular...
25) The main body and limbs of the Powerlink stent graft **are** fully

supported by a cobalt-chromium alloy stent to reduce the risk of kinking.

26) Intergard Silver UltraThin is the only small calibre vascular graft designed to reduce the risk of graft-related infections.

As to the modal verbs used, *may* and *should* are more frequent than *can*, which instead is frequently used in the Communications and Vehicles sub-corpora. *May* prevalently expresses recommendations on the part of the company not to use the tool when complications deriving from the product itself or from other sources may arise, as (27) and (28) illustrate:

27) This device is not recommended for patients whose weight exceeds 350 lbs (150 kg) or whose weight **may** impede accurate fluoroscopic imaging. Regular follow-up including imaging of the device **should**...

28) The stent **may** cause a thrombus, distal embolization, or **may** migrate from the site of implant down the arterial lumen.

The high frequency of adjectival intensification is, moreover, used to stress the quality, functionality and reliability of the product, which, if implemented, ensures optimal outcomes, as shown in 29), 30) and 31):

29) Visualize Your Path With a Highly Radiopaque Flush Catheter. **Excellent** Fluoroscopic Visualization Highly radiopaque tip ensures **easy** visualization.

30) **Unique** Intelligent Balloon Folding and Selective Dura-Trac Coating aid in reaching and crossing...

31) Patented SLIX Valve provides the **optimal** balance between catheter maneouvreability and hemostasis.

Unlike the adjectives in the Communications and Vehicle sub-corpora, which encode capability to satisfy customers' technological expectations, those in the Surgical sub-corpus have more than one function. They not only underscore the high technical quality and

functionality of the devices, but they also create empathy with the browser by stressing the excellent results the customer/surgeon would achieve by using that specific branded surgical tool.

This functional variation of the adjectives chosen in the three sub-corpora reflects the different promotional, persuasive communicative purposes of the companies in the webpages and impacts on the style adopted. Unlike the purely promotional parts of Communications webpages, in the Surgical Tools webpages there is no light and colloquial discourse. The style is rather similar to that of scientific discourse, characterized by recurring long NP patterns (Halliday and Martin 1993), which pervade the webpages and help to concentrate information in relatively short sentences, which also serve to satisfy webpage length requirements.

These phrasal patterns contribute to the feeling that webpage texts are very repetitive and characterized by the overlapping of descriptive, informational and promotional rhetorical acts according to the company's particular point of view. A case in point is example 32):

32) HemaCarotid Patch Heparin **UltraThin** is specifically designed to enhance patch performance and clinical outcomes. HemaCarotid Patch Heparin UltraThin incorporates the proprietary UltraThin wall technology and its unique Heparin bonding process. HemaCarotid Patch Heparin UltraThin offers excellent handling and host vessel conformability with no suture hole bleeding and is indicated in routine endarterectomy procedures where the use of a patch is required.

In 32) the description progresses by providing information on the product's purpose – specifically *designed to enhance patch performance* – functionality – *bonding process* – and usability – *excellent handling*; *indicated in routine endarterectomy procedures.*

The company creates meaning by progressively and cumulatively underlining the value of its product. This is achieved by highlighting the product's qualities and presenting it from a particular point of view with the function of differentiating it from similar tools on the

market. The choice of a specific verb like *to enhance*, and of emphatic lexis like the adjectives *excellent* and *unique* contributes to instilling trust and persuading potential customers of the worth of the surgical tool.

Notably, the name of the product itself, a long elliptical NP, which corresponds to a predicative adjectival construction "X is Y", includes an evaluation – HemaCarotid Patch Heparin *UltraThin*. Moreover, the patch is not only ultra thin but it is *specifically designed to enhance patch performance and clinical outcomes.*

Thus the company, through relational processes comprising attributive/identifying clauses (Halliday *et al.* 1993), simultaneously describes the product, explains why it has been designed in a specific way and expresses a positive evaluation by using lexis that gives special prominence to the product's features. This ensures renewed attention on the part of the browser whilst the company underscores the product's performance.

The emphasis on the relevant characteristics of the product is repeated in the next sentence, which is backgrounded by the first – HemaCarotid Patch Heparin UltraThin *incorporates the proprietary UltraThin wall technology* and its *unique* Heparin *bonding process.* The third sentence – HemaCarotid Patch Heparin UltraThin offers *excellent handling* and host vessel *conformability* with *no suture hole bleeding* and is *indicated in routine endarterectomy procedures* – develops the idea of the reliability of the product's performance, while providing the browser with an explanation. Thus, the example indicates the interdependence of three different rhetorical acts: description, explanation and evaluation in boosting a company's identity.

The repetition of the product's name with its cumulative force and redundant style enhances a positive evaluation of the product and company although it does not satisfy Grice's (1975) second maxim of Quantity. This calls for avoiding contributing more information than required in order to avoid redundancy. In such a context, though, redundancy has the function of interacting with the browser and promoting the product, whilst evaluation emphasizes the perspective from which the surgical tool should be considered.

In sum, the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis

suggest that, in the P2CWPs, the lexico-grammatical items employed vary according to the point of view and the communicative purposes pursued by the companies. Such changes impact on the style of the promotional discourse adopted.

6. *Conclusion*

The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the three sub-corpora – Communications, Vehicles and Surgical Tools – of the P2CWPs corpus revealed a close link between variance in the structural organization and promotional discourse style. This changes not only according to the different communicative purposes of the companies included in the corpus but also according to the diverse types and features of the products described and promoted from the company's point of view.

My findings, unlike previous studies (Nielsen 2008, 1998, 1997; Janoschka 2004) stating that a light and colloquial style characterizes websites, or web ads in the form of banners, pop-up windows etc., reveal that such a style is mainly adopted in the purely persuasive promotional parts of B2C webpages. This occurs when the company is attempting to "sell" an image the browser/consumer could benefit from by purchasing that specific product.

By contrast, the style of webpage promotional discourse changes when the company's aim is to persuade potential customers of its product's specific features. This leads to a variance not only in the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features used but also in the style of the promotional discourse. This becomes heavily redundant and quasi-scientific although including many evaluative features.

Following from this, the style of webpage promotional discourse cannot be defined, according to the traditional dichotomy based on spoken and written text, as strictly formal or informal. Given the combination of multi-semiotic resources and processes in a single communicative act which make webpages complex contexts, I think it is necessary to view the style of webpage promotional discourse as a mix between the two dimensions which varies along a continuum

according to the real and virtual exigencies of company websites promoting their products whilst boosting their identity from a particular point of view.

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