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**ACADEMIC AND BUSINESS WEBSITE IDENTITIES:  
ANYTHING TO SHARE?**

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**1. Introduction**

The members of any specialist community produce knowledge by negotiation and persuasion, that is, by claiming, counterclaiming and persuading others of their point of view. Knowledge claims are never presented as simple matters of fact but as argumentations in the attempt to fit the context wherein actions, values and communication, in general, takes place in sync with or in coordination with others. Thus, academics/economists can make themselves visible as a who by creating a socially-situated identity and can become recognisable as a what by their actions.

Such a claim may be applied not only to academics/economists but also to companies on business websites, since both may be seen as instances of social interaction between producer and receiver. These are to be understood not as isolated individuals/entities but as social agents located in a network of social relations (Kress 1989) where language is used to negotiate social relations by acknowledging, evaluating, taking a stance while construing an identity.

Previous work has focussed on evaluation/stance in academic discourse (Bondi and Mauranen 2003; Samson 2004b; Fløttum, Dahl and Kinin 2006), or in professional/business discourse (Garzone 2002; Bargiela Chiappini 2006; Shaw 2006, to mention a few), but little research has to date explored the influence of one genre on another, that is, the influence or the “colonisation” (Bathia 2004), for instance, of the promotional genre on the pedagogical one and the commonalities that such different genres might share in construing textual identities.

Based on the analysis of two small specialised corpora, this paper attempts to fill this research gap by answering the following questions: Do academic/economists’ identities have any features in common with those construed by companies in business websites? If yes, which are the features they share most?

This paper first focuses on some concepts of genre transformation, stance and branding. It then analyses the two corpora in a quantitative and qualitative approach. The emerging results are illustrated with examples and discussed from the

two sets of data in order to highlight the devices – e.g. self-mention and attitude markers – which help to construe identity in a similar way in dissimilar genres.

## *2. A note on genre transformation*

Swales in his seminal work, states that:

“A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. The rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style” (Swales 1990: 58).

However, such a definition appears too static. It does not recognise the dynamic qualities of genres wherein many subtle individual purposes, apart from those recognised only by the expert members of a professional community, contribute to the evolution and change of genres which, as discourse, are related to the changing of cultural and social forces. For instance, when academics say something is good or bad, or likely or unlikely, they are making a personal judgement which is simultaneously an appeal to shared norms and values of a community and a display of their knowledge reliability to convince the world outside their text (Samson 2006). This complex interrelation of internal and external factors, in texts, gives way to the intertwining of discursive planes with multiple functions and to the construal of identities incorporating personal and social needs as, for instance, the case of academics. The latter can be seen as not having only a pedagogical identity but also a professional<sup>1</sup> self promotional one. Such transformational processes are termed ‘transdisciplinary dialogue’ (Chiapello and Fairclough 2002), or ‘genre colonisation’ (Bathia 2004).

The concept of genre colonisation allows to represent the grouping of closely related genres, which, to some extent, share the same communicative purposes such as, their disciplinary and professional affiliations, context of use and exploitations, participant relationship, reader/audience constraints. Furthermore, Bathia (2004) argues that colonisation involves invasion of the integrity of one genre by another genre or genre convention, often leading to the creation of a mixed genre, which eventually shares some of its genre characteristics with the one that influenced it, in the first place. Thus, the invasion of the integrity of one genre by another may be seen as a process wherein each genre internally appropriates the logic of the other as a resource for its own development.

Given these inter and intra forces at work in the evolution of genres, deriving from the manipulation of institutionalised generic forms within the broad limits of specific genres, it becomes difficult to define boundaries between and across genres. Genre boundaries are, indeed, to be seen as dynamic, constantly changing

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the different roles adopted by economists in a text, see my previous publications (Samson 2002; 2004).

in an unpredictable way just as much as discourse changes in the real world. This implies that a genre may have a complex and unpredictable communicative behaviour, typical of real life, which consequently requires a broader interpretation of the linguistic resources used by a community.

As to this point, Bathia (2004) stresses the need for a multi-perspective model of written discourse which accounts for the interaction between textual, professional, social and tactical spaces. Interaction with context means that discourse includes, in textual output, features which characterise the “real” world with its non-linguistic objectives.

Published written economics lectures (hence PWELs), may be considered, I think, a case of genre colonisation and transformation, i.e. an academic genre which crosses its boundaries by using the promotional logic which characterises business to consumer websites (hence B2CWs) and is, thus, transformed into a blended genre. Furthermore, such a process seems to be represented by what Fairclough defines as ‘commodification’:

“... the process whereby social domains and institutions, whose concern is not producing commodities in the narrower economic sense of goods for sale, come nevertheless to be organised and conceptualised in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption ... In terms of orders of discourse, we can conceive of commodification as the colonisation of institutional orders of discourse, and more broadly of the societal order of discourse, by discourse types associated with commodity production” (Fairclough 1992: 207).

From this perspective, PWELs may be viewed as an example of pedagogical genre not producing commodities, in the literal sense, but adopting the same lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features implemented in B2CWs. They can be viewed as an example of genre transformation which meets the new demands of the academic/professional community they belong to.

### *3. Stance and Branding*

In evolving to meet new needs of the community of practice which produces them, the economists in PWELs use specific features, such as stance, evaluation and branding, to achieve a more effective promotional performance.

Stance is an expression of evaluation which is understood in its broadest definition as “the speaker or writer’s attitude, viewpoint on, feeling about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about” (Hunston and Thompson 2000:5) which create an identity in the text. Hyland (2005) refers to stance as the way authors project themselves into their texts to communicate their relationship to the subject matter and the receivers, and the way their persona is socially defined. Indeed, academics do not simply represent external reality in their texts but use language to acknowledge, construct, evaluate (Hyland 2000; Del Lungo Camiciotti and Tognini Bonelli 2004; Samson 2004a; 2006) just as much as companies do in their business websites.

The attitudinal dimension of stance includes features which refer to the way academics/economists present themselves and comment on the accuracy or credibility of a claim, the extent they want to commit themselves to it and their personal authority with which they want to brand their argumentations. Attitude markers indicate the producer's affective attitude to propositions by expressing importance, agreement, difference and so on, and they are explicitly signalled by attitude verbs, sentence adverbs and adjectives. It is on the latter I will focus my analysis on in this paper.

Moreover, academics/economists need to adopt a specific position and show an authorial authority in their texts and they achieve this by self-mention, i.e., the conscious choice of the first person pronoun and possessive adjectives which allows the academic/economist/company to strongly identify with a particular argument and gain credit for their individual perspective. Personal reference is not only a clear signal to the community and the rest of the world of one's position in relation to specific issues and the field, but it also indicates one's unique point of view which marks out the difference and construes one's identity (Hyland 2005).

Similarly to the interaction developed through the forms of stance in the PWELs, in B2CWs interaction is part of what is termed "branding". Branding is how an organisation presents itself and how its audience perceives it (Drew 2002). It is the way a company delivers its identity in seconds on the Internet with the aim of enhancing the relationship between a company and its customers, since knowing how to express a brand successfully online is a vital part of Web design.

As stance in the PWELs, branding in B2CWs revolves mainly around differentiation which is intended though not only to inform and promote, but also to sell ideas, goods or services to a selected group of people. Branding in websites is one of the most important moves to enhance a positive, favourable position and image of a business to users. This is realised, as in the lectures, through the implementation of self-mention and attitude markers which underline the uniqueness of the business while conveying an identity of superiority and reliability to receivers. It is these features that I concentrate on in the next section of this paper.

#### **4. Corpora and Methods**

The data consist of 2 small specialised corpora:

1. published written economics lectures (PWELs<sup>2</sup>);
2. business to consumer websites (B2CWs<sup>3</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup> The PWELs analysed are:

Blanchard, O. 1997 *The Economics of Post-Communist Transition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.  
 Blanchard O., Fisher S. 1997 *Lectures on Macroeconomics*, London, MIR Press.  
 Deaton, A. 1992 *Understanding Consumption*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.  
 Diamond, P. A. 1994 *On Time. Lectures on Models of Equilibrium*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.  
 Hart, O., 1996 *Firms, Contracts and Financial Structure*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

The corpora were designed to serve the specific function of being maximally representative of particular language domains that is, till when the collection of more texts does not shed more light on its lexico-grammatical or discourse patterning (Ooi 2001).

The corpus of PWELs comprises 10 written economics lectures by contemporary economists on various topics of economics. All the lectures were initially presented in their spoken form, by renowned contemporary economists, in front of audiences at the universities of Oxford and/or Cambridge. They were successively expanded and divided into chapters for their written form in published volumes. Their target readers are graduates with a certain maturity in the field of economics and professionals, as stated in the introduction of each volume. The lectures were chosen on the basis of their authors' prestige and for their availability in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Florence.

The PWELs were manually scanned and computerised to form a corpus of approximately 130,000 words which was processed using Wordsmith Tools (Scott 1998), a suite of programmes for language analysis. Since observations from a single source are of limited value, if not compared with other linguistic events, I compiled a second specialised corpus of about 50,000 words by downloading B2C hypertexts contained in several company websites.

The websites chosen belong to international companies manufacturing and/or selling their products or services also on the internet and their pages I downloaded focus on the companies':

- a) history;
- b) social activities;
- c) research and development.

Both corpora contain separate files all coded by name of company and specific page name which has allowed me to pass from a concordance line, where file names are indicated, to the individual file. This allows a degree of flexibility in moving between levels of analysis.

The quantitative methodology adopted is suitable to investigate frequent phenomena, since it allows us to discover which are genuine reflections of the behaviour of a language or variety, and which are merely chance occurrences. I therefore used Wordsmith Tools (1998) to scan my corpora for evidence of recurring person markers associated with evaluative markers in the PWELs and the

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<sup>3</sup> The B2CWs analysed are:

Nokia: [www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com)  
Motorola: [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com)  
Vodafone: [www.vodafone.com](http://www.vodafone.com)  
Johnson: [www.jnj.com](http://www.jnj.com)  
Volvo: [www.volvo.com](http://www.volvo.com)  
Gillette: [www.gillette.com](http://www.gillette.com)  
Reebok: [www.rbk.com](http://www.rbk.com)

B2CWs. A concordance analysis for the most frequent items was then inspected qualitatively by reading the entire full texts and by concentrating on explicit rather than implicit acts of self-mention and evaluation.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Self-mention in PWELs

Previous studies (Hyland 2000; Smith 2003; Biber et al. 2002; Samson 2004b) have shown that personal pronouns and possessive adjectives are excellent markers of subjectivity in a text, since the textual and interpersonal relationship are essential for a message to have a perlocutionary effect.

The PWEL corpus was therefore scanned for quantitative evidence of pronouns and possessive adjectives which encode the stance academics/economists take by recurrently mentioning themselves in their lectures. Co-textual information for the occurrences was then inspected to confirm the use of self-mention in constructing an identity. Table 1 lists the devices used and their frequency.

Table 1. Freq person markers (PWELs)  
Tokens per 100,000 words

Device	Frequency
I	4408
WE	720
MY	84
OUR	90

The high occurrence of *I* and exclusive *we* (4408 *I* vs 720 *we*) indicates a very clear choice, on the part of the economists, to establish themselves as asymmetrical authoritative expert members of the economic community, thus construing a strong professional identity which is not purely pedagogical but also a promotional one, as in examples (1), (2), (3) and (4):

- (1) the removal of subsidies triggered a collapse of state firms, and that growth in the new private sector was simply insufficient to take up the slack.  
I think that *this description is basically right*. But its logic is *less straightforward* than it first appears.
- (2) Graduate texts such as Olivier Jean Blanchard and Stanley Fischer (1989) or Thomas J. Sargent (1987) *do not resemble* undergraduate texts, or each other. Thus *my* task here *is more difficult*.

In order to promote their thought and promote their expertise, the economists take a stance not only by using the first person singular pronoun *I* but by evaluating the quality and academic impact of their colleagues' work. Although the economists' evaluative language attempts to preserve a balance, it nevertheless criticises, for instance, the logical economic processes followed (1), or the lack of evidence for specific purposes (2).



Self-mention encodes the superiority of the economist's knowledge on others' in the field, as in (3) and (4).

- (3) Three well-known models along those lines are the models developed by Fischer (1977), Taylor (1979), and Caplin and Spulber (1987); *we* show how and when they can generate persistent effects of aggregate demand on output and how *results can be quite different* under alternative price rules. **Our** approach will be different.
- (4) **We** do believe that there now exists a useful macroeconomics. At the same time neither the micro-foundations *nor the* evidence is strong enough for any reasonable researcher to feel at ease.

The authors prove, by implementing **I** or the possessives **my**, **our**, to be engaged in a social process by referring to arguments and methodologies that are established norms of the discipline while displaying a subjective evaluation on the issues – *I think this description is basically right; its logic is less straightforward* – which show where they stand in relation to the issues and to their colleagues. Self-mention is a means to point out the differences in their work compared to others'. In (3) the value of the economists is emphasised by how their approach and outcome are different and superior to other economists while in (4) self promotion is understated.

Such strategies, on one hand, are typically promotional as they reinforce the level of one's credibility and reliability. On the other, in Searle's terms (1975) they are acts with a word-to-world direction, that is, they give way to changes in the real world by bringing about material consequences rather than remaining at a world-to-word fit.

### 5.2. Self-mention in B2CWs

The high proportion of the singular marker **I** (4408) in PWELs indicates to what extent the economists want to personalize and commit themselves to their propositions and their receivers. Moreover, this finding is quite surprising, considering that PWELs belong to a non commodity producer genre.

Table 2 quantifies the use of plural person markers in the B2CW corpus, instead, wherein a high frequency of person markers is to be expected.

Table 2. Frequency of person markers (B2CWs)

Tokens per 100,000 words

Device	Frequency
WE	530
OUR	725

The frequent recurrence of exclusive **we** (530) and the possessive **our** (725) in the B2CWs is related to the desire of the companies to identify themselves with their social responsibilities, values, capacity to bring about changes. All the positive qualities diversify them from the other companies, as in (5), (6), (7) and (8):

- (5) one of the world's most broadly based and diversified health care companies, **we** feel a special responsibility to protect the environment;
- (6) **our** values extend to **our** accounting and financial reporting responsibilities that **we** have to **our** shareholders and investors, and many shareholders are inter;
- (7) **our** success. **We** believe that **our** differences enhance **our** business results; that **our** diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences provide a wide;
- (8) change **we** have achieved: \* 60% reduction in CO2 emissions since 1991 due to **our** energy programmes; \* 35% reduction in CO2 emissions.

Gaining credit for a unique perspective is strategically crucial for a company. This is achieved by repeating frequently the company's name to create an identification with the company's innovative activities and solutions.

Table 3 shows the frequency of the company names in the B2CW corpus.

Table 3. Freq company names (B2CWs)  
Tokens per 100,000 words

Device	Frequency
Nokia	197
Motorola	86
Vodafone	172
Johnson	166
Volvo	111
Gillette	110
Reebok	57

Similarly to the use of the first person pronoun in the PWELs, the recurrent use of the company's name has the purpose of accentuating the positive evaluation of the company which takes responsibility for its decisions in its sector, as (9), (10), (11) and (12) exemplify.

- (9) **Nokia** again succeeded in translating strong brand, product offering, industry-leading execution and operational efficiency into highly profitable results.
- (10) **Nokia** innovation, user-friendliness and secure solutions. The company has become the leading supplier of mobile phones and a leading supplier of mobile, fixed broadband.
- (11) Diversity in Internal Communications At **Motorola**, we believe in investing in our shared future. **Motorola** develops product.
- (12) is the largest investment in **Vodafone's** history. It involves significant branding on the.

The use of personalisation and praise for the companies' activities in the examples above, recall the strategic functionality of person markers in PWELs that stressed the innovative contributions to the field by the economists and their

differentiation for promotional purposes. In both corpora these strategies are encoded by attitude markers.

### 5.3. Attitude markers in PWELs

Attitude markers, in particular adjectives in the PWEL corpus, express mostly praise. They boost the economists' findings by asserting that theirs is not only a correct interpretation of the topics, but that it signals a difference which implies a superiority over other colleagues (Samson 2006). Interestingly, the relatively most frequent adjective is **different** with 178 occurrences, as Table 4 shows<sup>4</sup>.

Table 4. Freq adjectives (PWELs)  
Tokens per 100,000 words

Device	Frequency
Different	178
Steady	163
Central	102
Important	69
Relevant	30
Significant	23
Bad	15

The adjectives used in the PWELs indicate that the economists tend to be balanced in their laudatory and disparaging lexis even when marking out their unique point of view (13) and (14):

(13) identifies three different models, although his trichotomy is **different** from Marshall's and mine;

(14) this approach leads to a very **different** description of movements in GNP.

The adjectives have also other functions, that is, to interact with readers by stressing the significance and importance of points on a metadiscursive plane and to promote the economists' findings. This is achieved by asserting that theirs is a correct interpretation of the topics with exophoric references (15), (16), (17) and (18):

(15) relation between innovations in GNP and each component is large and **significant**; correlations between innovations in GNP and innovations;

(16) and the list of their addresses. There are also less obvious and more **significant** examples. Joskow (1985) has investigated the ownership;

(17) there is less haggling and hold-up behaviour in a merged firm, it is **important** to know why. Transaction cost theory, as it stands;

<sup>4</sup> In this paper I discuss only some of the attitude markers corresponding to the most frequent ones in the B2CW corpus. For an extensive study on evaluative adjectives in published written economics lectures, see Samson (2006).

- (18) imps. We believe that most (not all) current theories do capture **important** aspects of reality; we do not believe in monocausal.

In sum, economists underscore a high degree of competitiveness between schools of thought and their relative theories. Although the discipline seems to influence and constrain the choice of adjectives used to comply with the norms of the scientific community, they nevertheless adopt discourse types which are usually associated with commodity production.

#### 5.4. Attitude markers in B2CWs

In Table 5, the frequency of the adjectives listed clearly indicates their crucial role in construing positive evaluation of the companies in the B2CW corpus. Interestingly, adjectives such as *significant*, and *important* which in spoken discourse (Swales and Burke 2003) are considered the most common, in the B2CWs, as in the PWELs (Samson 2006) have a relatively low frequency.

Table 5. Freq adjectives (B2CWs)  
Tokens per 100,000 words

Environmental	96
Global	50
New	31
Safety	29
Leading	15
Significant	15
Important	14
Sustainable	5

The relatively low frequency of *significant* and *important* in the B2CWs points out that the attitude markers we encounter are influenced by the business community they belong to, as much as the attitude markers were in the PWELs. Moreover, *significant* and *important* refer to generic terms which could belong to any field other than business, as can be seen in (19), (20), (21) and (22):

- (19) We believe that our leading market position provides **significant** opportunities for Nokia to better understand;
- (20) mobile telecommunications company, with a **significant** presence in Continental Europe, the United;
- (21) buy in order to stay alive. But many of our products do serve a very **important** function for people; to give families as well as singles the
- (22) the Company is committed to providing men and women with **important** information and tools to educate and inform.

By contrast, those adjectives with higher occurrences refer to specific qualities and innovative features introduced by the companies to differentiate themselves from competitors and gain a vaster share of the market:

- (23) We have invested considerable resources in establishing the Nokia name as the **leading** brand in mobile communications. We intend to sustain and enhance the;
- (24) innovation-renovation and operational efficiency. We innovate in **new** products and technologies to meet the present and future need.

Whether the attitude markers refer to generic or specific characteristics of the companies, the examples are all loaded with praise for any initiative, activity, or solution carried out by the companies. Indeed, their purpose is clearly that of winning the website browser's interest by conveying a trustworthy company identity.

### *6. Final Remarks*

To conclude, in attempting to answer my initial questions, I think the two different genres analysed – Published Written Economics Lectures (PWELs) and companies in Business to Consumer Websites (B2CWs) – do share some features in construing their identities. In particular, the quantitative search highlights the high occurrence of self-mention and attitude markers in both genres. In the PWELs, as well as in the B2CWs, self-mention has the multiple function of under-scoring commitment to the propositions in the texts whilst sharing common values of the disciplinary or business community and promoting the economists or the companies more or less explicitly, in their texts.

In both corpora, the promotional act is reinforced by the implementation of highly positive attitude markers. In the PWELs they stress the innovative contributions of the economists to their field and, more importantly, underline the pivotal role of such contributions in developing professional success in the real world. In the B2CWs they encode not only generic praise but also specific valuable contributions of the companies to innovation. So, although they belong to different genres, PWELs and B2CWs share the same lexico-grammatical features for the same purposes.

Furthermore, the findings reveal how in each corpus the degree of self-mention and the choice of attitude markers is a conscious one with specific pragmatic functions. However, both type of markers are equally highly influenced and constrained by the community they belong to. Thus, PWELs as well as B2CWs reflect individual and social activity; they are, I would claim, an example of the interface between discourse and society. In particular, the overlapping of functions and the construal of identities, in the PWELs, give way to an academic discipline crossing its boundaries and transforming itself gradually – like a living organism – by borrowing features which characterise a dissimilar genre, the promotional one (Samson 2005), represented by B2CWs.

To conclude, although PWELs do not produce commodities in the economic sense of goods for sale, they nevertheless share features typifying the promotional genre which belongs not to an idealised world but to reality. Transformed genres, thus, call for a more comprehensive analysis that should “try to face the real world

of discourse, which is complex, dynamic, constantly developing and often less predictable" (Bathia 2004: 25) than what we assume it to be.

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**Abstract**

The members of any specialist community produce knowledge by negotiation and persuasion. Academics/economists can make themselves visible as a who by creating a socially-situated identity and can become recognisable as a what by their actions. Such a claim may be extended to companies on business websites, since academics/economists and companies may be seen as instances of social interaction between producer and receiver. Based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of two small specialised corpora, this paper explores if academic/economists' identities share any features with those construed by companies in business websites. The findings highlight the devices – e.g. self-mention and attitude markers – which help to construe identity in a similar way in dissimilar genres.