

**ANALYSING DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: DISCURSIVE FEATURES,
RHETORICAL STRUCTURE AND THE USE OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA
FRANCA IN TRAVEL BLOG POSTS**

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ABSTRACT. *The digital world is currently offering new modes of communication that allow multiple opportunities for a more immediate and dialogical interaction. Within it, the blog shows up as a very resourceful and sophisticated genre where different sub-genres converge and where speakers from distinct linguacultural backgrounds can communicate through English, which is used as a lingua franca (ELF). Thus, to start comprehending the rationale of the blog, an analysis of the sub-genre of posts and, more specifically, those hosted in travel blogs, is provided in this paper. The linguistic and discursive prominent features encapsulated in travel blog posts will be explored through a data-driven approach, and their rhetorical structure will be identified via a functional analysis. This will allow to understand better how the ELF blogosphere makes use of such a digital sub-genre and what the readership may expect when communicating digitally through it.*

Keywords: Blogs, travel posts, digital communication, ELF, digital genres.

ANÁLISIS DE LA COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL: CARACTERÍSTICAS DISCURSIVAS, ESTRUCTURA RETÓRICA Y USO DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA FRANCA EN POSTS DE BLOGS DE VIAJES

RESUMEN. *Actualmente, el mundo digital ofrece nuevos modos de comunicación que proporcionan múltiples oportunidades para una interacción más inmediata y dialógica. Dentro de este, el blog se presenta como un género muy provechoso y sofisticado donde convergen sub-géneros diferentes, y hablantes de distinta procedencia lingüocultural se comunican haciendo uso del inglés como lengua franca (ILF). Para empezar a comprender el sentido del blog, este artículo ofrece un análisis del subgénero del post, y más concretamente, de los posts alojados en blogs de viajes. Se analizarán las características lingüísticas y discursivas relevantes encontradas en posts de blogs de viajes mediante un análisis derivado de los datos, así como su estructura retórica mediante un análisis funcional. Todo ello permitirá entender mejor cómo la blogosfera que usa el ILF emplea este sub-género digital y qué pueden esperar los lectores cuando se comuniquen digitalmente a través de este medio.*

Palabras clave: Blogs, posts de viajes, comunicación digital, ILF, géneros digitales.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In our everyday life, we are increasingly attached to technology and its new advances that seem to make our communication more comfortable and successful. Therefore, a deep understanding of the new realities and new ways of interaction is needed, so that we can adapt to those changes in our private and professional spheres, and make an effective use of the possibilities technology is offering. Thanks to the web, new paths for interaction and communication have been opened among people that may not know each other personally, causing the haziness of the barriers of time and space in computer-mediated discourse (Herring 2012b). Users may not share the physical, cultural or linguistic background, but share personal interests or concerns that drive them to communicate digitally.

In this changing space of communication, some distinguishing features such as *immediacy* and *dialogicity* emerge. In fact, the bidirectional and instantaneous nature of today's interactions differ to a great extent from traditional written communication, many times considered old-fashioned or dysfunctional in our new reality. Printed genres offer rather fixed and foreseeable discursive practices which require more time, present limitations of space, and emphasize other features such as the accuracy of the message.

That is why *digital genres* are taking over in everyday communication, and have set more dialogic ways of interacting in the web. The Internet has triggered a broader spectrum as regards writing or discursive practices, since the distinctions between the spoken and the written modes are also blurred in digital communication (Mauranen 2016). Thus, paper-based genres are giving way to digital genres in a great deal of contexts, attracting more and more scholarly attention due to their advantages.

The web engages the users in a digital environment frequently dominated by *orality* and *multimodality*. These new modes of communication are reshaping the spoken and written registers and reflect specific lexico-grammatical, discursive and pragmatic features. In other words, the combination of different codes such as audio, video or pictures has been brought to the fore and is essential in digital genres (Richardson 2009), including those hosted in travel blogs. This alternation between modes and modalities in the ways of communication fosters research to comprehend the new functions and possibilities of digital genres.

Closely related to the spread of digital genres is the use of English as a vehicular language enabling digital communication. As Mauranen (2016: 22) indicates, “[d]igitalisation has also made us aware of the increasingly non-local nature of communities, which is a common characteristic of ELF use”. The international status that English has gained *as a lingua franca (ELF)* (e.g. Jenkins 2007; Seidlhofer 2011; Mauranen 2012) has been enhanced by the Internet, in the sense that most information is available in English and users can have access to more data thanks to it. Virtual communication using this language also offers the possibility of embracing *a far wider audience* than before, raising the impact and the effect of the communicative exchanges.

Moreover, the boundaries between native and non-native English speakers are increasingly fuzzy and the notion of nativeness is losing ground in favour of plurilithic and evolving cultural contexts (Jenkins 2015). Members of the same discourse community may come from radically different origins and backgrounds, and different discourse communities can easily interact. This is both triggered by digital communication and ELF. In this mode of international, digital interaction, ELF users should not be reckoned as deficit communicators at all, just as the native speaker tends not to be an idealised model anymore (Widdowson 2012).

Considering all the features framed above, this paper aims to analyze the travel blog used in an international context by different English speakers, as an instance of those digital genres modifying global interaction nowadays. Travel blog posts will be interculturally explored comparing sets of texts authored by Anglophone and non-Anglophone speakers, to identify distinguishing textual and discursive

features of ELF. A rhetorical move structure of this particular genre will be also offered bearing in mind its digital nature. More specifically, this research seeks to provide an answer to the following research questions:

1. What is the main communicative purpose of travel blogs posts?
2. Which are their prominent discursive features?
3. Do travel blog posts by Anglophone and non-Anglophone speakers present any rhetorical or discursive features that distinguish them?
4. How can we describe their rhetorical structure?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the concept of textual genre and the evolution in its conception through time and scholars' standpoints will be first explored. Discourse communities, and specifically virtual ones, also need to be conceptualised as the agents that employ and enact the digital genre of this study. Finally, explanations about the nature of the travel blog and its posts will enlighten the direction of the analysis.

2.1. *THE NOTION OF GENRE*

As our way of communicating differs depending on whom we communicate with and what we do it for, we make use of different types of genres according to their features and our goals to ensure effective interactions. Swales defined a genre as “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” (1990: 58). Bhatia emphasized the aim of interaction as the more decisive element to identify a genre. Thus, he conceived a genre as “a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs” (1993: 13).

Nonetheless, the concept of genre has deeply evolved from those definitional explanations offered above, partially influenced by the coming into being of emergent digital genres. Swales (2004) and Bhatia (2004) moved onto a much more metaphorical nuance of the term to capture the current realities and possibilities concerning communication. Genres are now considered to be dynamic entities characterised by their flexibility requiring a (re)discovery of their generic features, which may have been taken for granted.

Accordingly, the notion of genre has greatly developed from being fairly stable and regular, and now entails that genres drift noticeably through space and time. Pérez-Llantada (2013) identifies two factors inevitably integrated in

many domains, namely genres and media, questioning the concept of genre stability. To this respect, dynamicity and flexibility are strong features of the digital spectrum of genres, set off both by the arrival of new communicative modes on the Internet and the collaboration of international English users. To regain that stability, these emerging digital genres need to guarantee that their functionality efficiently suits the demands of the discourse community employing them (Pérez-Llantada 2016).

2.2. VIRTUAL DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES

The rationale of a genre is comprehended by a discourse community, consisting of a social group of language users sharing certain social conventions and norms and similar attitudes, beliefs or values (Kramsch 1998). They can recognize a genre by its structure and its function, its style and its layout, its possible impact and its generic constraints. The common ground they share is precisely reflected in the ways members of the same discourse community use the language to communicate, interact and meet their social needs. The purpose of a genre will lead to the generic form of the texts a discourse community makes use of and will allow to analyze the practices they engage in, identifying who they are addressing to, pinpointing prominent (non)linguistic features, and distinguishing them from other practices, texts and genres (Scollon, Scollon and Jones 1995: 9).

This is especially relevant in relation to digital genres, recognised by discourse communities that gather digital users together, consequently creating *online or virtual communities* (Herring 2004, 2008; Androutsopolous 2006). Despite coming from diverse contexts, these social groups on the net build personal relationships as they share personal or common interests online. Herring (2004: 355) has identified six sets of relevant criteria specific for a virtual community to work:

1. active, self-sustained participation; a core of regular participants;
2. shared history, purpose, culture, norms, and values;
3. solidarity, support, reciprocity;
4. criticism, conflict, means of conflict resolution;
5. self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups;
6. emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, rituals.

To identify the formations that will become virtual communities, different elements should be looked at, such as the users' active and frequent participation in the digital genre playing different roles, or strategies and ways to address other speakers, whatever the motives in the communicative act (Angouri 2016). This can occur both in a positive way through empathy, appraisal and encouragement, and in a negative way through complaint, criticism and divergence. Thus, certain

generic awareness and an open-friendly attitude can help produce information cooperatively, even constructing cross-linguistic virtual communities (Luzón 2016).

Herring (2008) suggests that network participants should feel part of a bigger group, growing emotional attachments to other members. They also realise that outer participants, whom she denominates *lurkers*, feel this subjective sense of community. On his part, Androutsopoulos (2006) adds as defining criteria the demographics of the members, the proof of social norms among them, and the technological features of the online environment they operate in. This last aspect is highly relevant, as the notions of what really constitutes a virtual community, and the environment where it works, are in constant transformation.

In the case of the travel blog, which is the object of this paper and constitutes an instance of a digital genre fostering interaction and collaboration within and among discourse communities, the virtual community is bounded to the discourse system of English speakers in intercultural global encounters.

2.3. DIGITAL GENRES: THE BLOG

Blogs are generic instances used by members of the virtual discourse community of the blogosphere, who exchange contents and ideas in them. They constitute a collaborative space for offering the possibility of writing a piece of discourse and also sharing it with others that may find it of interest or relevance (Richardson 2009, Luzón 2016). Blogs also stand out above other instances of genres as they allow many sorts of contents, working as a *tabula rasa* with no constraints of length. In fact, they are only restricted by both the author and the readership's criteria and judgment –and, of course, by a proper Internet connection and a device to do so. The limits of blog layout are clearly determined, first and most importantly, by the digital platform which hosts the blog and, secondly, by the author, who is able to make choices regarding the style, gadgets, sections and contents of their entries and posts (Richardson 2009).

In any case, there are some fundamental features to maintain the site of the blog and provide the virtual community with the generic content and form that they typically expect. Having an online (travel) blog means that certain periodicity should be assured. The contents of the blog are updated and improved in short periods of time, for the blog not to become obsolete. This can be carried out either with the creation of a new post or the publication of comments by the blogosphere or the author him/herself, being normally listed in reverse chronological order (Boyd 2006). Furthermore, digital genres like the blog are characterised by their malleability, which permits the digital communicative practices to be shaped and

modified to a great extent (Luzón 2016). Not only does this refer to the easiness of incorporating, editing and deleting information both when writing the blog and after it, but also to the fact that in just one site several digital genres can be combined and hosted.

The recognition of the generic features and of the audience of travel blogs is essential for digital users to employ such a genre. Similarly, its generic relationships need to be unravelled to comprehend its connections within the web. Regarding blogs, on the one hand, it is possible to find genre colonies (Bhatia 2004: 57), in which genres are “viewed at different levels of generalization, making it possible to posit principled relationships”. The blog at the general level would encompass types of blogs focusing on different topics or domains (food blogs, fashion blogs, travel blogs, etc). On the other hand, it is possible to encounter genre chains (Swales 2004: 18) where the sub-genres are sequentially dependent and there is some “chronological ordering, especially when one genre is a necessary antecedent for another”. In the blog this is enacted in the different sub-genres of the post, the comment, and even the response to comments.

In addition, non-linearity constitutes another key to understand digital genres like the blog (or a FAQ page or a forum). When searching for information and browsing in a (travel) blog, the users decide the direction to follow to achieve their communicative goal. Therefore, a navigating mode is preferably applied when entering a blog, complementing the reading mode users are more used to (Askehave and Nielsen 2005). This possibility, which does not exist in printed genres, allows the writer and the reader to gain transparency and accessibility when transmitting and receiving the message, respectively.

2.4. THE TRAVEL BLOG

The (travel) blog greatly enlightens the innovative and ever-changing ways of digital communication, so its analysis appears to be useful to understand a part of this current panorama. Within travel blogs, the sub-genre of the travel post can be identified, aiming to provide the audience with a description of the place and the experiences that a person lived, so that others can make the most of their experiences or can enjoy themselves by reading on topics they are fond of. Travel posts may concentrate on an external event concerning a place, a special sight, a festivity or ceremony, but they may also expose the blogger's personal life through anecdotes or emotions experienced in the trips. Both sources tend to be interspersed in posts often mixing external issues with private individual details, so overall any blogger's online identity mixes both professional and personal or social characteristics (Luzón 2013). In any case, the purpose of the

travel blog is normally to provide the readership with trustworthy information and data, as well as feelings and opinions, on a particular destination (Lee and Gretzel 2014).

Moreover, identifying a consistent rhetorical structure may assist in building the prototypical skeleton of a (travel) blog, to further comprehend the rationale of this digital genre. Exploring travel blogs, and their role in the continuous shift of the communicative and social assumptions of our everyday computer-mediated interactions, will lead to the identification of specific lexico-grammatical and rhetorical characteristics. In turn, the analysis of these features may lead to gain a deeper insight into the nature and purpose of the travel blog, as well as into the practices of the blogosphere, including both Anglophone and non-Anglophone users coexisting in this digital genre via English.

3. METHOD

To give an answer to the research questions posed, a representative corpus was compiled to highlight the most important generic and discursive features of travel blogs (concerning structure, lexis, grammar, orthotypography or pragmatics), and to better understand the sub-genre of the blog post. Six travel blogs were chosen online from a representative sample of international bloggers belonging to different linguacultural backgrounds. Three entries from those blogs were selected to carry out a qualitative discourse and rhetorical analysis, resulting in a small-scale corpus of 18 entries (30,410 words) (see Table 1 below). Each entry, as a unit of analysis, is made up of the bloggers' post, the readers' comments within the range of one year, and the author's reply to them, to obtain a more complete panorama of the genre, despite focusing on the travel blog post in particular.

In order to select the travel blogs striking an analytical and more objective balance, Kachru's circles were considered to be effective (Crystal 2003; Bolton and Kachru 2006). Thus, in the sample not only blogs by English native speakers –inner circle– were represented, but also by non-native speakers using ELF and belonging to the outer and the expanding circles. The former comprises speakers in whose countries English is not the mother tongue but has been institutionalized and is the dominant language of interaction between different ethnic or language groups. The latter refers to the speakers who study English as a foreign language (Bolton and Kachru 2006). As can be seen in Table 1, two bloggers belong to the inner circle (England and US), another two come from the outer circle (India and Nigeria), and the expanding circle includes the remaining two authors (Slovak Republic and Belgium).

A data-driven approach was followed for the analysis of the corpus, retrieving the quantitative data by manually reading the posts. The corpus itself was “the sole source of hypotheses about language” (McEnery and Hardie 2012: 6), leading to identify and classify the prominent features in the posts into a taxonomy of linguistic or discursive characteristics (see Table 2 in Section 4). To devise it, different frameworks have been used to gain a more holistic insight of the potentialities and tendencies in travel blog posts. These include traditional grammatical theories, (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik 1985; Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan 1999), speech act theory (Searle 1985) and Hyland’s approach to metadiscourse, understood as “the linguistic expressions which refer to the evolving text and to the writer and imagined readers of that text” (2005: ix).

Table 1. Description of the corpus considering the number of blogs, the word length and the blogger’s origin.

Circles of English	Blog name	Origin	N° of posts	N° of words
INNER CIRCLE	Helen in Wonderlust	England	3	8,762
	Nomadic Matt	United States	3	4,498
OUTER CIRCLE	The Shooting Star	India	3	2,976
	Zee Goes	Nigeria	3	3,363
EXPANDING CIRCLE	Girl Astray	Slovak Republic	3	3,487
	Lili’s Travel Plans	Belgium	3	7,324
			18	30,410

This metadiscourse perspective will be enlightening in the analysis of discursive and pragmatic aspects like (i) self-mentions, “a key way in which writers are able to promote a competent scholarly identity and gain approval for their research claims” (2005: 57), (ii) directives as an engagement marker to “instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer” (2005: 154), and (iii) attitude markers, “used to express the writer’s attitude to the propositional material he or she presents” (2005: 32).

Overall, travel posts by speakers from different linguacultural backgrounds were thought to provide real-life different cultural contexts in which ELF is used to communicate digitally. Thus, the corpus is representative insofar as it can capture the tendencies that travel bloggers and readers’ practices follow as part of the same global virtual community. To respond to research question 3, the taxonomy was applied to unveil these potential differences among bloggers from different linguacultural backgrounds (Section 4.1).

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE GENRE

In this section, salient features regarding lexis, grammar, orthography and pragmatics arising from the corpus will be looked into, and examples of them will be offered. Special attention will be paid to the discrepancies in use among native and non-native English speakers. Afterwards, a rhetorical qualitative analysis will be offered, to explore the structure of travel blog posts and match it, if possible, with the linguistic and discursive findings.

4.1. LINGUISTIC AND DISCURSIVE FEATURES IN THE TRAVEL BLOG POST

The analysis of the presented corpus will concentrate on those lexicogrammatical and discursive features of travel posts that make up the taxonomy (see Table 2 below), as they stand out because of their function and frequency. Differences in the uses and tendencies between Anglophone and non-Anglophone speakers, in relation to Kachru's distinction between inner, outer and expanding circles, will be provided.

Table 2. Taxonomy devised following a data-driven approach and including the most prominent linguistic and discursive features in the corpus of travel blogs compiled.

LINGUISTIC AND DISCURSIVE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS	SPECIFIC FEATURES	
Lexico-grammatical	Personal <i>I</i>	
	Inclusive <i>we</i>	
	Attitude markers	
	Acronyms	
	Vague language	
	Interjections	
	Exclamations	
Syntactic	Unfinished sentences	
	Question tags	
	C-units	Copula/Auxiliary deletion
		Subject omission
Non-clausal units		
Semiotic	Onomatopoeias	
Orthotypographic	Non-standard capitalization	
	Lack of capitalization	
	Abbreviations	

Pragmatic (speech acts)	Engaging	Directive <i>you</i>
		Questions
		Commands
	Thanking	
	Criticizing	
	Praising	
	Stressing/Adding emphasis	
	Recommending	

Table 3 presents general results as regards the use or lack of use of these features in all texts analysed.

Table 3. Overall occurrences of the discursive features in the travel posts according to the users' linguacultural background.

SPECIFIC FEATURES		POSTS	INNER CIRCLE	OUTER CIRCLE	EXPANDING CIRCLE
Self-mentions	Exclusive <i>we</i>	16/18	5/6	5/6	6/6
	Personal <i>I</i>	18/18	6/6	6/6	6/6
Attitude markers		18/18	6/6	6/6	6/6
Acronyms		11/18	6/6	4/6	1/6
Vague language		14/18	3/6	5/6	6/6
Interjections		15/18	6/6	4/6	5/6
Exclamations		17/18	6/6	6/6	5/6
Unfinished sentences		13/18	4/6	4/6	5/6
Question tags		5/18	0/6	2/6	3/6
C-units	Copula/Auxiliary deletion	16/18	6/6	5/6	5/6
	Subject omission	11/18	4/6	3/6	4/6
	Non-clausal units	16/18	6/6	5/6	5/6
Onomatopoeias		8/18	4/6	2/6	2/6
Non-standard capitalization		8/18	1/6	5/6	2/6
Lack of capitalization		5/18	2/6	3/6	0/6
Abbreviations		16/18	6/6	6/6	4/6
Engaging	Directive <i>You</i>	18/18	6/6	6/6	6/6
	Questions	15/18	3/6	6/6	6/6
	Commands	18/18	6/6	6/6	6/6

Thanking	5/18	2/6	2/6	1/6
Criticising	13/18	6/6	3/6	4/6
Praising	14/18	5/6	5/6	4/6
Stressing/Adding emphasis	14/18	4/6	4/6	6/6
Recommending	16/18	6/6	5/6	5/6

Concerning lexico-grammatical features, personal references are included in all texts compiled and therefore constitute an essential feature of travel blog posts. These include self-mentions (Hyland 2005) through personal pronouns, object pronouns, possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns. A distinction has been made between personal *I* expressions (present in all posts) where writers only make reference to themselves, or exclusive *we* expressions (in 16 out of 18 posts and in 14 out of 15 comments), which refer to the people accompanying the writers in their trips, leaving the audience out. Attitude markers also appear everywhere in posts, due to the evaluative nature of blogs, to highlight positive and negative aspects of the trip and place(s) visited (e.g. I was *definitely* thrown off by the title; I still find it *sorely* lacking).

Acronyms introduce the first difference in use depending on the blogger, as they are more frequently used by inner circle authors than the outer and expanding ones. Common examples comprise acronyms about countries (*USA*, *UK*, *URSS*), related to economics or politics such as *VAT*, *FCO* or *EU*, those concerning travelling and trips, like *GPS*, *b&b* or *YHA*, and others conveying informality and orality such as *ASAP*, *wtf*, *OMG* or *aka*. Probably, using this type of linguistic feature entails a deep knowledge of the language and cultural or social practices. Hence, understanding acronyms may be useful to follow important details and practical information of travel posts by native English authors, and non-native bloggers might struggle to decode them.

By contrast, vague language is mostly predominant in the expanding circle travel blog posts (6 out of 6), as non-native English speakers may not find sometimes accurate words because of the lack of full command of the language, and replace them in this way. These expressions convey a looser meaning or hedge their utterances (e.g. probably you and *a bunch of* others...get all that praise; I spent *a good chunk of* my time perched on the stones). As posts are characterized by a casual style, vague expressions are commonly employed when writers are not sure of something, prefer not explaining further, or do not want to be mistaken or assertive (e.g. they probably need import all fruits, vegetables *and other stuff*).

Interjections, a “peripheral to the language system itself” (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 853) are also spread in posts (15 out of 18) and transmit a touch of orality

and closeness with the audience. They very much overlap with exclamations, which are also prominent, to enthusiastically emphasize parts of the writer's trips (e.g. *Wow!; It's such a great itinerary!; Parking was free!*). Additionally, discourse markers indicating contrast (especially conjunctions: *while, however, even though*) and temporal markers (*then, when, while*) are the most frequent ones by native and non-native speakers alike. They introduce effects of surprise, excitement or opposition in the case of contrastive markers, and interweave sequencing and chronological references during the narration in the case of temporal markers. In all, both types of discourse markers help each other in making the reader feel equally informed and thrilled.

As regards syntactic aspects, Herring (2012a) pinpoints that computer-mediated discourse often involves deviation from strict syntax rules and can result in telegraphic or fragmented messages. In line with her argument, it has been found that unfinished sentences constitute a fairly recurrent aspect in travel blogs, making the discourse more informal and less *perfect*. They could be the counterpart of pauses and hesitations in spoken discourse, and they should not be confused with suspense-triggering sentences as in "ignore the headache *because...well*, you know what I want to say". Posts showing a higher frequency of these features belong to the expanding circle, since such bloggers may need more time to think, elaborate, and organize their ideas. This is probably influenced by the immediacy of current communication, as presented above, so the bloggers note down the first idea coming to their minds, since they are aware that unfinished sentences are not considered as mistakes, but as signs of informality and orality.

The distribution of question tags is also significant among the different circles, even if the amount of posts presenting this feature is not very high. Whereas native English speakers make no use of them, both the outer circle bloggers (2 posts) and the expanding circle ones (3 posts) find them a useful linguistic resources to engage the reader and ensure that the channel of communication is still open –as question tags seldom look for a real specific answer. Non-native speakers of English may want to look for both the agreement with their audience and their approval; hence they include this informal feature to make the reader feel empathy when going through the blogger's post of a trip.

In addition, all sorts of C-units (Biber *et al.* 1999), syntactic units being independent, can be reckoned to predominate in travel blogs, regardless of the blogger's linguacultural background (e.g. *Helen in Wonderlust, Zee Goes, Girl Astray*). Subject omission may simultaneously convey a certain degree of grammatical inaccuracy and a large level of informality and flexibility. This is reinforced if deletion of the main verb of the clause occurs, be it the copula *be* (both in active or passive voice –e.g. *Enjoying Turkey?; Followed by more food*

and more food) or the auxiliary verbs to build up questions and perfect tenses (e.g. *do*, *have* –e.g. *Need* a side kick?; Never *heard* about the spitting). To this respect, ELF speakers are fairly conscious of how language and grammar are different depending on registers and genres, in this case regarding the (non) mandatory presence of the subject in (in)formal discourse (see Table 3). Finally, sentences presenting no clause structure (no main verb, but just one single phrase or even one word) have been labelled in the taxonomy as non-clausal units. They are also associated with spoken discourse, where brief, concise phrases, though full of meaning, are frequently used. In travel posts, their use is mostly exploited to introduce headings or titles to the sections of a post (*Travel blogger fail!*; *All for a laugh...*; *Yummy food!*).

Onomatopoeias are the only significant semiotic feature found in the corpus selected (e.g. *boom*; *bababa*; *cough...cough*; *gulp*; *Argh*). They are not equally frequent among bloggers' travel posts, their use being more significant in the case of those by inner circle bloggers. As with acronyms, a higher use of linguistic and pragmatic resources made by native bloggers may be the reason. Consequently, it is necessary to know the cultural and social practices assigned to the language to recognize and produce the linguistic counterparts of those sounds in the discourse communities of each language. In any case, onomatopoeias are a fruitful resource to give the discourse a more oral and expressive touch that may attract the audience's attention.

Moreover, "e-communication often manifests spelling practices that suggest loosened orthographic norms" (Herring 2012a: 3). Traces of such loosening can be observed throughout the corpus, although these features do not greatly differ according to the bloggers' background. Non-standard capitalization plays a relatively prominent role in travel posts (8 out of 18) –e.g. its *Amazing* scene; Lovely *Article*– possibly due to carelessness of the writer when actually drafting the message or a potential attempt to emphasize a particular piece of discourse. In this case, it would overlap with the pragmatic function of adding emphasis and stressing.

Apart from that, lack of capitalization is not frequent, indicating that authors probably revise their output and care about the accuracy of their messages, despite the immediacy and informality of these texts. The groups of words that typically require capitalization in English but lack it in the examples from the corpus involve toponyms (e.g. *balkans*, *sabara*), demonyms (e.g. *soviet*, *portuguese*) or anthroponyms (e.g. *matt*, *bassan*). Strikingly, there are no cases of posts by the expanding circle speakers showing lack of capitalization, what may demonstrate an even higher concern about the revision of their text, since English is not their L1.

Abbreviations constitute another regular feature in travel posts, and differences are fostered by the writers' background. As in the case of acronyms

or onomatopoeias, to produce abbreviations a great command of the language structures and possibilities has to be acquired, and this may be more demanding for non-native English speakers. Indeed, the inner circle and the outer circle cases (6 out of 6 in both) outnumber the expanding circle ones (4 out of 6). However, unlike acronyms and onomatopoeias, it tends to be easier to decode the full words from abbreviations and their subsequent meanings (e.g. *fave, pics, veggies, comfy*), so they can be an effective resource for ELF users to convey the informality that the virtual community using travel blogs usually shows and expects.

Moving on to pragmatic features and the appearance of certain speech acts, directives (Hyland 2005) feature to a great extent in travel posts. They can adopt the form of the personal reference *you* (18 out of 18), so as to directly address the audience, engage it in its reading and establish a bridge for communication between the sub-genres of the post and the comment (e.g. *You'll have to see it for yourself; I like how you mentioned that you didn't realize*). Likewise, commands, typically displayed by imperative forms, are yet another form of directives recurrently used to address readers in travel blog genres (18 out of 18, too), despite having other purposes, too, as will be pointed out.

Furthermore, there are certain speech acts whose occurrence differs to a great extent in travel posts, namely asking or requesting, thanking, praising and criticising. Whereas it is logical that questions show up in posts to call the reader's attention (15 out of 18), it is remarkable that instances of thanking are rather scarce (5 out of 18), since travellers may want to mention and publicly appreciate what other people have done for them. Besides, praising and criticising may be understood as opposite speech acts demonstrating the speaker's stance towards someone or something involved in the blog post (for instance, cultural aspects about food, religion or social practices). Hence, these functions are usually accompanied by evaluative expressions, either positive or negative, reinforcing the attitude transmitted (e.g. *“Personally, receiving so many favors from strangers was (and is) an extremely humbling, yet at the same time inspiring, experience”*, as compared to *“There are always too few waiters, the tables are piled too close to each other and I don't enjoy the vibe in general”*). Consequently, these four pragmatic functions are very relevant for the writing of a textual genre like the travel blog post.

The high presence of praising instances in travel posts (14/18) may be brought about by a positive pragmatic and intercultural attitude that recognizes the role of different people, linguaculturally speaking, in the development of a trip. Apart from that, criticising was identified as a speech act that may contribute to the dialogicity featuring travel blogs. Numbers are not excessively high in posts (13/18), but this speech act is also fruitful when contrasts and downsides of a travelling experience are highlighted.

Stressing parts of the text is also a recurring feature in travel blogs, for the audience to convey different emotions, attitudes or even *intonations*. This emphasis can be transmitted via orthotypographic changes (italics, in bold, repeated question and exclamation marks, underlining or even crossing words), or lexico-grammatical ones (use of the emphatic *do* or repetition of lexis, as in “*Love love love this post*”). Finally, recommending is also very common in travel posts (16/18), because bloggers normally want to share their knowledge and experience for the readers to make the most of their trips (e.g. *Let’s not forget* their share in our story; *I would recommend* the annual Frankfurt Book Fair).

4.2. RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF THE TRAVEL BLOG POST

The post in a travel blog needs to follow a *frame* which, although flexible, structures the text from the beginning and leads the way to the aim the writer pursues. Different sections or stages specifically respond to particular communicative intentions of a travel post. It is perhaps difficult to come up with a very steady and systematic structure in this dynamic genre, but there may be a leading thread underlining the contents and functions expressed through the words used. Bhatia (1993: 87) argues that “the ultimate criterion for assigning discourse values to various moves is functional rather than formal”. Then, the objective is not to come up with a detailed rigid move classification or to follow quantitative analyses proving statistical relevance.

The virtual discourse community of the blogosphere expect some linguistic and discursive features to be used in order to fulfil those communicative purposes, so community members can identify and follow the different moves of the rhetorical structure of the post and their corresponding functions and realizations. Thus, it seems clear that both authors and readers stick to quite an implicitly conventionalised structure. By carrying out a qualitative analysis of the rhetorical structure of travel blog posts in the compiled corpus, insights can be gained into the stages, sections or moves composing such a structure, getting to identify what the reader may generally expect and encounter in each of them. Furthermore, this analysis would also draw connections with the linguistic and discursive analysis presented above, understanding how authors convey the purposes of their posts through specific features.

Table 4 below shows the relations and connections between moves, purposes and linguistic features. The rhetorical structure functions as a frame to express the communicative intents enacted by different linguistic, discursive and pragmatic realizations in the text.

Table 4. Prototypical structure of travel blog posts in terms of moves, communicative purpose and discursive realizations.

MOVE	COMMUNICATIVE PURPOSE	REALIZATIONS
Situational move	To introduce and frame the post spatio-temporally by giving broad information and contents from the experience.	Self-expression (<i>I</i> and <i>We</i>) Attitude markers Directives
Descriptive move	To provide detailed data about the place and the experience, including appealing layouts, anecdotes and hypertexts.	Exclamations Interjections Onomatopoeias Non-standard capitalization
Closure move	To finish the post by recapitulating what the author liked or disliked or by making a summary of the trip.	Thanking Praising Criticising Recommending
Invitation move	To engage the readership to finish the post and share their ideas and thoughts in the comments section.	Directives Subject/Auxiliary omission Interjections Exclamations

First, the travel blogger sets the scenario of the post in the situational move, consisting of the presentation and contextualization of the place and potentially the time the author is going to talk about. The area where the journey takes place is typically emphasized here and the author begins by providing spatio-temporal parameters and stating his/her opinion about the experience. There is typically a combination of what Hyland (2005) refers to as self-mentions (first person *I* and exclusive *we*) with attitude markers and some directives to the readership, to engage them from the starting point and persuade them to keep on reading the post in depth, as can be seen in the following examples.

Example 1 (LTNN2)¹

Dear old Trinidad... You're like *everything that's authentic about Cuba gathered together in one single place*. I rarely *visit the same place twice*, but [...] I want to come back. I **NEED** to come back. But at the same time I'm scared. *Afraid to find you've changed. I sure know I have...*²

¹ The code to label the travel blog posts, and used hereafter in the paper, is as follows: the first two letters correspond to the name of the blog, and the two subsequent ones to whether it is written by a native (NS) or a non-native speaker (NN). The final number refers to the specific post within the 3 posts retrieved from each blog. For the overall information and links of the blogs, see Appendix.

² The italics in this example and onwards correspond to my added emphasis to identify linguistics realizations connected with the particular move structure.

Example 2 (HWNS3)

If you had asked me a year ago about the countries in the world I wanted to visit, I doubt *Ukraine* would have made it into the top 100. *Ukraine just wasn't on my travel radar*. In fact I'd never even considered it. Until... I was invited to my brother-in-law's wedding that is.

Hence, this first section is primarily content-oriented, used to establish the ground of the post. From this point on, it is likely for the author to use multiple options allowed by the layout of the text to hint at the different sections and moves of their production, “titles, sub-titles, headings and subheadings [being] commonly deployed to keep track of the composition structure [of the texts]” (Martin 1992: 443).

Afterwards, it is typical to find a descriptive move, insofar as the author deals with a great variety of expository subjects, including cultural customs and practices, which were relevant in such a trip. As explained above, the description of sights and landmarks is normally interspersed with the narration of anecdotes, and classified into distinct titles and headings (see Example 3). In addition, the author tends to add hypertextual references and links within the main text to address the reader to more information about a particular topic (see Example 4), or even to highlight or advertise another post of potential interest to the reader written in the same blog. All in all, this section calls readers' attention to the parts of the text the author desires to underline –through the use of features such as exclamations, interjections, onomatopoeias, as well as striking spelling patterns or semiotic symbols like emoticons. Opportunities are also provided for the potential gaps readers may want to fill or explore further.

Example 3 (ZGNN1)

Panchos Legend Walking Tour + Pub Crawl – 19 euro: Definitely worth it. For travelers looking to make like minded friends, you will meet a lot of folks here. *They also had a separate large group for Spanish speaking folks*, so you get good mix of choices.

Through the legends tour, *I got to see older parts of Seville and learned of it's history*. I *found one tragic story* somewhat familiar to G R R Martin's Song of Fire and Ice book, the Game of Thrones.

Example 4 (NMNS2)

Attend a cultural event – Since *Sydney has a complex about Melbourne* being called the culture capital of Australia, it tries to outdo its rival by *hosting over 30 official festivals and events each year*. It offers art gallery nights, concerts, festivals, and much more. Most of them are free and can be found on *the Sydney tourism website*.

In a sense, a navigating mode (Askehave and Nielsen 2005) is being emphasized for the reader to comprehend the narrative parts displaying those linguistic and

non-linguistic features and, more generally, the purpose of the blog and the author's intention. Thus, it is not expected that readers restrict themselves to a sequential or linear reading *per se* –more attributable to a classical reading mode and traditional genres–, but readers may actively build their own path through the different sections, moves and sites. This way, they may accomplish a better understanding of the communicative purpose of a digital genre like travel blog posts. The navigating mode is made possible mainly through the hypertexts and multimodal languages, including images or videos, which the blogger decides to add and which, according to Luzón (2015), particularly contribute to making discourse more (re)contextualised and popularised.

To finish the composition of the post, there is a widespread tendency to employ two different moves. The first one constitutes the closure move, where the author adds some final thoughts on the narration and draws some conclusions from the trip. This can be done regarding what has been learnt, the things that they want to repeat in the future or that they loathed, and/or just by doing a brief summary of the trip in a few lines. Here speech acts such as thanking, praising or criticizing, and recommending are frequently found (as illustrated in Examples 5 and 6). In some of the posts analyzed, the author decides to include a chart or a list of bullet points where practical information about prices, opening hours, means of transport or accommodation is offered, so that readers find it easy to recreate the trip in case they liked the location and the post (Example 6).

Example 5 (GANN2)

Hitchhiking is a great way of traveling and mostly results in fun experiences – nevertheless, as always when with strangers, you should use your common sense, avoid talking about intimate topics (you don't want to give the wrong impression) and most importantly, trust your gut.

Example 6 (HWNS3)

[...] *I really wasn't expecting to love Kiev or Ukraine. But I really did. The people were friendly, the food and drink were gorgeous and cheap as chips and there were so many cool things to see. Thanks for a great day and night Kiev. I'll definitely be coming back!*

Essential Info:

We flew to Kiev from Luton with Wizz Air. *The plane was nice and comfortable, reasonably priced, pretty efficient, no complaints at all. [...]*

The second move, marking the end of the post, has been labelled as the invitation move. It is usually very concise and aims to provoke the readership's answer to their reading and understanding. It gives way to the comments section, and entices anyone to share their ideas and give feedback to the author, subsequently creating a genre chain (Swales 1990; 2004). The layout of the post

is also very helpful at this point, since this move usually presents a special font, a bigger size or appealing colours. Directives are employed to address the reader in brief but purposeful sentences (often with subject and/or auxiliary omission). Exclamations or interjections also lower the register to a more informal one to maintain a relationship of trust and confidence, so that the readership can start commenting on the instance of digital genre they just went through.

Example 7 (SSNN2)

What would you add? And what's on your Frankfurt wishlist? [...]

Join The Shooting Star on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for more quirky ways to discover popular destinations around the world.

Example 8 (NMNS2)

Want to share your tips and advice? *Got questions?* Visit the **community forum** to ask questions, get answers, meet people, and *share your tips!*

No meaningful differences have been found in the rhetorical structure of posts by Anglophone or non-Anglophone users. The four prototypical moves discerned are followed in all travel posts, regardless of the author's linguacultural background. This may point at a fairly established conventionalization of the structure of the travel blog and the communicative purposes of its moves in the English language. These patterns are indeed shared by users belonging to different discourse communities, but forming a virtual global community. To accomplish the narration of their travelling experiences and to engage the reader in an enjoyable active way, bloggers seem to find it useful to include the sequence of situation-description-closure-invitation, and to repeat it, whatever the post, to effectively transmit their messages and make clear their particular goals throughout the text.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a swiftly evolving panorama for communication affected by the development of the Internet, its digital applications and the digital genres, the travel blog offers new possibilities of interaction between native and non-native English speakers. Thus, members of the same virtual communities using ELF are profiting from the blog as a dialogical, immediate and informal instance of communication, in contrast to printed genres. In travel blog posts, bloggers can explain and transmit their travelling experiences and recommendations for a readership that will be willing to go through the text, will probably feel close to the writer and will be able to exchange their impressions and further information in the sub-genre of the comment.

As for how English speakers employ the travel blog post according to their linguacultural background, salient differences have been observed when it comes

to the use of discursive and linguistic features. Due to their higher unconscious command of the language, inner circle English speakers can take advantage of more sophisticated linguistic resources such as acronyms, onomatopoeias or abbreviations than bloggers from the outer and expanding circle. Nevertheless, speakers from the outer and expanding circle show higher concern about their contribution as bloggers in their travel blog posts. This leads them, first, to avoid unorthodox decisions such as lack of capitalization and, second, to fill that gap with other efficient resources such as vague language.

Even so, pragmatically, all bloggers display a similar use of a wide range of speech acts to transmit their messages to the audience (specifically, engaging, recommending, stressing, praising, criticising and thanking). They also use specific linguistic and discursive strategies to instantiate them –discursive attitude markers, interjections or exclamations. Hence, ELF users, regardless of their origins, understand that the digital discourse in the blogosphere needs to present dialogical and informal traits that characterize it as friendly, respectful and conversational. Travel blog posts have, consequently, an increasingly oral nature that is reflected in accepted lexico-grammatical and discursive practices, considered otherwise as incorrect (e.g. non-standard capitalization and subject or auxiliary omission).

Interestingly, results from the corpus highlight no differences in the rhetorical structure of travel blog posts. The same moves tend to be followed to build up the narration and description of a trip. After situating the place and describing it with full range of details and experiences, bloggers summarize the important points and invite the audience to feed them back with opinions or further information. Likewise, the navigation mode abounds in all posts, the user being an active reader who decides what to read, and in what order.

In closing, some venues for future research may comprise comparing this study with blog posts other than travel ones belonging to the genre colony to observe potential ELF discrepancies in its use and structure. Moreover, the contrastive analysis between the travel blog post and the comment can shed light on the boundaries as for these two sub-genres that have been considered, and on their particular features and their relation in the genre chain within the blog.

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APPENDIX

List of travel blog posts, following the codification used in the corpus, with their accompanying links.

Helen in Wonderlust

HWNS1: <https://www.heleninwonderlust.co.uk/2016/06/things-loved-didnt-love-sri-lanka/>

HWNS2: <https://www.heleninwonderlust.co.uk/2015/09/morocco-sahara-desert-tour/>

HWNS3: <https://www.heleninwonderlust.co.uk/2014/07/things-to-do-kiev-ukraine/>

Nomadic Matt

NMNS1: <https://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/patagonia-camping-hiking/>

NMNS2: <https://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/best-things-sydney/>

NMNS3: <https://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/save-money-reykjavik/>

The Shooting Star

SSNN1: <https://the-shooting-star.com/2015/07/06/if-youre-looking-for-the-shire-come-to-georgia/>

SSNN2: <https://the-shooting-star.com/2016/12/15/quirky-ways-to-discover-frankfurt/>

SSNN3: <https://the-shooting-star.com/2016/12/11/lake-atitlan-guatemala-the-feeling-that-ive-found-my-place-on-earth/>

Zee Goes

ZGNN1: <http://www.zeeoes.com/2016/02/29/summer-2015-road-to-seville-with-zeeoes/>

ZGNN2: www.zeeoes.com/2016/10/17/how-to-buy-a-good-travel-insurance/

ZGNN3: <http://www.zeeoes.com/2016/09/28/bushmills-traveling-around-northern-ireland/>

Lili's Travel Plans

LTNN1: <http://www.lilistravelplans.com/cinque-terre-italy/>

LTNN2: <http://www.lilistravelplans.com/trinidad-cuba-life-lessons-responsible-travel/>

LTNN3: <http://www.lilistravelplans.com/survival-guide-culture-shock-china-part-1/>

Girl Astray

GANN1: <http://girlastray.com/locals-guide-to-bratislava-with-map/>

GANN2: <http://girlastray.com/basic-hitchhiking-guide/>

GANN3: <http://girlastray.com/free-travel/>