

# “FINISHING ONE BIG ADVENTURE IN ORDER TO EMBARK ON ANOTHER”: EXPLORING UNIVERSITY RESEARCH BLOGS

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## **Abstract**

The article focuses on blogs related to research activities of the academic community. Research-related blogs as components of university websites have developed into an array of sub-genres shaped by specific foci, their authors and the desired audiences. The data set consists of fifty posts from ten blogs of six universities. Drawing upon Swales' methodology of genre analysis, the study explores the generic structure of the blog posts, reveals the communicative purposes they can fulfil within the landscape of university websites, identifies significant communication strategies, and explores the roles the blogs may serve in communicating science to the diverse audiences they potentially address. The analysis has shown that the blogs help accomplish the general goals of informing about the university and promoting it providing a personalized view and engaging the reader, manifest loose but recurrent generic structuring, and can be vehicles of knowledge dissemination as well as knowledge construction.

**Keywords:** academic discourse, communicating science, genre analysis, generic structure, research blog, university website

## **1. Introduction**

Striving to construct a picture of the multifarious character of university life, the university website represents a complex multimodal ensemble pursuing the communicative goals through interplay of verbal and non-verbal modes and employment of a range of genres. The website could be viewed as a super genre realized as a genre set (as defined by Bazerman, 2004) working towards common communicative goals, viz. to introduce the university to the public and to promote it. This double task tends to be accomplished through hybridization of institutional discourse (cf. Fairclough 1992, Bhatia 1997, 2004): infusing university guidelines and instructions with elements of promotional genres and incorporating genres inherent to other domains: e.g. news reports, interviews, or blogs.

Blogs are not regular components of university web presentations but if they are employed, they tend to become abundant, populating an array of paths of the university website. The majority of these blogs defy classifications into groups

and types according to content or authorship (Herring et al. 2005) combining the personal and the topical, including both individual and community posts.

In spite of their variability and hybridism, university website blogs in the data set analysed generally fall into two categories distinguishable by their authorship, content and function: blogs introducing university life to prospective students and blogs related to research and its impact. Whereas the first type of blogs is invariably written by university students, science or research blogs are produced by a range of authors – researchers, university administrators, doctoral students, or professional science journalists. The present study explores the latter sub-genre of university affiliated blogs.

Blogs have inspired a number of studies (Miller and Shepherd 2004, Herring et al. 2005, Myers 2010), and scholarly blogs in particular have received attention in recent years (Mauranen 2013, Kuteeva 2016, Luzón 2011, 2013, 2018). Science and research blogs are studied from a variety of perspectives, often seen as new forms of scholarly writing, significantly shaped by their social function, and as means of communicating science to the public. The format or genre of blog apparently lends itself well to the processes of recontextualization which make scientific information accessible to general audiences by means of “mediation, re-expression or translation of scientific issues into contexts that mean something to audiences” (Russell 2010: 88) rather than by facilitating its understanding through simplification.

Although the researchers have come in many respects to compatible conclusions on the role of blogs and their make-up, the status of the blog as a form of communication is still debated and debatable, oscillating between the blog as a genre (e.g. Mauranen 2013, Schmidt 2007) and blog as a technical form of online-based communication, “*a designed space* with many potential uses” (Barton and Lee 2013: 29, highlighting in the original), possibly even within one study: Luzón characterizes the blog as one of online genres (2013: 429), at the same time, however, avoids using the concept of move in the analysis of rhetorical categories within posts as she does not “consider these posts a genre” (2013: 435).

Generally, the research results published suggest that the blog can be recognized as a genre complying with Martin’s (1997), and Swales (1990) and Bhatia’s (1993, 2004) definitions genre analysis draws upon. Swales’ concept of a genre, adopted later by Bhatia, is grounded in professional and academic domains, viewing 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. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value” (Bhatia 1993: 13). Martin’s approach goes beyond the borders of a specific domain, which makes the definition more general but not incongruous with the Swales’ concept; according to Martin genre represents “the system of staged goal-oriented social processes through which social subjects in

a given culture live their lives” (1997: 13). The flexibility of Martin’s definition consists also in loosening the relation between a genre and a specific (professional) community, which aptly suits web genres, including blogs. As Mauranen (1993, 2013) has shown, rather than arising from an existing community, certain genres may establish new communities, possibly quite heterogeneous in character.

Yet another approach to the concept of genre can be found in Conrad and Biber (2009), who do not define genre as a communicative event or a social process, but see genre as one of the perspectives from which you can view and analyse language varieties (Conrad and Biber 2009: 2), the other perspectives being register and style. Still, as Conrad and Biber explain, their distinction between register and genre “clearly shares some characteristics with the use of the concepts in the Systemic Functional Linguistics, especially with respect to the genre perspective emphasizing the conventional features of whole texts, while the register perspective emphasizes variation in the use of linguistic features” (2009: 22).

Blogs share a set of communicative purposes (typically dissemination of information, presenting personal attitudes, and networking, Schmidt 2007, Kjellberg 2010), and are structured, even if their cognitive structuring is variable and the conventions are loose. The variability of their cognitive structuring could be partly attributed to the novelty of the genre and constant evolution of genres as such (Santini 2006), the more so that “technology such as the Internet lives on the principle of permanent change” (Lovink 2008: xi), partly to the fact that blogs are “highly social” (Kuteeva 2016: 435), often dominated by personal experiences and opinions rather than facts, and so there is no need for efficient information retrieval that pushes “genres in some fields towards standardization” (Shaw 2016: 246).

As observed by Mauranen (2013), the inner diversity of blogs may be accounted for by perceiving the blog as a supergenre, or a genre cluster (Mauranen 2013: 13), comprising an array of sub-genres; at the same time the inner structure of individual blogs is complex in itself: as a string of (relatively) independent posts unified by a shared purpose, author, topic, or domain, the blog resembles a discourse colony (Hoey 1986, 2001). The blog as a whole exhibits conventional division into posts and each of the posts can be examined to define its rhetorical structuring into moves.

Whereas the model move structures of a number of genres in academic, professional and promotional discourses are already defined and confirmed by a number of studies (e.g. Swales 1990, Bhatia 2004, Dontcheva-Navratilova 2016), modelling the inner organisation of blog posts has not been accomplished yet—even though the rhetorical categories in research-commenting posts Luzón identified and discussed (2013: 438) may actually represent a model cognitive structuring based on recurrent moves collaborating towards the communicative goal, but are not presented as such. Rather than applying or testing an expected

pattern, this analysis of university science and research blogs is thus a piloting qualitative study of the genre.

As mentioned earlier in this section, this study investigates blogs affiliated with universities, accessible through university websites and referred to as science or research blogs through the titles of the blogs, or through the links leading to them. Drawing upon the previous research findings on a variety of blogs, the blog is assumed to be a genre shaped by its communicative purposes which translate into the move structure of the posts and the strategies used to achieve these purposes. The present study seeks to answer the following research questions: What are the purposes these blogs (potentially) fulfil within the landscape of university web presentations? Do the university science and research blogs manifest a recurrent generic structuring including characteristic lexico-grammatical features? Are there any significant strategies the bloggers typically use to accomplish the purposes of these blogs? What is the role of these blogs in communicating science to diverse audiences?

## **2. Methodology and data**

The analysis applies Swales' and Bhatia's concept of genre, aims to characterize the communicative purposes of the blogs, and explores the cognitive structuring of the posts selected; it identifies elements of the structure of the posts that recur across the posts in the data set and fulfil the same function, i.e. structural elements that could be defined as moves. In agreement with Swales, the communicative purposes are perceived as the cohesive forces of the representatives of a genre which distinguish it from other genres: "The principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes. [... G]enres are communicative vehicles for the achievement of goals" (Swales 1990: 46). The communicative purposes are not expected to be always unequivocal and self-evident, on the contrary they are often complex and hidden, and can be revealed only with the knowledge of the relevant context. Askehave and Swales therefore proposed a flexible model of genre analysis starting with a provisional status of the anticipated communicative purpose of the genre, which is after a thorough analysis of the text and the context 'repurposed' (Askehave and Swales 2001: 207, cf. also Bawarshi and Reiff 2010: 49) "completing the hermeneutic circle" (Askehave and Swales 2001: 210). The findings presented below have resulted from an analysis following Askehave and Swales's proposition and involved distinguishing individual moves according to their functions after a careful analysis of the posts with revising provisional findings in the course of repeated close readings by the researcher.

Even though there is a wide agreement with regard to the essential role of the communicative purpose(s) in the definition of the genre (cf. Miller 1984; Halliday and Hasan 1989; Bhatia 2004; Martin 2008; Virtanen 2010) and on the

fact that “[b]y its very nature, genre is therefore defined by function much more than by form” (Dorgeloh and Wanner 2010: 10), the form of the genre and its moves are also worth considering. Although lexico-grammatical analyses of particular genres do not seem to have identified features that are unique to one genre or to a particular set of genres (Dorgeloh and Wanner 2010: 8), the identification of formal features regularly occurring within a set of representatives of one genre can meaningfully contribute to its characteristic. This qualitative analysis thus also focuses on those lexico-grammatical features that are widely present in the data set, recur in the majority of posts, help reveal the communicative purposes and jointly form strategies to accomplish them.

The set of university websites in the corpus consists of relatively random collection of top as well as less prestigious but quality universities: nine British universities (University of Edinburgh, Oxford, Bristol, Bournemouth, Cambridge, Warwick, Brighton, Leeds Beckett, and Sheffield), four North American universities (University of California Los Angeles, Central Oklahoma, Alabama), and four Czech universities (Charles, Masaryk, Palacky University, and the University of Ostrava). I searched all these websites for the presence of blogs that met the following criteria: the blogs were part of the university website, accessible through the web pages of the university or its colleges/faculties; they were referred to and characterized as science or research blogs and related to a field of study or research, and were active at the time of the data set compilation. Only six university websites offered blogs which met the above-listed criteria.

The data set analysed consists of 50 posts retrieved from 10 blogs: five recent posts from each of the ten blogs, accessed through the websites of University of Edinburgh, University of Oxford, University of Bristol, University of Bournemouth, University of Cambridge, and Harvard University. The corpus has the total of 49 240 words. All the blogs are referred to as science, or research blogs at the respective websites, some of them are specified by a discipline (historians’ blog), or a broader field of research and study (health blog). The authorship helps distinguish five types of university affiliated blogs in the corpus: blogs written by science journalists to inform about the university scholarly achievements and promote them (science blog), blogs written by academics and/or professional editors to raise awareness about scientific and social issues and provide advice to the public (health blog), blogs run by administrators on professional issues in academic and research life at the university (blog on scholarly communication), discipline-related blogs written by researchers and doctoral students (historians-at-Bristol blog), and finally research blogs written by doctoral students (medicine-vet postgraduate life blog). All the posts in the corpus were retrieved between June 2016 and May 2017 and all the source blogs, except one postgraduate student blog, are still active.

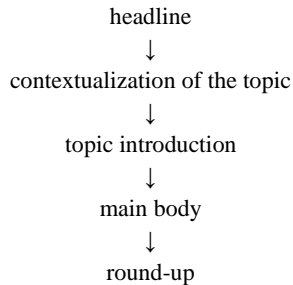
### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 The generic structure of blog posts

As most of the previous research into blogs stresses the variability of the content and form of the posts, the starting point of the present study was to find out if there is any recognizable conventional structuring within university affiliated blogs. And if there is, whether individual moves manifest typical lexicogrammatical realization. The move is understood here in accordance with Motta-Roth as “a stretch of discourse (extending for one or more sentences) that realizes a specific communicative function and that represents a stage in the development of an overall structure of information that is commonly associated with the genre” (1998: 33).

The analysis has shown that the blog post structure relies on relatively steady framing constituents which provide stabilizing support for the more volatile move structure of the main body. The posts exhibit the following move sequences:

**Table 1.** The Move Structure of University Research Blog Posts



##### 3.1.1. Headlines

Blog post headlines both inform the readers and attract their attention but they vary substantially in the proportion pertaining to each of the two functions: headlines of blogs written by professional journalists or editors, promoting research achievements affiliated with the university, and raising public health awareness reach far beyond the university community and strive to tell the story (see examples 1 to 4 below); headlines of postgraduate student blogs, on the other hand, tend to address fellow and prospective students rather than the general public, and prefer vaguer headlines, drawing upon the readers’ assumed familiarity with certain aspects of university life and leaving the text open for their interpretation (example 6). This variation in the degree of informativity spreads the headline samples along a scale between the highly informative and explicit, and the non-specific, or vague.

The information-focused headlines typically not only introduce the topic of the post but at the same time imply, or briefly state the core research findings:

- (1) Personal music systems may be hazardous to hearing  
<http://blog.journals.cambridge.org/2016/07/18/personal-music-systems-may-be-hazardous-to-hearing/>

The message conveyed by headlines may also suggest the rhetorical strategy of the text, make the reader expect reportage (2), a case study (3), or instructions (4), and augur the personal and personalized rendering of the topic (2, 3):

- (2) Summer in Chad: Ismaël Maazaz reflects on fieldwork  
<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/>
- (3) Severe hepatitis: A personal story  
<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog/severe-hepatitis-personal-story>
- (4) How to stop the world's 3.1 billion young people being left behind  
<http://blog.qeh.ox.ac.uk/>

In headlines left open for interpretation by the audience facts and figures give way to word play (5, a post on the benefits of dental flosses), or appeal on experiences shared by the academic, particularly student community (6, a post on the author's work on the final master's project):

- (5) Tossing flossing?  
<https://cambridgemedicine.wordpress.com/>
- (6) Closer to the finish line...  
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/postgraduate/postgraduate-life/blogs>

The blog post headlines resemble in many ways online newspaper headlines, also technically with the author's name, and the date and time of posting in the heading, including the fact that it is the headlines alone the visitors of the website can see first before deciding to click a post open to read the text which follows. It is certainly not the only resemblance to be found (see section 3.1.4 characterizing the main body of the post), which could be partly explained by their place and function within institutional websites, partly by the affordances inherent to the internet medium and their shaping role in the makeup of web genres.

### ***3.1.2. Contextualization of the topic***

The blog posts typically open with a passage (a paragraph or two), which provides the reader with the context – the context in a broad sense as it may not necessarily be the context of the topic to be introduced later, it can also be the context of the post itself, explaining why it has been written, or the situational context of writing the post including the author's feelings and motivation, or the

atmosphere of the moment. Introducing a post offering reportage from the blogger's field research in Africa, the contextualization move in example 7 informs the reader about the financial and social support he enjoyed, indirectly acknowledging the scholarship as well as the help of his friends.

(7) Thanks to a Global Development Academy (GDA) scholarship I was lucky enough to conduct fieldwork in N'Djamena, Chad over a month of June 2015. A friend of mine, Mathilde, ..., kindly hosted me ... I was rapidly embedded in a crew of Chadian and French residents who made my stay amazingly human.

<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/>

Example 8 below shows how the topic introduction move can be preceded with a description of the emotional atmosphere of the event to be depicted. The generalized assertions about feelings accompanying a book publication or a project completion invite the readers to identify themselves with the author and construct the relevance of the post to the audience.

(8) There is something frenetic and exciting about the publication of a book. Especially when it's been a long time in the writing. And there's also something a bit sad about delivering the last words on a project before moving on to the next.

<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/>

The posts tend to be contextualized in terms of time and space well beyond the note of the date, time, and affiliation in the header. Time specification relates the time of writing to the time of the event the blog post reports on and distinguishes between them as in example 7 above; time reference may take the date of the post as the deictic centre and refer to the past or future accordingly:

(9) Over the past four weeks during our research project at Bournemouth University...

<http://blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/>

Dating can also be paired with indirect time references mentioning social or political events that are assumed to be familiar to the readers or embedding the post in the course of the year – be it the academic year calendar, or the seasons and seasonal holidays:

(10) Can I just express how happy I am that the sun is already up when I get up and sets when I am leaving the lab? I am delighted! I know that that first part will change when we set our clocks forward this weekend, but the sunlight along with the daffodils in the Meadows are a sign of Spring ... Happy Easter weekend!

<https://theviewofgeorgesquare.wordpress.com/2016/03/25/the-ghost-of-the-past-present-and-what-is-yet-to-come/>

As these blogs are affiliated with universities and accessible through university websites, the default location is the university and the city in which it



resides; the blog writers only make the space reference explicit when it adds relevance to the topic, or when the place of writing the post is elsewhere:

(11) It’s a damp, restful Monday here in Lagos, Nigeria.. one of those Mondays you *don’t*

‘hate’! Today is a public holiday as we commemorate “Democracy day” in my country – the day Nigeria officially transitioned from a military government to a democratic government in 1999.

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/postgraduate/postgraduate-life/blogs>

A significant part of the contextualization is showing the relevance of the post and the topic to the desired audiences. The factor of relevance seems to play a crucial role not only in science and research blogs but in science communication in general, and is presented by researchers in the field as a feature distinguishing scientific texts for specialist readership from those targeting non-specialist readers (cf. Myers 2002, Russell 2010, Luzón 2013). Luzón explains that “While researchers write papers to persuade specialists of the validity of their knowledge claims, this validity is taken for granted in popular science where the focus is on the relevance and value of this new knowledge for the audience” (2013: 433). In the same vein Myers argues that “facts in popular science are endowed with an authority they did not always have within the specialist discourse from which they emerged... popular science texts do not suggest how scientific facts could be questioned or modified” (2002: 179).

Within the contextualization move the efforts for showing the readers the relevance of the post topic typically translate into explanations of the motivation for choosing the topic just now and just here. Political and social events and holidays regularly represent motivation factors (see example 11 above), revealing at the same time the relation and relevance of university studies and research to the political or social situation in a particular country or in the global society; motivation may also come, however, from inner university life:

(12) Today – graduation day – is a very important day for University of Bristol historians. ... The George Hare Leonard Prize is awarded to the graduate with the best overall performance, but who was George Hare Leonard, and what does the fact that we attach his name to such a prestigious award mean?

<http://historiansatbristol.blogs.ilrt.org/>

The post exemplified in example 12 is apparently written with the academic community in mind, even though it further on emphasizes generally acceptable values; blogs addressing broader and mixed audiences seek to inspire a feeling of all-embracing relevance of the issue under discussion and often employ less conventional techniques, as in the opening passage below:

- (13) You're in hospital and you need to have a blood test: What do you think would Reduce your pain?
1. Sucrose (sugar water)
  2. Painkillers
- You probably went with option 2. But in babies option 1 is often prescribed. Ultimately, we would like to provide better pain relief for some of the most vulnerable patients in hospital.

*Prof Rebecca Slater, Department of Paediatrics*

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog>

Stating or implying relevance is not limited to the opening contextualizing move: it can be best characterized as a strategy cutting across all the stages of the post structure, a strategy, which is in itself an objective this genre pursues. It is also an objective shared with other genres of popular scientific domain and tends to be particularly conspicuous in the novel ones – e.g. in TED talks, in which showing the general value of the topic represents an essential move (Matušincová 2016: 34).

It could be argued, though, that indicating relevance in the opening paragraph(s) of the post yields additional value in claiming the common ground: the contextualizing passage can be perceived as ‘a pre-sequence’, building a communication harmony and a relationship with the receivers.

All the examples and comments considered, defining this move as contextualizing may sound a bit like a paradox: the contextualization of the study, research, or scientific topic here in effect contributes to their recontextualization, i.e. interpreting it “in terms of more familiar contexts” of the desired readership (Russell 2010: 114).

### **3.1.3. Topic introduction**

As the corpus comprises a selection of university affiliated blogs related to science and research in general, their scope is comparatively broader than researchers’ blogs studied e.g. by Mauranen (2013) or research-commenting blogs analysed by Luzón (2013). Although related to science and research domains, the topics tackled are not always research topics as such, and if they are they tend to be introduced in a personalized way, or the topic sentence closely follows the contextualizing move (14). Bloggers enjoy the freedom of the genre and the affordances of its technical format, which give “the author more control over the content and communicative setting” (Schmidt 2007: 1412) and “provide space for personal expression and debate” (Kuteeva 2016: 435), and choose to write about a variety of aspects of research process and research product offering a snapshot from a long-term project, a complex topic consisting of an overview of academic and other activities (15), or providing a report on how a research-related topic was discussed at debate sessions (16).

- (14) “My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.”  
That’s just one of many Rodney Dangerfield jokes that don’t exactly paint a rosy picture of marriage. But, according to a new study, being married might just save your life.  
Okay, that might be an overstatement. But there is fascinating — and compelling — research suggesting that married people enjoy better health than single people.  
<http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog>

- (15) So, what’s been keeping me so busy?  
[...]  
Speaking of presentations, I gave a talk at the zebrafish group meeting in the beginning of July.  
[...]  
In the last few weeks, I have been doing some big experiments and tried collect a lot of data  
[...]  
My lab signed up to take part in Science Insights, which is an initiative by the University of Edinburgh  
[...]  
In my free time, I did something more exciting than just read or watch Netflix recently...  
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/postgraduate/postgraduate-life/blogs>

- (16) This blog describes some of the insights that emerged from two sets of discussions with academics at Cambridge University organised by Cambridge University Press last year. The topic was peer review...  
<http://unlockingresearch.blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

In most sample posts topic sentences or paragraphs follow the contextualizing move, a reverse order is, however, also possible. The majority of topic introductions show signs of personalization by explicitly attributing the topics to the blog writers and/or through expressive and evaluative language, including jokes and rhetorical questions. There are also topics introduced indirectly, through the author’s feelings or through a description of a situation experienced by the blogger: the topics thus may be picked out and dealt with for very subjective reasons:

- (17) Christmas browsing in my local bookshop, my eyes settled on a portrait of a bearded,  
Middle aged man and I pondered on the words Ben Jonson – A Life. (Ian Donaldson). Ever since turning the first pages of that book, I have been like a fish on a line. Why? What’s been the attraction of Ben Jonson?  
<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/ben-jonsons-walk/hooked-on-ben/>

The manifold ways of introducing the topic of the post, rarely employing impersonal topic sentences or topic paragraphs of academic genres, eloquently document the nature of the blog merging the scientific and the personal, balancing facts and feelings with neither of them gaining the sole focus.

### **3.1.4. Main body**

The inner structuring of the main body of the post text is too variable in terms of the content organisation to be described as a set of clearly definable moves that would recur across the data set. In spite of the diversity in realisations of the main body texts, there are two recognizable types of structuring that emerge from the analysis and seem to be applicable as unifying elements within the data set, allowing for further specifications into sub-types. The generic structure in the main body is either orbital in character, or chronological with a variation between narratives, reportage-like narratives, and minutes-like structuring.

The orbital generic structure was described by Iedema (1994) to account for the structure of news reports and applied by others (e.g. Nádraská 2016) on news reporting in online papers. The orbital generic structure ignores the potential chronology of the elements and is instead characterized by the dependence of individual paragraphs in the report on the headline and the opening paragraph (the lead) and at the same time by a lack of mutual dependence between the paragraphs. Each of the paragraphs elaborates on a topic/topics introduced in the lead to which it is related primarily by lexical cohesion, avoiding deictic expressions or linking devices that would make the paragraphs dependent on each other for meaning-making. The paragraphs represent satellites co-operating with the headline and the lead, which form the nucleus (Iedema et al. 1994, cf. also the constant continuous theme pattern in Daneš's model of thematic progression – Daneš 1974). Similarly to news reporting, blog posts characterized by the orbital structure either fully follow the satellite model, or combine it with chronologically organised passages; the combined structures, though, are still dominated by the orbital principle, the sequential organisation is loose and keeping the sequence is not crucial for reading comprehension. A typical representative of a combined orbital pattern is the following example from a postgraduate student blog:

- (18) So, I am excited to be completing my full Masters coursework this upcoming June. I just completed “Global Aid” last week and I am currently undertaking the final coursework “Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI). STI marks the end of my taught courses...

Global Aid was a great course for me as it involved a lot of intellectual exposure outside my core area of interest in Global/Public Health. We were introduced to the current global aid models...

Another funny story about the course though. As some of us may be aware...

So with my current course – “Sexually transmitted diseases”, I am looking forward to improving my understanding of the subject. I have some considerable experience...

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/postgraduate/postgraduate-life/blogs>

The beginning of the third paragraph in the extract suggests that it is not the first paragraph in the row and that there should be a story preceding the one told here. The “funny story” is in fact not related to the comments on the Global Aid course – explaining difficulties caused by the lack of power supply in Nigeria – but to the blogger’s recent experiences as such.

The chronological structure is organised along the timeline of events modified into several shapes: the post may read as a narrative, a story of what the author and/or others were doing, or what happened to them (examples 19, 20); the post may acquire the form of reportage tracking a research process step by step including the findings as well as citations and comments (21), or the post may exhibit a minutes-like structure providing an impersonal report on a meeting or debate (22).

- (19) First it was the bobbing float... as I read on, I was amazed at how much seemed to be recorded... Then came the bait: the drama of his life... Then a hook sunk itself in, drawing me along the Jonson road... Then the hook twisted, and pierced my publishing skin... I was fascinated by Ben Jonson’s outrageous assertion...

<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/>

In example 19 the chronology of the story is strongly supported by a string of cohesive devices: a series of linking elements, the continuity of simple past tense forms, the consistent first person singular perspective, which makes the story a personal experience, and last but not least the development of the ‘fish and hook’ metaphor originating as early as in the topic introduction paragraph earlier in this post. The story-telling structure and the corresponding linguistic makeup of the post comply with Myers’s findings that “[e]very popularization needs a story” (2002: 180), and that in popular science “the researchers become actors and the claim becomes a discovery event” (2002: 183).

A yet another modification of the chronological structure consists in splitting the story line of the narrative: the post exemplified in example 20 below presents a case study in two parallel, occasionally intersecting lines narrated by the author of the post and by the patient himself respectively.

- (20) In an impossible situation, his body was so weak that the standard treatment to clear the virus (interferon) would likely kill him. Each week ten litres of excess fluid needed to be drained from his abdomen...  
*‘Everything that could go wrong with the liver had gone wrong with my liver. It was*

*massively sclerotic. I had varices, I had ascites. ...*

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog/severe-hepatitis-personal-story>

- (21) ...we must be very wary of received wisdom.

This came home to me recently as I sought to investigate the musician credited with leading James Scott Skinner into the world of classical violin technique. ...

According to Skinner himself...

I searched long and hard but my efforts to locate Charles Rougier in specialist dictionaries, catalogues of music, trade directories and genealogy websites drew a complete blank.

Fortunately, through the Hallé Orchestra I was able to confirm that the player in question was actually called Roguier. ...

Nevertheless he did have some status regionally, as this concert report records: ...

I have been unable to locate any compositions or arrangements by him and wonder if the *Keel Row* arrangement mentioned by Mary Anne Alburger was in fact by another, but real, C. Rougier. The search continues.

<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/revival-fiddle/2016/01/23/the-man-who-taught-the-strathspey-king/>

Example 21 presents a selection of paragraph beginnings to document the reportage-like structure of the post. The topic, as suggested by the first line of the example, is much broader than searching for the identity of Rougier – it is the alertness with which findings and secondary sources should be taken and the importance of going back to primary data. A suspicion raised by a note on a music album sets off an investigation that revealed clues, required independent thinking and staying power, and finally lead to the resolution of the enigma. The reportage form, creating the tension of a detective story, contrasts with reports imitating meeting minutes, characterized by matter-of-factness and the backgrounded position of the author:

- (22) One participant raised a question of whether we were blaming peer review for things

it is not responsible for. [...]

The conversation moved to the pressure to publish in high-impact journals. One STEM participant noted that the problem has got substantially worse than 30 years ago. [...]

A social anthropologist noted that a major problem with peer review is we are asking

people to do a whole load of free labour.

<https://unlockingresearch.blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

As the example shows, even the minutes-like report avoids a completely detached objectivity of expression employing evaluative language and personal reference by first person plural pronouns.

The writers strive to make their posts meaningful and engaging for the readers, inviting them to get involved with the topic or an activity through frequent referencing to (potentially) shared experience, instincts or attitudes (23), showing the importance of findings as solving problems (24), and focusing on benefits for people, presenting themselves, or other researchers not only as interested in the matter but also as socially responsible (25).

- (23) As adults we may instinctively stop ourselves from pulling our hand away from the handle of a hot pan...

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog>

- (24) The results are also relevant to medical practice: doctors and nurses rely on behavioural observation to make judgements about pain in babies.

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog>

- (25) Oxford University researchers work with partners around the globe to develop new treatments to benefit people worldwide.

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog>

### **3.1.4. Round-up**

Unlike the rather diverse character of the main body, the representatives of the framing moves – the contextualizing and topic introduction moves on the one hand and the final round-up move on the other are much more akin. The final passage provides a generalizing summary of the topic(s) discussed in the post and is also invariably of a prospective nature. This orientation towards future may translate into personal plans of the blogger, in the majority of cases, however, includes an appeal on the (desired) reader: a wish (26), advice (27), but also a call for action (28). The reader-oriented round-up is typical even for posts which are otherwise predominantly author-oriented (26), or impersonal (27).

- (26) As I walk around the Lauriston Place campus at the moment I see our final year students starting to assemble their work for the ECA Degree Show that opens at the end of May. I know that they're currently experiencing that exhilarating and daunting sense of finishing one big adventure in order to embark on another as well. I wish them the very best of luck.

<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/eca-principal/suit-form-function-style/>

- (27) Be cautious if you use marijuana  
In the meantime, if you do use marijuana products, do not do so before driving or operating other heavy or dangerous equipment, and stop if you are pregnant.

<http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/>

- (28) If Chad's future is riddled with uncertainties, I am convinced that more researchers should pay attention to it, since it may be geopolitically decisive for the larger Africa.

<http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/>

The appeal on the readers reveals the readership the blogger expects to address out of the broad audiences of the internet medium. Whereas professional editors apparently target the general public, academics and students seem to have in mind researchers or (prospective) students (examples 26, 28); the potentially global audiences of the websites are thus invited also to the inside of the academic community, becoming familiar with activities, interests and goals, and the values attributed to them. University science and research blogs can build “new bridges between the interested layman and the professional expert” (Mauranen 2013: 32), at the same time opening doors to the institutions and the life of their communities.

### 3.2. Summary

In spite of the considerable variability in their schematic structuring, the posts exhibit recognizable stable elements recurring across the data set. The headline attracts readers' attention and provides information about the content of the post.

The contextualization move presents both the context of the research or scientific topic and the context of (writing) the post as such: it describes the circumstances of the research, the emotional atmosphere of the research or of writing the post, it explains the motivation for choosing the topic, situates the post in time and space with the date in the header as the deictic centre and the university as the default location. The contextualization move contributes substantially to the construction of relevance to the receivers, recontextualizing the topic to fit it within the audience's experience.

The topic introduction move tends to be personalized – presenting the topics as arising from the blogger's intentions and interests and employing evaluative and emotional language expressing their personal attitudes to them.

The main body moves are more volatile in the content as well as form (a narrative, reportage, or even meeting minutes) unified by their adherence to one of two inner structures, or their combination: they are organised either chronologically, or by orbital structuring, which defies chronology and is instead based on self-contained paragraphs loosely related by lexical cohesion and by their common affiliation to the frame set by the contextualization and topic introduction moves.

This set of moves is concluded with a round-up move that sums up the content of the post, generalizes its message, and involves prospects or references



to the future such as wishes, or calls for action. The individual moves are recognizable by their functions and content, only rarely by a distinct form.

The blog posts in the data set analysed tend to be shaped by three dominant strategies that pursue the communicative purposes the blogs seem to accomplish. All the posts manifest features of personalization: the scientific topics or research processes are viewed and presented from a subjective, personal point of view, with the bloggers themselves playing a central role in the story or with the research topics and research benefits presented through the condition of the people affected.

The personalized character of the posts is complemented with their hybrid features, namely the expressive – emotional and evaluative – vocabulary this discourse is infused with and the conversationalized language, which mix with more formal passages and impersonal structures of this academic genre.

The bloggers seek to build a common ground with the readership referring to shared experience and to make the posts more engaging presenting the research potential for solving problems and helping local as well as global communities. The writers build a relationship with the readers and get them involved in the processes revealed by means of a range of rhetorical questions constructing a dialogue – a dialogue communicating science but also its personal reflection.

All the three strategies are closely related and co-operate: personalization is facilitated by emotional, evaluative and conversationalized language, and a personalized account imitating a dialogue with the readers builds a relationship with the audience and helps them identify with the bloggers or with the issues presented, and feel the relevance of the message conveyed.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

The university science and research blogs are nested within the institutional websites and as embedded genres contribute to the accomplishment of the key communicative purposes of university web presentations: to inform about the university and to promote it. On the one hand, the analysis has confirmed some of the previous findings on the communicative purposes of research blogs in general – the university science and research blogs also disseminate information, present personal attitudes of their authors and focus on making scientific facts and research results relevant to the readers. On the other hand, they do not seem to pursue networking purposes, and even though they encourage the readers to feel part of the process and communication, the posts do not yield comments or discussions. Besides constructing their own image, the bloggers have their share in building a positive image of the university and in presenting its impact on both the local and the global community.

The university science and research blogs in the data set analysed manifest a recurrent generic structuring: even though the move structure of the blog posts is loose and flexible, it is recognizable and supportive, providing a unifying

frame of headline, contextualization, topic introduction, and round-up with a more variable main body flowing as a chronological narrative or building a mosaic of satellite paragraphs. The analysis has shown that individual moves are definable in terms of their respective functions within the post, not by the formal features they exhibit. Recurring lexico-grammatical features tend to be related to the strategies realized across the posts rather than to particular moves.

The significant communication strategies applied to achieve the communicative purposes of the blogs are interpersonal in nature. The science/research blog could thus be perceived as a tenor-dominated genre reverberating contributions to scientific journals in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries: “In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most reports to the journal were letters. The authors presented themselves at the centre of action, referred to themselves in the first person, and freely described their thoughts, feelings and actions. The texts resembled the spoken discourse of everyday life” (Russell 2010: 10; similarly commented on by Mauranen 2013: 27).

Focussing on personal experience, feelings and attitudes, and reflecting and evaluating the research process as well as its results, the blog narratives and reports go beyond knowledge dissemination and reveal how knowledge is constructed, creating space for the readers’ knowledge construction by getting them involved.

Similarly to student blogs targeting prospective students, science and research blogs contribute to ‘deinstitutionalization’ of the institutional discourse of university websites offering a more holistic view of the academic community, introducing the professional as related to the personal, enriching the neutral or formal language with informal, expressive and conversationalized features inducing interaction. Interweaving the two sets of aspects into a coherent whole seems to be one of the defining characteristics of the genre.

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### The data set

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