

Dialogic voices of writers and readers in *traveller forums* through interpersonality.

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Abstract:

This study explores web-based discourse genres and applies a dialogic framework to the study of interpersonality in *traveller forums*. This genre belongs to the domain of travel and tourism, where the interaction of writers-readers leads towards its ultimate purpose: to persuade others through positive or negative opinions. The theory of Dialogic Action Games (Weigand 2008, 2009, 2010) aids to understand its rationale since these dialogic interactions can be seen as an application of Weigand's principles (2010), in this case materialized through interpersonal markers (Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore et al. 1993). A corpus of *traveller forums* (180 threads of conversation) from Trip Advisor was compiled and analyzed. The quantitative and qualitative analyses draw on the notion of *voice* (White 2003; Hyland 2008), divided into writer's stance and reader's engagement. This research shows that they are encoded in a number of interpersonal markers which participate in the genre's rhetorical characterization.

Keywords:

interpersonality/dialogue/polylogue/metadiscourse/voice/stance/engagement/traveller forums/interactional markers/tourism

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1. Introduction

This study reports findings of a research done on writers' and readers' dialogic voices through interpersonal markers. A corpus of the web-based genre *traveller forum*, collected from the portal Trip Advisor in English during the summer of 2012, has been quantitative and qualitatively analyzed. Findings suggest that interpersonal markers participate in the characterization of this genre. The research question focuses on whether the web genre *traveller forum* can be analyzed through metadiscursive markers of interpersonal meaning (Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore et al. 1993) and whether this induces a particular bias that characterizes this genre. Interpersonal markers (Hyland

1998, 2005, 2008) can describe genres since they aid in achieving their rhetorical purpose, thus setting ground to describe other genres of the same discipline, as previous research in *hotel webpage* genre showed (Suau Jiménez 2011, 2012).

From a theoretical viewpoint, the theory of Dialogic Action Games (Weigand 2008, 2009, 2010), a holistic model based on the ability of *competence-in-performance*, which is seen as an inherent way humans have to solve problems through dialogue, is central to understand the rationale of *traveller forums* and how their fundamental rhetorical functions -persuasion, evaluation and solidarity- are built and achieved. This theory is based on the assumption that rhetoric is inherent to dialogue (Weigand 2010: 72) since humans are both individual and social beings, persuasive by nature, who negotiate meaning and understanding as part of everyday life. Their actions are thus determined by this double nature that induces them to communicate through strategies appropriate to their interests:

Texts are not just rhetorical texts if they contain rhetorical figures, they are always produced by human beings who are attempting to achieve more or less effectively certain purposes in dialogic interaction. (Weigand 2008: 3)

Speakers are constantly acting and reacting in what is called “effective language use”, a particular kind of action game that includes both verbal and non-verbal means (Weigand 2010: 73). Through her Mixed Game Model (MGM), Weigand (2008, 2009, 2010) explains how, consciously or unconsciously, humans proceed to reach rhetorical competence through a series of methodological principles that govern dialogues. These principles are termed constitutive, regulative and executive. *Constitutive principles* consider action as a correlation of purposes and means that not only include the ability of speaking but also that of thinking and perceiving. *Regulative principles* command

the interaction between emotion and reason, i.e. self-interest and the ability to deal with others. Politeness thus belongs here, telling us how to deal with other people and cultures in what to say and how. Finally, *Executive Principles* describe the actual rhetorical strategies that lead speakers towards their aims, for instance, “*how to avoid a definite answer, how to conceal the real purpose, depending on the basic interests and ideological viewpoints of the interacting partners*” (Weigand 2008:8).

Traveller forums display one kind of dialogue or polylogue where Weigand’s principles are represented. Beginning with *constitutive* ones, their dialogic structures follow a series of purposes and means (asking and providing convenient and reliable advice). Then, *regulative* principles shape how and what has to be said out of politeness when asking and replying, so as not to sound too demanding, too imposing or impolite, according to diverse cultural patterns underlying languages. Eventually, *executive* ones specifically describe rhetorical strategies meant to achieve communicative purposes in different genres. These strategies may be shaped with the aid of interpersonal markers (Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore et al. 1993; Hyland 2005, 2008; Suau-Jiménez 2011, 2012), where the concept of *voice* (White 2003; Hyland 2008), divided into writer’s *stance* and reader’s *engagement* provides a framework of analysis that can bring a new approach to the study of rhetoric and dialogue in a cyber-genre of a specific domain such as travel and tourism.

Thus, the method of analysis in this study has followed the framework of *voice* and its two categories of *stance* and *engagement*, each encoded in a number of interpersonal markers that cater for the rhetorical strategies necessary to negotiate meaning and understanding in order to attain persuasion, evaluation and solidarity in traveller forums. This approach permits a socially driven analysis, more accurate than previous studies that only regarded markers from a perspective of personal usage and

choice (Suau Jiménez and Dolón Herrero 2007; Suau Jiménez 2011, 2012). *Voice* introduces a social variable that can be theoretically situated between personal metadiscursive options and generic rhetorical functions, thus creating a new space for linguistic analysis within discourse that allows an alternative genre characterization from the perspective of interpersonality. Since genres in general entail a social identity, analyses based on *stance* and *engagement* voices can lead to more reliable interpersonal insights and conclusions when describing a web genre like the *traveller forum*. This genre's nature facilitates an array of interactions where a first writer poses a question and then a number of readers react turning into writers that exchange opinions and provide different judgements and evaluations. This way, a particular model of dialogic interaction is construed, where participants show their double nature of individual and social beings. These interactions can be heteroglossic and polyphonic (White 2003; Fløttum 2005) at times, presenting different voices and opinions, although voice here is related to each person participating in the conversation, being thus different from stance or engagement. Hyland and Tse's (2004) and Hyland's (2008) interactional metadiscourse models have served as a starting point to signal markers in English, previous to stance or engagement voice categorization. Findings on interpersonality in non-academic discourse have been taken into account, with special emphasis on tourism web genres (Suau Jiménez and Dolón Herrero, 2007; Mapelli 2008; Pierini 2009).

2. The *traveller forum*, a 2.0 web genre

2.1 *E-discourse*

Before attempting to define the genre *traveller forum*, we shall explore several concepts like *e-discourse* (electronic discourse) and *CMC* (computer-mediated-communication), since they are directly related to our study. A

plethora of authors have tried to define what *e-discourse* or the discourse that derives from the use of internet is, Herring (1996), Thurlow (2001) and Crystal (2006) being some of the most interesting ones. These authors agree on the description of interaction in virtual space by joining the concept of medium (net, web, internet, cyber-, electronic, virtual) and that of communication (speak, -lish, language and discourse), adding that the degree of specialization and the field of use must also be taken into consideration, since they are variables that bring about important differences (Varga 2012: 12). We could then say that *e-discourse* is a hybrid between the written and oral discourses. Herring, who coined the concept of CMC (computer mediated communication), proposes a clear definition, although she does not consider its discursive aspect: “...communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computer” (1996: 1). Another, possibly more insightful, approach to the description of *e-discourse* comes from Thurlow (2001), who claims that CMC entails five essential aspects: multilingualism, language change, conversation/discourse, stylistic diffusion, metalanguage and folklinguistics, these two last ones being of special interest to us since they refer to interpersonal metadiscourse, the virtual community of tourism and its genres. Thurlow is one of the first authors to suggest that genre description is a necessary tool to study internet texts. He also points to the need to consider the following contextual factors: format and type of channel, participants, length and nature of the relationship, topic and purpose. Finally, Crystal (2006: 6) defines the *e-discourse* phenomenon as a “variety of language governed by situational factors” avoiding the difficulty to define what an *e-discourse* would be in all its language and instrumental aspects. Another important concept to explore and define is that of *virtual community*. Rheingold (2000), one of the first authors to describe it, suggests that:

Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace (Rheingold 2000: XX).

Thus, his definition focuses on *public discussions* and *human feelings*, two concepts related to common shared values and a friendship bound of its members. It also describes virtual communities in terms of space (virtual space), time (the span of time the members are logged in), and communication (topics of interest).

2.2 Tourism and the traveller forum

The internet has undoubtedly become a major source of information and also a platform for tourism business operations (Bing et al. 2007; World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission, Spain, 2008). Diverse studies have shown that the internet influences and shapes the tourism industry more than any other sector of the economy (TIA 2005). Interpersonal influence arising from opinions exchanged between consumers is an important factor shaping consumers' decisions, and word-of-mouth coming from friends or peers provides a powerful influential source of pre-purchase information (Crotts 1999). A tourist product or service has become an "experience good", which means that its value is based on experiences that are difficult to assess prior to purchase (McIntosh 1972). Driven by altruism, solidarity and the expectation of reciprocation at some point, consumers contribute to spread product knowledge through word-of-mouth (Grewal et al. 2003), which has materialized through the internet in the form of travel blogs and traveller forums. The implication for the tourism industry is crucial, since results demonstrate that travel blogs and traveller forums are inexpensive

means to gather rich, authentic, and unsolicited customer feedback that can be used as a cost-effective method to assess touristic services quality and so to improve travellers' experiences and demands (Bing et al. 2007).

Therefore, the *traveller forum* is one among the rich variety of cyber-genres, also known as internet, digital, electronic, virtual or web-based genres (Shepherd and Waters 1998, 2004, cited in Santini 2007; Varga 2011) that have emerged since the greatest hypertext, the World Wide Web, began its life in 1989. These genres match the definition given by Crowston and Williams (2000: 13) as “*social type of communicative actions, characterized by a socially recognized communicative purpose and common aspect of form*”. Erickson (1999: 2, cited in Koskensalo 2012) defines web genres as “*a patterning of communication created by a combination of the individual (cognitive), social and technical forces implicit in a recurring communicative situation*”. In other words, they are characterized by a triple perspective that comprises content, form and functionality.

More specifically, tourism web genres, in the format of Web 2.0, offer particular and rich characteristics that supply travelling information, search, evaluation and analysis of customer's preferences, in portals such as Holiday Check, and Trip Advisor, in travelling-communities like Lonely Planet Thorn Tree and Trips by Tips, social networks like Couch Surfing or wikis like Wikitravel, Wikivoyage, and World66, Koskensalo (2012) sees tourism web genres as multidimensional phenomena where the new concepts of *prosumer* (producer+consumer) and *produser* (producer+user) explain the emergent collaborative web culture (Bruns 2008) of touristic websites, made visible through social software (wikis, newsfeeds, weblogs, instant messaging and social networking), where producer and consumer are the same person. These web genres are all characterized by dynamism and change, functionality, convergence of different

technologies, multimodality and blurring boundaries between writer and reader (*wreader*). This last characteristic -the blurring boundaries between writer and reader- is central to the *traveller forum* genre and represents a new form of interaction where a particular discursive psychology is on the basis of its communicative goal and, most importantly, its rhetorical functions and metadiscursive nature.

Following Calvi (2010: 21), the *traveller forum* is defined as an *informal genre*, facilitated through the internet, where the tourist/traveller turns into an expert that transmits touristic information. The aim is to exchange personal opinions, judgements and evaluations from a non-business viewpoint, since participants share a similar power status. The whole turns into an excellent source of commercially unbiased data that tourism agents can surely use as a way to know real travellers' opinions and demands. The *traveller forum's* rhetorical goals –persuasion, evaluation, solidarity- differ from other tourism web genres, due to its personal and non-commercial interest, thus providing “authentic” and valuable information. These goals are materialized, not only by means of content propositions and discursive moves, but also through interpersonal markers that, according to previous research into hotel webpages (Suau Jiménez 2011, 2012), can vary since they are social-semiotic and thus culturally driven. This explains our interest in analyzing interpersonality in English as a first step to characterize this web genre cross-linguistically in further studies.

We are going to describe this genre from the three aspects above mentioned: contents, form and functionality. Its peculiar structure entails all three: contents are based on a particular discursive psychology, where an initial writer (0) starts a conversational thread, usually with a short description of her/his situational context about a trip or journey, a stay or a visit to some specific touristic place. As for the form and functionality, at least one initial question is posed, seeking advice from other people

or peers with experience in that particular issue. Here ends her/his intervention. Then, at least one reader (1) reacts giving an answer (at times more than one, which can create a heteroglossic situation with different and diverse opinions) and, so doing, turns into a writer (1), whereas initial writer (0) turns into a reader (0), exchanging roles and providing the requested information. Frequently, this answer is the end of the conversational thread, although, depending on how rich or interesting the initial question is, other readers (2,3,4) may contribute with opinions about the first given answer or with different details or new answers, thus becoming writers (2, 3, 4). This is the case when a long conversational thread emerges, displaying a heteroglossic structure, rich in opinions and shades.

Sanmartín-Sáez (2007: 20) describes *web forums* as one kind of notice board where internet users leave their opinions on a specific topic. This can generate an answer, although not necessarily, thus proving to be an asynchronic type of communication. The end of its conversational thread is difficult to predict since it does not respond to an agreed pattern with an ending rhetorical function that a particular discourse community has designed beforehand. Instead, it has to do with different causes such as the participants' time or interest in the topic, something closely tied to personal and psychological, unpredictable reasons. This is why these conversational threads can end abruptly, with neither a feedback nor an acknowledgement or ending formula from the initial writer (0). As for the type of language or register used, it varies from standard to informal or colloquial English, with a frequent lack of punctuation and capital letters and a prolific use of abbreviations and contractions. Metaphors, play-on-words, informal expressions, jargon and jokes are frequent, thus creating a friendly tone and warm atmosphere that helps participants to feel at ease and give authentic and reliable information, since their power status is similar. In our research,

the topic “London for kids” was written on Trip Advisor’s search window in order to retrieve related conversational threads. This topic adds a down to earth, almost familiar aspect to the content of the threads since the aim is how to entertain your own children, something that people take as one of the most frequent family activities, thus leading to a great solidarity and empathy.

3. Interpersonality and voice in writers and readers

3.1 Interpersonality or interactional communication

Interpersonality, also known as metadiscursive interaction between writer(s) and reader(s) (Hyland 2005, 2008), embodies the idea that writing or speaking are social acts that involve senders and recipients (writers, speakers, readers and listeners) who interact with each other and by doing so affect how ideas are presented, understood and interpreted (Crismore 1989; Crismore, Markkanen and Steffensen 1993; Crismore and Vande Kopple 1997). It is an important feature of communication. Readers and listeners’ resources need to be assessed in order to understand a text and to write or speak effectively. Interpersonality refers to chunks of linguistic material which can contain both propositional and non-propositional content that aid to construe a writer-audience interaction. They take the form of markers: *hedges, boosters, personal pronouns/commitment markers, attitude markers, directives, self-mention or asides*. Fairclough (1992: 22) understands it as a social component that can be viewed as the control that a writer exerts over his/her own discourse and his/her reader, in order to make sure that the message is transmitted following the writer’s intention. Interactional metadiscourse or *interpersonality* is different from textual metadiscourse, which deals with cohesive markers or how does the author relate to his/her own text. It is the material realization of the function that both writer and reader establish throughout the

text after taking into consideration the reader's previous knowledge, as well as his/her textual experience and processing needs (Dafouz-Milne 2008: 97). It is the most genuine part of metadiscourse since it includes cognitive personal options and textual aspects (Hyland 2005; Dafouz Milne 2008).

Previous research within tourism genres in the internet has pointed at specific cross-linguistic and generic characteristics when dealing with *hotel websites* and also with touristic *promotional webpages*. *Hedges*, *directives* and *commitment markers/personal markers* have proved to be salient interactional features in English websites, whereas other languages (Spanish) are more dependent on *boosters*, especially qualifying adjectives, and less on *hedges* or *personal pronouns* (Mapelli 2008; Pierini 2009; Suau Jiménez 2011, 2012).

Interpersonal metadiscourse has produced a considerable body of research in a number of disciplines, academic discourse texts having been the most prolific ones. In fact, the interpersonal markers' taxonomy proposed by Hyland and Tse (2004) for academic discourse has triggered many analyses on interpersonality (Crismore and Abdollehzadeh 2010).

3.2 Voice, stance and engagement

A new approach to interpersonality has been suggested that includes the concept of writer's and reader's *voice*. It can be seen as a more comprehensive theoretical framework, since *voice* entails a social view of interactional metadiscourse and markers. The notion of *voice* (White 2003; Hyland 2008) comes from the field of literature (Bakhtin 1986) inasmuch all writings have at least one voice and, at times, several ones, situating users contextually, culturally and/or historically. White (2003: 259) claims that

by means of voice, especially stance, “the interpersonal functionality of discourse explains how language construes social roles and relationships and the potential of language to operate rhetorically”. Hyland (2008) also applies this concept to the analysis of academic discourse, offering a different view from previous research that was focused on personal choice, assuming now that voice is seen as a way to express both a social and a personal position:

...we achieve a voice through the ways we negotiate representations of ourselves and take on the discourses of our communities. So this notion of voice as self-representation subsumes the traditional view of voice as authority. But it does not eradicate personal choice in how we express ourselves. We still decide how aggressive, conciliatory, confident, or self-effacing we want to be. (Hyland 2008: 6)

This view explains how writers position themselves and their work, their judgements and opinions, by claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating ideas or providing different viewpoints. Thus, the concept of voice is close to that of *interaction* since its social rather than personal bias can better characterize genres when it comes to interpersonal markers. Hyland proposes to divide *voice* into *stance* and *engagement*, two types of voice or ‘systems’, central in dialogic texts, that aid to achieve a genre’s communicative goal and functions like persuasion, evaluation or solidarity. Stance and engagement can be seen as part of:

...a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimensions of the sociocultural field. (Dubois 2007: 163)

Stance is related to the ways writers present themselves and convey judgements, opinions and commitment, as much as *engagement* alludes to the ways writers align

with the readers, by recognizing their presence and establishing a relationship with them through specific interpersonal parts of the text. Therefore, *voice* can also be considered as a tool that assists in the characterization of genres, providing an additional perspective of how stance and engagement behave when there is a dialogic interaction.

This concept of *voice* and the authority that derives from it has been mostly applied to academic writing, in an attempt to explain functions realized through *stance*, like ‘evaluation’ (Hunston 1994; Hunston and Thompson 2000), ‘evidentiality’ (Chafe and Nichols 1986) or ‘tentativeness and possibility’ (Hyland 1998), expressed by authorial self-mention and hedges (Hyland 2001b) and reporting verbs (Thompson and Ye 1991; Hyland 2000). These works have been complemented by others, who explore how authors try to involve the reader (*engagement*) in the communication process through the use of personal pronouns and directives.

This framework can also be valid for the analysis of other disciplines and genres, such as tourism and *traveller forums*, where voices are heard due to the genre’s dialogic structure. We attempt to bring a richer insight into its generic and discursive characterization, with implications for interpersonality, genre analysis and dialogue studies. As stated in the Introduction, Weigand’s Mixed Game Model –MGM- (2008, 2009, 2010) can provide a theoretical perspective to this study. Interpersonality and its rhetorical basis can very well be an application of constitutive, regulative and executive principles. By means of author’s and reader’s *voices*, interpersonal markers are related to politeness following English socio-cultural patterns (regulative principles) and are executed through an array of pragmatic strategies formed with interpersonal markers (executive principles). Therefore, conclusions deriving from this research can prove the applicability of the principles of the Dialogic Action Game-to specific domains such as travel and tourism through traveller forums.

4. Data sources and methodology

The research reported here is based on a corpus of traveller forums in English (180 threads of conversation: 136.000 words) that was collected during the summer of 2012 from the portal Trip Advisor with the topic “what to do with your children when visiting London”. Free software AntConc.3.2.4 (2011) - concordancing and wordlist tools- was applied to extract markers and create a database for the analysis, following the interactional markers’ taxonomies proposed by Hyland and Tse (2004) and Hyland (2008). As mentioned above, the analysis of dialogic interaction between *writers* (writers and readers at the same time) is based on the concepts of voice (stance and engagement) (White 2003; Hyland 2008) as well as on those of polyphony and heteroglossia (Fløttum 2005). Also, the threefold approach of e-discourse genres analysis as *contents*, *form* and *functionality* (Thurlow 2001) was considered.

We first classified interpersonal markers -following their frequency of appearance- under stance or engagement (Hyland 2008) for the quantitative analysis and then applied a qualitative approach. To this end, we looked at recurrent patterns of conversation in our corpus, having found that they can have either two or several *writers*, thus giving way to dialogic structures that can be at times polyphonic, with a subsequent variety of opinions or heteroglossia. Secondly we analyzed five threads of conversation taken randomly from the corpus and followed White’s proposal (2003: 261) that dialogic intersubjective structures use voices (stance or engagement) in a twofold way, being either “dialogically expansive” or “dialogically contractive”.

The quantitative analysis followed Hyland and Tse’s (2004) taxonomy of interpersonal markers, grouped under the concepts of *writer’s and reader’s voice*

(Hyland 2008) and also under those of *stance* and/or *engagement*. However, these notions only provided a preliminary and general approach to the characterization of the *traveller forum*, describing the type and amount of markers that were identified in the corpus but failing to provide a detailed account of how these markers were distributed according to the different voices. A qualitative analysis describing how these markers are distributed in the different parts of the conversational thread proved necessary. Conversational threads were also explored to see how intersubjective positions build up their different opinions and/or evaluations by means of certain interpersonal resources, thus adopting a stance/engagement voice and creating a dialogically expansive or contractive structure (White 2003). Both approaches, quantitative and qualitative, are meant to yield a picture where interpersonal features aid to map the *traveller forum* and the voices and dialogic/heteroglossic structure that it displays.

5. Analysis

5.1 Quantitative analysis

First, an overview of the total number of markers in each voice is shown in Table 1. The frequency of *stance voice markers* is slightly higher than that of the *engagement* one, irrespective of the matching between stance/(same)writer or engagement/(same)reader, since these roles take turns in their conversational exchange.

Total markers	Stance voice markers	Engagement voice markers
10.249	6.049	4.200
100%	59.1%	40.9%

Table 1. Total *stance and engagement* markers

Second, and more specifically, the table below (Table 2) shows the classification of interpersonal markers for the writer’s voice, also irrespective of the real agent behind this role. We can see that *self-mention* markers stand in the first place of usage, being followed by *hedges*. *Boosters* are infrequent and *attitude markers* are practically missing. These figures lead to a first interpretation where the three generic aims (information, evaluation and solidarity) are mainly based on authority and experience (*self-mention* markers), politeness and suggested ideas (*hedges*). The fact that *boosters* are scarce (contrarily to what happens in promotional genres like hotel web pages) (Mapelli 2008; Pierini 2009; Suau-Jiménez 2011, 2012) is an important difference that characterizes the *traveller forum* as a genre significantly based on the personal experience of its users, where promoting the product or service is not a central requirement.

Total stance markers	Hedges	Boosters	Attitude markers	Self-mention markers
6.049	1.555	164	27	4.303
59.1%	25.7%	2.7%	0.4%	71.1%

Table 2. Stance markers: *writer-oriented voice*

Finally, Table 3 summarizes the results on engagement markers or alignment with the reader and shows that *reader pronouns/commitment markers* is the most frequent marker, which coincides with the trend identified in other tourism genres such as hotel web pages and promotional sites in English (Suau-Jiménez 2011, 2012). This result suggests that personal pronouns are crucial in the way writers align with their readers, constituting a major strategy to involve them in the discussion and attract their attention towards their judgements and opinions. *Directives* come in second place, also following the trend of tourism genres in English, as the next most common marker to lead the reader and give him/her a clear and personal direction about a touristic enquiry.

Total engagement markers	Reader pronouns (commitment)	Directives (imperatives and obligation modals)	Appeals to shared knowledge
4.200	3.405	685	110
40.9%	81%	16.3%	2.6%

Table 3. Engagement markers: *reader-oriented voice*

To sum up, this quantitative analysis shows that the writer's voice (stance) and its deriving authority, based primarily on self-mention and secondly on hedges and a limited number of boosters, is slightly more important than the reader's voice (engagement), based primarily on personal pronouns and, less commonly, on directives. Although these findings must be contrasted with the results of the qualitative analysis, they already suggest that the *traveller forum* is highly dependent on the personal experience of *wreaders* and word-of-mouth coming from consumers as an important factor that can influence other consumers' decisions, in line with previous research on e-communication and the tourism industry (McIntosh 1972; Crotts 1999; Grewal et al. 2003).

5.2 Qualitative analysis

This analysis is based on the concepts of dialogic heteroglossia and polyphonic visibility (Fløttum 2005), according to a taxonomy of interpersonal markers that classifies them into reader's and writer's voice (Hyland 2008), shown on Table 4 below, to express interaction between writers' authority and readers' alignment. As mentioned above, it also follows White's (2003) proposal for dialogic intersubjectivity through interpersonal resources, to check whether the different participants of a conversation adopt stance/engagement markers to construe dialogically expansions or contractions that may influence rhetorical functions in this genre. The aim is to complement the initial quantitative analysis to better characterize the *traveller forum* genre from a metadiscursive perspective.

Interpersonal markers and voices (Hyland 2008):

<i>Dialogic voices</i>	<i>Markers</i>	<i>Markers</i>	<i>Markers</i>	<i>Markers</i>
Stance voice (writer)	Hedges	Attitude markers	Boosters	Self-mention
Engagement voice (reader)	Personal pronouns	Directives	Questions	Asides

Table 4. Interpersonal markers and voices (Hyland 2008)

Five examples of conversational thread extracted from our corpus and analyzed qualitatively, are shown and commented below:

Conversation thread no.1

A. : reader/writer (0)

We are considering Hilton London Tower Bridge. Traveling with 2 kids, strong walkers, elementary school aged, visiting June 2012. **Thought would try** a Hilton this time. **I haven't been** to London in years, and **don't know** the city too well, or the best areas to stay. No particular budget, but **we just always look for** the best, and the best deal for the money. **Hilton, Waldorf, Double Tree or other recommendations?** **Appreciate** any advice.

B: reader/writer (1)

Hello Jas, the Tower Bridge Hilton is **excellent**, but also **consider** the Hilton at Canary Wharf, which is always lower in price and **not really too far away**. In either case, **go for** an executive room, which qualifies **you** for free breakfast on the executive lounge, **it s so worth it**.

C: reader/writer (2)

«If that location has a good price **I'd keep it** on the list”. **Very much agree** and **I think** the **area is good** for the little ones with the river and HMS Belfast on **your** doorstep. Just **wanted to point out** that the journey by public transport **would take longer** than getting to, say South Kensington. In any case with four people including two children **I'd probably suggest** a pre booked car service as being a better idea than the tube on arrival day.

This first conversational thread displays a heteroglossic or polyphonic structure (0/1/2) with three participants that exchange roles and thus become *writers*. An interesting dialogic game is displayed where *writers* use stance and engagement indistinctly to agree and/or disagree, give opinions, evaluations and show solidarity as well as to construe their intersubjective positions.

Reader/writer (0) uses a strong stance voice with several self-mentions and a typical engagement voice structure with only one question:

STANCE:

[...*We are considering* Hilton London Tower Bridge. Traveling with 2 kids, strong walkers, elementary school aged, visiting June 2012. *Thought would try* a Hilton this time. *I haven't been* to London in years, and *don't know* the city too well...No particular budget, but *we just always look for* the best...]

ENGAGEMENT:

[*Hilton, Waldorf, DoubleTree or other recommendations?*]

Reader/writer (1) gives a first opinion, agreeing/engaging with reader/writer (0) about the hotel quality and advice about the best options for kids in London, but also constituting a stance voice marked by an adjective (attitude marker –*excellent*) that provides some strength to the interaction and then introduces a new opinion (*but...*) showing strong engagement by means of several markers (directives, a booster –at the service of the engagement voice- and a personal pronoun). This is a clearly dialogically expansive move where opinion and advice are brought about, thus taking a stance and so, building some kind of authoritative role.

STANCE:

[...the Tower Bridge Hilton is *excellent*...]

ENGAGEMENT:

[...but also *consider* the Hilton at Canary Wharf, which is always lower in price and *not really too far away*.../...in either case, *go for* an executive room.../...which qualifies *you* for free breakfast...]

Reader/writer (2) starts by agreeing on some points using a stance voice with one hedge, one self-mention and a booster, but then uses another self-mention and hedge to introduce his/her different recommendation. The engagement voice is used here to give additional advice with the aid of one directive, one commitment marker and another directive. Reader/writer (2), by means of stance and engagement resources, opens up another set of opinion and advice, thus contributing another dialogically expansive move into the conversation.

STANCE:

[...*I'd keep it* on the list. *Very much agree* and *I think* the *area is good* for the little ones ...*I'd probably suggest* a pre booked car service as...].

ENGAGEMENT:

[...but also *consider* the Hilton at Canary Wharf, which is always lower in price and *not really too far away*. In either case, *go for* an executive room...]

As can be seen, there is no feedback from reader (0), although it is assumed that the whole message must have been received.

Conversation thread no.2

A: reader/writer (0)

My wife and I are taking our 8 year old daughter to London for 7- 10 days in July. *We* will be meeting our 19 year old daughter so *we* will be taking two rooms. *Any suggestions on hotels, sites or activities particularly suited for children?* Thanks.

B: reader/writer (1)

Unfortunately *i don't know* any hotels *myself*, but there are hundreds of *good ones* available!

Good tourist attractions for children include the tower of london and the london dungeons (*really good*), the london eye, madam tussauds, london zoo (*really good*), the natural history museum, the science museum. All of those are *fantastic and ideal* for children.

You can also never go wrong with a london theatre show as *they never fail to impress!*

i loved london when i was younger and still do, and *im sure your* little girl will love it too!!
have a fantastic time!

What are your 8 yr. old's interests? Does she like museums, walking through churches, etc.?

When *I took my boys* to London for the first time, they loved the double decker hop on hop off bus tour. *We've* always taken the Big Bus tour and love it. There is a Thames river boat tour included in the price.

<http://www.bigbus.co.uk/>

The London Eye *would also be a lot of fun*.

If *you're looking* for a low key tea experience, the Orangery at Kensington Palace *would probably be just the thing for you*.

[http://www.londontown.com/LondonInformation/Restaurant/The_Orangery_\(Kensington_Palace\)/1973/](http://www.londontown.com/LondonInformation/Restaurant/The_Orangery_(Kensington_Palace)/1973/)

I don't know if she'd like the Tower of London, but *it was my boys favorite*.

Will you be taking any day trips out of London while you're there? Does she like castles and palaces? If so, *you might want* to look into going to Windsor Castle and/or Hampton Court Palace.

We've stayed at the Travel Inn County Hall (loved it--the location is fantastic), *we just got back* from staying at the Holiday Inn Kensington. *Very good sized* rooms and just across the street from the Gloucester Rd. tube station.

In this case, the structure is not heteroglossic since only two participants are involved in the thread (0/1).

Reader/Writer (0) follows the expected generic pattern, with four self-mention markers being used in the stance voice and one long question used as engagement, which contains a complex commitment marker *–particularly suited-* which works at the service of this voice. We could say that both voices are thus rather balanced in their interactional strength.

STANCE:

[*My wife and I are taking our* 8 year old daughter to London for 7- 10 days in July. *We* will be meeting our 19 year old daughter so *we* will be taking two rooms.]

ENGAGEMENT:

[*Any suggestions on hotels, sites or activities particularly suited for children?*]

Reader/writer (1) deploys a very long conversational turn, with a rather colloquial language full of familiar expressions that create a tone of warmth and friendship that helps to show solidarity. This uncommonly long intervention could be the reason for no more *wreaders* to take part in the forum. This person (1) constructs her/his advice using questions (engagement) and a great number of self-mention markers (stance) and boosters (stance) that provide rich information with all kinds of details and reference to personal experience. Although the engagement voice is important, the stance voice is slightly more marked, thus showing strong personal authority through a dialogically expansive move.

STANCE:

[*Good* tourist attractions for children include the tower of london and the london dungeons (*really good*), the london eye, madam tussauds, london zoo (*really good*), the natural history museum, the science museum. All of those are *fantastic and ideal* for children.../...*they never fail to impress! i loved london when i was younger and still do*, and *im sure* your little girl will love it too!! / When *I took my boys* to London for the first time.../*We've* always taken the Big Bus tour and *love* it.]

ENGAGEMENT:

[*You can* also never go wrong with a london theatre show as.../ *What are your 8 yr. old's interests? Does she like museums, walking through churches, etc.?/... you* might want to look

into.../ If *you're looking* for a low key tea experience, the Orangery at Kensington Palace would probably be just *the thing for you*.

Again, there is no feedback from wreader (0) or an ending salutation formula.

Conversation thread no.3

A: reader/writer (0)

hi all, *have lived* in london for a few years but this weekend *am having* to entertain *my* nieces for the first time in london... they are 3 and 6 and *i'm after* some advice as to suitable places to take them to - *i was considering* the museum of childhood in bethnal green, but *have heard* that this is more suitable for adults rather than kids. *any thought?* if anyone has any recommendations *they'd be greatly received*.

B: reader/writer (1)

Hi Caz. *Have a look at* www.kidslovelondon.com for some great ideas. The Museum of Childhood *might be* a bit old for them but The Natural History Museum *could be fun* and don't rule out an open top bus tour with a live guide. *Check out* www.bigbus.co.uk. *I guess* they *would love* Madame Tussauds but *beware* of the queues. *Buy your tickets* in advance from any tube station. The weather folk says it is going to be cold again this weekend so *wrap up* warm...Gosh *I sound like my mother!* For *your* 3 and 6 year old nieces (*Mine* are the same age) *I would suggest* the London Eye, The Natural History Museum and the Science Museum. Also *take them to* a matine of the Lion King or Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Word of warning, *DO NOT take them* to the London Dungeons. *It will totally freak them out!!!!!!!I agree* the museum of childhood will be too 'adult' for them and as for the London dungeon - it scared the pants off *me* let alone a 6 year old! The natural history museum is *a good idea* but *I would restrict* it to seeing just one or two exhibitions eg just the dinosaurs and mammals. *I took* my 12 year old brother last year and after seeing the dinosaurs he got bored rather quickly. The science museum has a section for under 8's to play in. *We tried to* get in to have a look but *they wouldn't let us unless we* had a young child with *us!* The rest of the science museum is again a bit too much for a 3 & 6 year old. One of the *nicest places* is the London aquarium - *fun and interesting* for youngsters (*especially* watching the rays being fed as the kids get a chance to stroke them)!<http://www.londonaquarium.co.uk/info/events.html> will tell *you* when the feeding times are for the piranhas, sharks and rays. Depending on how *you feel* afterwards *you could* always take them to the Rainforest Cafe! The National Gallery has a monster activity book *you can pick up* at the info desk and *do with the girls* and the TATE Modern has some great activities on the weekends, even for the three year old. *My girls* were thrilled just to ride the double decker buses!

This thread is again of the kind that only involves two participants (0/1), one possible reason being that reader/writer (1) provides very detailed and abundant information that surely aids to show solidarity. The language belongs to a highly

informal register in terms of punctuation (lack of capital letters), contractions, jokes and familiar vocabulary that creates a friendly atmosphere where *wreaders* surely feel at ease to give unbiased opinions and judgements.

Writer/reader (0) follows the usual pattern for the introductory intervention turn, using several self-mention markers (stance) and hedges (stance) and only one question (engagement), this time a very simple one, thus with a strong emphasis on the stance voice:

STANCE:

[...hi all, ***have lived*** in london for a few years but this weekend ***am having*** to entertain ***my*** nieces for the first time in london... they are 3 and 6 and ***i'm after*** some advice as to suitable places to take them to - ***i was considering*** the museum of childhood in bethnal green, but ***have heard*** that this is more suitable for adults rather than kids...]

ENGAGEMENT:

[***any thought?***]

Reader/writer (1) shows a balance between stance and engagement voices. Both voices are expressed through many interpersonal markers and a great amount of colloquial expressions, play on words and some asides. The stance voice contains self-mentions, boosters and hedges whereas the engagement voice is realized through personal pronouns, directives and some asides. Again, this reader/writer construes a dialogically expansive move that contributes to construe strong social authority.

STANCE:

[***I would suggest*** the London Eye, The Natural History Museum and the Science Museum. ***It will totally freak them out!!!!!!!!!!I agree*** the museum of childhood will be too 'adult' for them

and as for the London dungeon - it scared the pants off **me** let alone a 6 year old! The natural history museum is **a good idea** but **I would restrict** it to seeing just one or two exhibitions eg just the dinosaurs and mammals. **I took** my 12 year old brother last year and after seeing the dinosaurs he got bored rather quickly. The science museum has a section for under 8's to play in. **We tried to** get in to have a look but **they wouldn't let us unless we** had a young child with **us!** The rest of the science museum is again a bit too much for a 3 & 6 year old. One of the **niciest places** is the London aquarium - **fun and interesting** for youngsters (**especially** watching the rays being fed as the kids get a chance to stroke them)! **My girls** were thrilled just to ride the double decker buses!]

ENGAGEMENT:

[**Check out** www.bigbus.co.uk. **I guess** they **would love** Madame Tussauds but **beware** of the queues. **Buy your tickets** in advance from any tube station. The weather folk says it is going to be cold again this weekend so **wrap up** warm.../Also **take them to** a matinee of the Lion King or Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.Word of warning, **DO NOT take them** to the London Dungeons./... <http://www.londonaquarium.co.uk/info/events.html> will tell **you** when the feeding times are for the piranhas, sharks and rays. Depending on how **you feel** afterwards **you** could always take them to the Rainforest Cafe! The National Gallery has a monster activity book **you can pick up** at the info desk and **do with the girls** and the TATE Modern has some great activities on the weekends, even for the three year old.]

As in the previous thread examples, neither an ending formula nor a feedback comment was posted.

Conversation thread no.4

A: reader/writer (0)

Hi Everyone, **I am coming** to london from Australia in July with **my** 8 year old daughter. **I have been** a couple of times already but it is her first time. **Any suggestions on things to do to**

interest children? I want to show her all the usual sites but *I guess* architecture and history *can be* a little boring for kids. *Is there any hidden treasures you locals can let me in on?*
Thanx.

B: reader/writer (1)

Towards the top of page one *you* will find an *excellent* sticky produced by Theartgirl that lists a number of websites related to all things young person related. *I am sure you will find plenty* to keep *your* daughter amused there. *You could also use* the search engine using terms like children and kids to find a number of threads that discuss this topic. tripadvisor.com/ShowTopic-g186338-i17-k41528... Lastly, *do let us know where you are* staying and *I am sure we can then advise you* of some child friendly things within a short walk of *your* accommodation. If *you have to do* the architecture and history stuff, *you can* then redeem *yourself* by taking *your* daughter to the Rainforest Cafe for dinner. Large animatronic animals, a 'storm' rumbling around, and a huge aquarium of fish *would keep* her entertained whilst *you* eat. *I mean, whilst you* both eat, (just in case it sounded like *I wanted your* child to starve!). *I am* actually staying in Letchworth in Hertfordshire *we will be catching* the train into London. *I am expecting* to make about 4 trips so as not to try and do the whole city in one day. *I have left* similar notes once before on this site but here are a few favorite things *my* 10 year old daughter did on recent first time trip:1. the obvious...she loved the Eye. *Great way* to start the trip. *Recommend* paying a little extra online for the Discovery tickets. That way *you have a funny* and *personable* (in our case) guide pointing out the sights and *you avoid* the lines.2. Tube pass letting her ride the upper deck in buses to her heart's content.3. Mary Poppins...*splurge* on this west end play and *get close seats* so *you can sit* under Mary as she glides above *you* to the ceiling with her umbrella in hand. A *truly delightful* play even for those of *us* adults who did not like the movie.4. *Playing soccer* in the beautiful London parks. *Remember*, kids need breaks from museums. A ball *can be* a cheap way for kids to flock to other kids who are stranded in a strange city with their parents.5. She liked a tour by costumed guides at the Drury Lane Theater.

A new thread with the 0/1 structure –two *wreaders*- again repeating the pattern where the second participant gives such rich information that other people may do not feel the need to give more.

Writer/reader (0) uses several self-mentions (stance) and one long and complex direct question (engagement) that is reinforced with personal pronouns (you/me) to construct her/his intervention turn, thus balancing both voices, although there is an obvious stance voice authority with the use of first person pronouns . This first participant introduces a colloquial/informal register that creates a friendly atmosphere, thus inviting to continue in the same tone with opinions based on personal experience:

STANCE:

[...**I am coming** to london from Australia in July with **my** 8 year old daughter. **I have been** a couple of times already but it is her first time. **I want** to show her all the usual sites but **I guess** architecture and history **can be** a little boring for kids.]

ENGAGEMENT:

[**Any suggestions on things to do to interest children?/Is there any hidden treasures you locals can let me in on?**]

Reader/writer (1) answers with a balance of stance and engagement voices, although again the stance voice takes it over the engagement one. The stance voice is expressed through abundant self-mentions and boosters, whereas the engagement voice does it via personal pronouns, directives and some asides. The register keeps the tone introduced by the first *wreader*, once more, full of colloquial words and expressions. This is another example of dialogically expansive move within the *traveller forum*.

STANCE:

[...**I am sure you will find plenty...**/ Lastly, **do let us know where you are** staying and **I am sure we can then advise you** of some child friendly things within a short walk of **your** accommodation... Large animatronic animals, a 'storm' rumbling around, and a huge aquarium of fish **would keep** her entertained whilst **you** eat. **I mean, whilst you** both eat, (just in case it sounded like **I wanted your** child to starve!). **I am** actually staying in Letchworth in Hertfordshire **we will be catching** the train into London. **I am expecting** to make about 4 trips so as not to try and do the whole city in one day. **I have left** similar notes once before on this site but here are a few favorite things **my** 10 year old daughter did on recent first time trip:1. the obvious...she loved the Eye. **Great way** to start the trip. **Recommend** paying a little extra online

for the Discovery tickets.../...a **funny** and **personable** (in our case) guide pointing out the sights...]

ENGAGEMENT:

[...**you** will find an **excellent** sticky produced by Theartgirl.../ to keep **your** daughter amused there.../You could also use the search engine.../If **you have to do** the architecture and history stuff, **you can** then redeem **yourself** by taking.../ and **you avoid** the lines.2/ **your** daughter to the Rainforest Cafe for dinner./ That way **you have**...]

No ending formula or feedback was posted.

Conversation thread no.5

A: reader/writer (0)

Does anyone have any ideas or recommendations for three boys who will not have the pleasure of being with their parents from 8am to 5pm whilst staying in piccadilly? ages are 15, 12 and 10, **are there any tours available that are chaperoned and vetted? we are anxious** about leaving them for so long .

B: reader/writer (1)

I have never heard of any, but if **your** 15 year old is "streetwise" and won't let his 2 siblings wander off they **should be** OK. **Suggest** they spend their time at museums which open a bit later. They **would probably enjoy** Science Museum, British Museum, Imperial War Museum. These are all in different locations around London, **suggest you** google them for directions, times etc. and **let the kids decide** where they **would like** to go.

Just **make sure** they understand the tube network or buses **get them** the correct travelcards for the day, **get them** an underground map. **Make sure** the eldest has sufficient money on him for drinks/snacks etc., and **preferably** a mobile phone to call **you** in an emergency.

Also **make sure** they know name and address of hotel. **Presume you are** coming to London on business and can't be with them.

It is **highly unlikely** that any tour will take 3 unaccompanied minors.

Alternative if **you have** the "funds" available **would be** to see if **you can** get a "nanny" for the day but this **would be expensive**.

C: reader/writer (2)

Have a look at the Kids section in Timeout London and **search** for activities based on the timeframe of **your** visit to London and **your** children's interests. There **may be** some full-day activities that suit.

D: reader/writer (3)

I agree with the museum idea. **Would recommend** British Museum or IWM over Science

Museum as it **would not** have held **my** daughter's attention for the whole day (at 10 y/o). There are also the Natural History and V&A museums in that general vicinity, but V&A didn't seem like somewhere **my** daughter **would have wanted** to hang out for the day either. Tower of London **might be** a possibility too as that took **us** most of a day. **I would try** to find someplace **you think** they'd like where they **can spend** most of the day without having to do too much moving around (although getting around is easy and at that age, **I think** they **could do** it with no problem). **Make sure** they have enough money for a taxi and a way to get back in the hotel room and they **should be** fine.

This last conversational thread shows a 0/1/2/3 polyphonic structure. It can be observed that reader/writer (1) does not give an excessively long nor too convincing answer, encouraging other reader/writers (2,3) to intervene and provide more information, thus creating a polyphony of voices that bring along new advice and opinions.

Writer/reader (0) totally adopts the generic pattern of posing a question (engagement), but only uses one self-mention marker (stance) that, due to the unusual use of an adjective (*anxious*), gives a strong reinforcement to stance authority:

STANCE:

[...**we are anxious** about leaving them for so long...]

ENGAGEMENT:

[**Does anyone have any ideas or recommendations for three boys who will not have the pleasure of being with their parents from 8am to 5pm whilst staying in piccadilly?** ages are 15, 12 and 10, **are there any tours available that are chaperoned and vetted?**]

Reader/Writer (1) shows a balance of stance and engagement voices. Stance is expressed through self-mentions, attitude markers and hedges, whereas engagement is realized through personal pronouns and directives. Clearly, although the first intervention deploys some contraction (*I have never heard of any...*), a dialogically

expansive move is created through stance and engagement resources, giving new information and details.

STANCE:

[...**I have** never heard of any, but if **your** 15 year old is "streetwise" and won't let his 2 siblings wander off they **should be** OK. **Suggest** they spend their time at museums which open a bit later. They **would probably enjoy** Science Museum, British Museum, Imperial War Museum. These are all in different locations around London, **suggest you** google them for directions.]

ENGAGEMENT:

[...Just **make sure** they understand the tube network or buses **get them** the correct travelcards for the day, **get them** an underground map. **Make sure** the eldest has sufficient money on him for drinks/snacks etc.../...Also **make sure** they know name and address of hotel.]

Reader/Writer (2) has a very short intervention, mostly using an engagement voice via the use of abundant personal pronouns and directives and only one stance voice marker:

STANCE:

[There **may be** some full-day activities that suit.]

ENGAGEMENT:

[**Have a look at** the Kids section in Timeout London and **search** for activities based on the timeframe of **your** visit to London and **your** children's interests.]

Reader/Writer (3) introduces a new set of opinions, first agreeing but then partially disagreeing and thus giving a new piece of advice, all through a quite strong stance voice full of self-mentions and hedges. The engagement voice is weak, only containing one directive. In this case, although still expansive, the move contains some contraction too, since some of the opinions tend to put off the previous set of given information.

STANCE:

[*I agree* with the museum idea. *Would recommend* British Museum or IWM over Science Museum as it *would not* have held *my* daughter's attention for the whole day (at 10 y/o). There are also the Natural History and V&A museums in that general vicinity, but V&A didn't seem like somewhere *my* daughter *would have wanted* to hang out for the day either. Tower of London *might be* a possibility too as that took *us* most of a day. *I would try* to find someplace *you think* they'd like where they *can spend* most of the day without having to do too much moving around (although getting around is easy and at that age, *I think* they *could do* it with no problem).]

ENGAGEMENT:

[*Make sure* they have enough money for a taxi and a way to get back in the hotel...]

Again, no ending formula or feedback was posted.

6. Discussion and conclusion

We have looked at how the different participants of conversational threads use stance and engagement voices and their corresponding markers and resources to attain self-interest by means of exchanging evaluations, opinions, advice and judgements on the basis of a peer-to-peer solidarity scheme that characterizes the *traveller forum*.

From a broad viewpoint, our study seems to prove that this genre is a communicative phenomenon where *prosumer* (producer+consumer) and *producer* (producer+user) are concepts that reflect the social personae that *writers* (writers and readers) are and the roles they take alternatively when exchanging advice within the tourism virtual community, as suggested by Bruns (2008). *Traveller forums* are

therefore a valuable source of information for the tourism industry, showing the real and authentic needs and opinions of travellers. According to our findings, the dialogic pattern displayed by the *traveller forum* has at least two users and can be polyphonic at times, showing heteroglossia or a diversity of opinions. Also, our study shows that the *traveller forum* follows most of the features described by Thurlow (2001: 287) in computer mediated communication texts, that is: its language is a hybrid between oral and written discourse, its form is conversational, its style changes from standard to informal English terms and structures. Metalanguage (interpersonal metadiscourse) takes the form of stance and engagement voice markers and finally, folklinguistics can easily be spotted through play on words, jokes and asides.

Additionally and following Bruns (2008), writers' and readers' discursive limits are blurred, since both users display stance and engagement voices to establish their interpersonal relationships. Also, the discursive structure of the *traveller forum* has proved to be asynchronic (Sanmartín-Sáez 2007): conversational threads do not display a "round" pattern with a question-answer structure that ends with a final answer and/or an acknowledgement of the previous information. Instead, questions can remain unanswered and open, or act, as Sanmartín-Sáez (2007) indicates, as if the forum was a noticeboard.

More specifically, we have analyzed how interpersonal markers behave to shape the *traveller forum* genre, in terms of stance and engagement voice, from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. This analysis has followed the threefold approach of *contents, form and functionality* (Thurlow 2001). The contents of the genre are determined by the discipline of tourism and the topic, "*what to do with children when visiting London*", that has yielded a lexico-semantic variety of terms about places, trips and events, as well as a psychologically driven dialogue where a first *wreader* starts a conversation using a

stance and engagement voice that is then maintained. As for the form, its dialogic structure contains at least two participants that take turns to write and read, displaying a highly informal register full of colloquial words, expressions, play on words and asides that create a friendly atmosphere enabling authentic and fluid conversation. Finally, as per its functionality or communicative goal, it is in the exchange of information through personal opinions, judgements and evaluations, where the interpersonal function can be assessed, since interactional markers play a central role and contribute through both voices to this end. The slightly higher number of markers in the stance voice compared to their use in the engagement could be due to the structure of the traveller's forum itself, where the initial *wreader's* (0) intervention displays a larger amount of stance voice markers (*self-mention* and *hedges*) than engagement ones. The rest of *wreaders* use stance and engagement voices in their conversational turns in a rather balanced way. In what concerns intersubjective positions and dialogic expansions or contractions (White 2003) it can be said that expansions have been clearly salient in our analyzed threads. This result can be interpreted as a reinforcement of the rhetorical nature and the social goal of the traveller forum, where participants do not get involved in strong debates or discussions about touristic places or services but rather weakly disagree, if that is the case, and then provide rich and varied new information with positive opinions and judgements. From the viewpoint of Dialogic Action Games (Weigand 2008, 2009, 2010), our study proves that meaning and understanding can be negotiated in traveller forums by means of interpersonal markers, a key instrument in the construction of executive strategies, eventually meant to attain persuasion. This way, individual interest is pursued by participants within a highly social and rhetorical dialogic game where hidden polite norms, conscious or unconscious, are unveiled, irrespective of which voice uses them. Emotion and reason are regulated in order to come to an understanding

through actions (making claims) and reactions (fulfilling the claims) (Weigand 2010: 82), reactions having a perlocutionary effect on the reader, who is ready to put into practice the received advice and opinions, as our qualitative analysis (see Analysis section, 5.2) shows. This is how competence-in-performance works in traveller forums dialogues in English.

To sum up, we could say that the generic characterization of the *traveller forum* through interpersonal markers is the following: the stance voice, irrespective of the *wreader's* turn in the thread, is mostly expressed through *self-mentions* and *hedges*, thus creating a strong authoritative and personal discourse that provides credibility and helps to obtain opinions and evaluations of a non-business nature. In contrast, the engagement voice displays a seemingly constant and, therefore, presumably generic, weakness in the *wreader* (0), most of the times with only one question as a way to interact through metadiscourse. For the rest of *wreaders*, both voices show rather balanced. The most frequent interpersonal markers that aid the reader's alignment are *personal pronouns/commitment markers*, as well as *directives*. This is how the engagement voice achieves the *traveller forum* purpose, constantly involving the reader in evaluations, judgements and advice, showing solidarity and a peer-to-peer communication. These findings strongly challenge interpersonal markers usage in other e-discourse genres like promotional touristic sites (Mapelli 2008; Pierini 2009; Suau Jiménez and Dolón Herrero 2007 ; Edo Marzá 2011) or hotel webpages (Suau Jiménez 2011, 2012), where *personal pronouns* and *boosters* rank first as the most commonly used. In the case of boosters, this is possibly due to their generic business bias, inasmuch as touristic services and products are promoted through qualifying adjectives.

Although more research on the discourse of cyber-genres is needed, our study has proved useful in providing a new insight to characterize this genre from an interpersonal

perspective and also to explain how individuals negotiate understanding, pursue and attain self-interest within a socially and rhetorically driven medium as is dialogue, or polylogue, in traveller forums.

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