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Oggi sono lieta di presentare un nuovo e molto interessante *Occasional Paper*, di Sandra Petroni, ricercatrice di Lingua e linguistica inglese presso il Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università degli Studi di Roma “Tor Vergata”. Negli ultimi anni gli studi della Petroni si sono indirizzati verso il campo relativamente recente e d’interesse crescente della Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), alla quale affianca strumenti di indagine quali l’analisi critica del discorso e anche la multimodalità, rivolgendo particolare attenzione alle nuove tipologie testuali digitali. I suoi ambiti di ricerca riguardano inoltre i linguaggi specialistici (in particolar modo l’ambito economico e informatico), la glottodidattica e anche la psicolinguistica. La studiosa è membro di associazioni scientifiche nazionali ed internazionali e spesso è stata recensore per alcune riviste internazionali, tra cui la *Ripla* (Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata/Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics, indicizzata APA). È autrice di diversi articoli e nel 2011 ha pubblicato la monografia dal titolo, *Language in the Multimodal Web Domain*, una coedizione Aracne (Roma) - Legas (Toronto).

L’articolo si intitola:

## **ADVERMATATIONAL TERRITORIES ON THE WEB: HYBRIDITY OR RESEMIOTISATION?**

Negli ultimi decenni molti studiosi (tra cui Fairclough 2009, 2010; Castells 1996, 1997; Lemke 2002; Petroni 2010, 2011) hanno messo in luce come il discorso istituzionale abbia subito un evidente cambiamento e come le nuove tecnologie abbiano preso parte a questa trasformazione in maniera determinante. Fairclough, nel suo approccio critico all'analisi del discorso, sostiene che da tempo stiamo assistendo a processi che tendono a "informalizzare" il discorso pubblico e istituzionale e allo stesso tempo a trasformarlo in "merce". Tutto questo implica una variazione in termini di stile e di registro all'interno delle rispettive pratiche discorsive.

Il presente contributo ha come scopo l'analisi della rappresentazione del discorso istituzionale in ambienti digitali e mira a dimostrare come i meccanismi di "conversationalisation" e "commodification" dei contenuti presenti nel web vengano supportati e in parte amplificati grazie alle potenzialità del web stesso (in particolar modo del web 2.0). L'autrice mette in evidenza come oggi alcuni aspetti testuali e linguistici, da tempo specifici del linguaggio persuasivo del marketing, pervadano l'intero dominio della Rete, inclusi i siti istituzionali. Evidenzia inoltre come tali aspetti salienti siano completamente integrati nei processi di connessione (link) e, insieme, cooperino alla costruzione del senso. L'articolo dimostra che la natura ipertestuale del web insieme alle sue intrinseche capacità di permeabilità e interattività danno luogo a molteplici e simultanee pratiche discorsive attraverso continui fenomeni di ri-negoziazione delle risorse semiotiche impegnate, ciò che Iedema (2003) definisce, appunto, risemiotizzazione.

Parole chiave: Advermatation, Critical Discourse Analysis, Genre Theory, Hyperlink, Resemiotisation.

*Donna R. Miller*

Responsabile scientifica del CeSLiC e dei Quaderni del CeSLiC

Bologna, li 1 dicembre 2013

# ***ADVERMATI*ONAL TERRITORIES ON THE WEB: HYBRIDITY OR RESEMIOTISATION?**

## **1 Introduction**

Social and cultural changes are intermingled processes that continuously affect discourse and language use. Any ideological phenomenon – be it social, cultural, political or economical - that exerts a powerful impact on people’s lives entails meaningful and substantial changes in discursive practice. These include rewording of activities and relationships, restructuring of the already existing discursive practices and types of discourse, and appropriating of different semiotic resources from other domains of practice and diverse contexts. Globalisation and the information revolution are two examples of these phenomena, but we must distinguish between “actual processes of globalisation and representations of globalisation” (Fairclough, 2009: 318).

Globalisation can usefully be conceived as a process (or set of processes) which accounts for a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating boundless flows and networks of activity, interaction and power (Fairclough 2009, 2010; Castells 1996, 1997; Lemke 2002). By thinking of globalisation in this way, it becomes possible to draw up patterns of world-wide links and relations across all key domains of human activity, from the cultural to the political, from the religious to the military. By “representations of globalisation”, Fairclough intends how these networks, connectivities and interactions are represented through discourse or better, how they are modelled into new forms of interactions that can be globalised and globalising.

Globalisation impacts upon discursive practices and vice versa. Furthermore, thanks to the mediation of the Internet and the computer, hybrid and new forms of interaction utilise net-shaped and multi-coded constructions<sup>1</sup> which entail continuous processes of re-contextualization in terms of migration among diverse contexts. In fact, it is impossible to think about the process of globalization independently of the informational revolution and of the spread of the Internet: a global society is a society that thinks, acts and interacts globally, and all these processes have been made possible thanks to the information technology revolution. This allows the accumulation of knowledge to be diffused throughout the world generating an increasingly complex network of information management. In this context, processing information means generating new knowledge. Of course, the cultural sphere is

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Petroni 2010, 2011. The hyperlinked and multimodal nature of discourses on the Web give rise to net-shaped and multi-coded constructions respectively.

involved in these changes. In fact, today culture is strongly influenced by the existence of a knowledge-based information technology that changes the way in which we produce ideas and contents and how we encode and decode them (Castells 1996; Petroni 2010).

This contribution sheds further light on the process of informalisation of public discourse in terms of democratisation and reduction of formality. This process, along with commodification and technologisation, leads to the consequential marketisation of information: the incorporation of the commodity market into social practices that have never been regulated by marketing rules, e.g. public, institutional, educational, etc. (Fairclough, 1992, 2010). Analogously, the upsurge of web communication and, consequently, the widespread production of digital texts and text types can be considered as forms of (inter)discursive remediation. On the Web, in fact, the merging of promotional and informative functions within discursive practices (Posteguillo 2003; Bhatia 2004) has given rise to an intrinsic feature residing in digital texts and genres that is defined by Shortis (2001) as “advermation”, a blend of advertising and information.

Drawing on the Critical Discourse Analysis approach (hereafter CDA), the analytical framework utilised here to carry out the investigation is Swales and Bhatia’s Genre Theory. This framework has been applied to two institutional websites, namely the official homepages of the US Government and UK Parliament<sup>2</sup>, chosen as case studies, or rather as examples of *advermational* territories. It is clear that these two sites that can be classified as institutional web genres reflect different discursive practices. Their institutional role is different in the social community, but both address a global audience and both need to establish relations with their users/citizens. These interactions are the objects of this analysis.

Finally, our research shows how these phenomena are augmented when they take place within digital contexts, due to the fact that the information revolution and web technological properties, links in particular, endorse and empower these processes. Furthermore, differently from traditional domains of practice, the types of discourse produced in these permeable digital contexts are not simply hybrid constructions but endless processes of resemiotisation (Iedema, 2003).

## **2 Theoretical Background**

Topics such as democratisation, commodification and technologisation of discourse have been widely discussed over the last decades in CDA, although they have not been

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<sup>2</sup> Available at <http://www.usa.gov/> and <http://www.parliament.uk/> respectively and accessed June 2012.

systematically and fruitfully considered as further corroborative perspectives to be used together with other methods of language analysis such as discourse analysis as such or genre theory.

Fairclough in particular, in his CDA approach, argues that we are witnesses to a process called informalisation and conversationalisation, or rather democratisation, of public and institutional discourse that implies a transformation in style and register. On the one hand, private styles have crossed borders into public, official, and business situations. On the other hand, the public domain seems to invade private domain practices. The tendency towards the avoidance of manifest power markers is strictly connected with the tendency towards informality among participants within discursive and social practices. A typical manifestation of this transformation is the strong presence of conversational discourse projected onto the public domain from private and personal interactions. As Kress (1986) and Fairclough himself (1992) state, conversation is “colonising”,<sup>3</sup> for example, the domain of the media. Likewise, the shift in the relationship between spoken and written discourse in printed media mirrors this tendency. Informalisation and conversationalisation today are striking and pervasive processes because mainly endorsed by the advent of new technologies, in particular the Internet. Crystal (2006) identifies a new hybrid form of language present on the web - “Netspeak”- whose modality oscillates between speech and writing (i.e. “written speech” or “oral writing”). According to Crystal, this is due to the fact that on the web users/speakers interact mainly through the written mode by utilising a keyboard or a touchpad, but they perceive and realise the interaction as a face-to-face conversation, and hence they construct meanings and discursive and social practices by using constructions more typical of the oral mode. Furthermore, the affordances provided by digitality increase the possibilities of establishing interactions anywhere and anytime.

These new communication and information technologies have been directly involved in the process of globalisation and informalisation. The way these media have been taken on and the way they have restructured their discourses and presented them to the global world reflects the commodification of meanings conveyed through them. As Fairclough argues, in terms of orders of discourse,<sup>4</sup> “we can conceive of commodification as the colonisation of institutional orders of discourse, and more broadly of the societal order of discourse, by discourse types associated with commodity production” (1992: 207). For this reason, today,

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of colonisation will be tackled later.

<sup>4</sup> Following the Foucaultian definition (1972), by “order of discourse” we mean the totality of discursive practices within an institution or society, and the relationship between them.

the “enterprise culture” dominates our conceptualisations of institutional, educational, professional experiences and practices as if they were goods and services addressed not to citizens, students or general users but to clients and consumers. In fact, commodification changes social meanings and discursive practices not only in terms of rewording but also in terms of genre construction. Promotional genres are invading and proliferating in domains that have traditionally had nothing to do with advertising. This often occurs by appropriating generic resources (lexico-grammatical, rhetorical, discursal or other generic conventions) from a specific genre for the construction of another (Bhatia, 2004).

The last tendency is technologisation. Moving from Foucault’s analysis of the technologies of power (1972), Fairclough refers to “‘discourse technologies’ and to a ‘technologisation of discourse’ as characteristics of modern orders of discourse. Examples of discourse technologies are interviewing, teaching, counselling, and advertising”. The technologisation of discourse exploits genres with a public character and institutional functions, such as the interview, in order to invade genres associated with the private sphere (conversation), or exploits, for example, advertising practices to present (or rather promote) an academic degree programme (Askhave, 2007). Discourse technologies entail simulation that works on interpersonal meanings within discursive practices.

By focusing on the web domain and in particular on the advermational process, the analysis highlights the cause-effect relation that exists between commodification and marketisation of meanings and their realisation through genre construction. With information being made into goods to be marketized and sold, every text and text type, pertaining to diverse domains of practice and linked to diverse contexts, are pervaded, or colonised, by the advertising domain (see Figure 1).

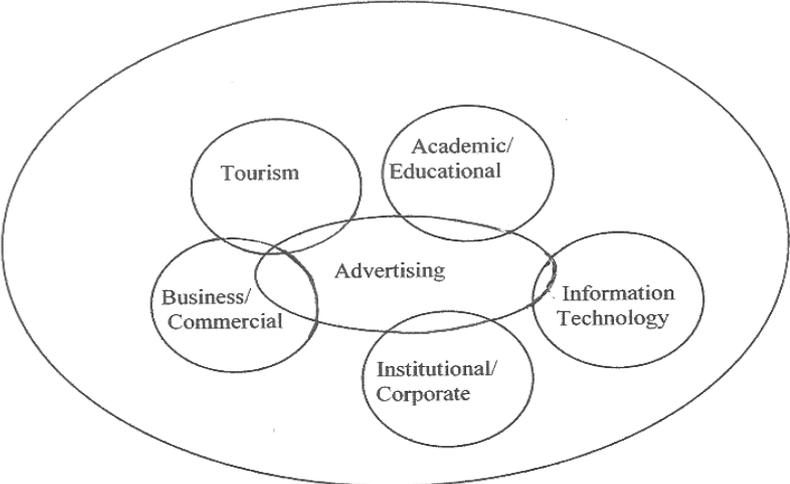


Figure 1. Multiple domains on the Web

This process brings to mind the concept of “genre colony” mentioned by Bhatia (2004: 57). Earlier, Martin (1992), although with a different perspective on genre, had drawn attention to the “agnation of genres”, i.e. akin relationship among a number of apparently different genres. Bhatia, instead, coins the term genre colony to identify those genres which, despite their apparent diversities, possess those traits that describe the same social practice. As Bhatia notes,

[...]. *Colonization* as a process thus involves *invasion of the integrity* of one genre by another genre or genre convention, often leading to the creation of a *hybrid form*, which eventually shares some of its genre characteristics with the one that influenced it in the first place. So the concept of genre colony is therefore crucial to the present theoretical framework for genre theory, as it represents both a grouping of a number of genres within and across disciplinary domains which largely shares the communicative purposes that each one of them tends to serve, and hence they are to be seen as primary members of the colony, and at the same time it represents a process whereby *generic resources are exploited and appropriated* to create *hybrid* (both mixed and embedded) forms, which may be considered secondary members of the colony. (2004: 58. My italics)

Along with the concept of genre colony, traits such as invasion of integrity, appropriation of generic resources, and hybridity emerge. But when Bhatia makes reference to hybrid discourses in terms of mixed or embedded forms, he connects hybridity with another related process, that of interdiscursivity, which in turn draws on two basic elements of discourse: social practice and context. This allows scholars to identify two different kinds of interrelationships within and across texts that are intertextual and interdiscursive relations. As Bhatia points out, it is important

[t]o make a distinction between the two related concepts [intertextuality and interdiscursivity], where intertextuality refers to the use of prior texts transforming the past into the present often in relatively conventionalized and somewhat standardized ways; interdiscursivity, on the other hand, refers to more innovative attempts to create hybrid or relatively novel constructs by appropriating or exploiting established conventions or resources associated with other genres and practices. Interdiscursivity thus accounts for a variety of discursive processes and professional practices, often resulting in mixing, embedding, and bending of generic norms in professional contexts. [...] Appropriations across texts thus give rise to intertextual relations, whereas appropriations across professional genres, practices and cultures constitute interdiscursive relations. (2007: 392)

*De facto*, interdiscursivity is a pivotal feature not only in Genre Theory but also in CDA since both recognise in it the mechanism that regulates discursive variation and socio-cultural change. Even Fairclough, and before him Foucault (1972) and Bakhtin (1986), defines the term interdiscursivity as “the constitution of a text from a configuration of text types or discourse conventions” (1992: 10). What happens to genre construction is the “fragmentation” of discursive norms and conventions and this provokes a continuous

restructuring and recontextualisation of orders of discourse which make them permeable. When boundaries of domains are transcended and blurred because of the above mentioned tendencies the consequent fragmentation entails variations at different scales and levels, such as variations of discursive event and practice which imply greater negotiation among participants. But fragmentation also involves a greater osmosis among diverse types of discourse as in the example of promotional discourse embedded in institutional discourse<sup>5</sup>.

Hybridity and interdiscursivity are discursive properties clearly present also on the web. However, digitality provides affordances, such as multimodality, multimodality and interactivity, that amplify and further re-shape these processes of transformation.

### **3 Transgen(e)ricity and Resemiotisation**

In conventional discursive practices and genres, interdiscursivity leads to hybrid forms and the same occurs in digital settings, mainly when digital affordances are not totally exploited as in many genres that are the virtual representation of their print counterpart. However, the focus here is on those forms that exploit the potentialities provided by the hypertextual and multimodal nature of web texts at different scales. Petroni (2011: 153), investigating web genres, re-defines genre hybridity as “hypersemioticity”. Hypersemioticity results from the fact that meanings are instantiated by multiple modes simultaneously “and thus they become the consequence of the intersection of different semiotic keys.” (Villanueva, Luzón, Ruiz Madrid, 2008). Furthermore, as a consequence of this complex process, there are two sub-parameters that are “hypergen(e)ricity” and “transgen(e)ricity”. The former accounts for the co-existence of different genres in a single web text (e.g. a portal or an educational wikipage) and this implies the co-existence within the same text of different contexts of situation (on a portal users can read news or weather forecast, can make a reservation or watch a video). The latter is the affordance of the hypertextual structure. In hypertextual genres, transgen(e)ricity entails the possibility of activating a link in a genre which leads to a different genre either within the same context of situation or not. A pre-requisite for transgen(e)ricity is that the addresser establishes a coherence relation between the source and target genre, which can be reconstructed by the addressee (user) in his/her pathway.

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<sup>5</sup> Hasan (2004), too, looks at this phenomenon as a key-factor to investigate diatypic varieties related to the pivotal notion of register, i.e. the context of situation and its three components: field, tenor, and mode (Halliday, 1978, 1994). From the SFL point of view, language is “the ability to ‘mean’ in situation types, or social context, that are generated by the culture” (Halliday, 1978:34), and this means that language has a great contextually specific meaning potential.

The multiplicity of simultaneous representations via links requires a process of an endless semiotic re-negotiation as affordances augment and merge the borders of each mode and its semiotic framework accordingly. This mechanism is what Iedema defines as “resemiotisation”, that is “how meaning making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next” (2003: 41). Transgen(e)ricity on the one hand and resemiotisation on the other are the means analysts use to examine not only how many modes and resources meaning construction makes use of but also why and how those resources have been deployed, and why the same meaning has been reified and materialised through different discourses.

But both these processes are made possible by means of links which automatically imply the involvement of users in terms of interactivity. This phenomenon aims at empowering promotional culture and consumerism. Promotional discourse means persuasion, persuasion derives from human involvement in social practices. The involvement can be physical, mental, and emotional but these three elements work simultaneously and cannot be independent one from the other. When interactions occur in digital settings, interpersonal meanings are subject to manipulation deriving mainly from the affordances of the medium. This is due to the fact that on Web 2.0 many technologies operate and are created to engage users in the site and one of these is linking. Clicking on links involves users physically, they physically have to click on a button; cognitively, they choose one link rather than another in their path and elaborate their expectations concerning what they get after clicking; and affectively, they evaluate what they get. But links need to be catchy and usable and promotional culture is embedded in this linking process that is the network of the homepage.

Persuasive, evaluative, and rhetorical actions, which characterise promotional genres and settings, are always present and integrated in the meaning-making process on the Web, be it instantiated by a site or an interface. By nature Web domain implies the presence of multiple permeable contexts: the versatility and fluidity of this dynamic medium (its *hypernature*) enable each of these contexts to go beyond its boundaries and invade other territories. Commodification turns information into goods and, for this reason, it must be visible, accessible, usable, interactive, and attractive, just like goods. Whenever users look for something in the Internet, whether information, ideas, goods or services, they need to interact first with the interface and then with Web pages; second, they need to find what they are looking for immediately, easily, and with the least amount of effort; finally, they evaluate the result of their queries by either consuming the site or abandoning it, and in this way they determine its success or failure. This is a typical marketing process. Regardless of whether or

not the site is commercial, educational, or institutional, if its purpose is to sell, to describe, or to give instructions, basically it must convince the user to consume the information presented through a limitless mediation of semiotic resources.

#### **4 Institutional Discourse on the web: Two Case Studies**

The official homepages of the US Government and the UK Parliament are the two case studies here investigated. Ostensibly, these sites should not be ‘marketizable’ but simply expository and descriptive, since their communicative purpose is to offer information and services concerning the institution they represent.

Before showing the results concerning the textual organization of the two homepages, it is important to emphasize that in the Web domain there is a co-deployment of two modes in the reading process: users can access and consume information by choosing both the multiple layers navigation mode and the reading mode (Askhave, Nielsen, 2005). The former runs tri-dimensionally, or rather hypertextually, and the latter bi-dimensionally, the linear reading process. What makes the difference is the presence of links that filter, or mediate, the move structures residing behind them. At the very beginning of the reading process users have to tackle and decode the organization of discourse/s mostly by interpreting meanings actualised via links. They are an integrated part of web text type construction. The analysis, in fact, focuses in particular on this issue because it represents the most interesting and innovative facet of web genres analysis (homepages in this case) and needs to be further investigated (Petroni, 2011). Links are one of the above mentioned discourse technologies as they actualise actions and interactions between addresser and audience. Nearly all homepages today are totally realised through, and composed of, a network of links which enables users to move (or to inter-act) within web discursive contexts.

From this perspective, in order to identify the organization of links and what they represent in terms of the navigation mode, we can state that these two sites share the same “identifiable communicative purposes” (Swales, 1990: 49), basically informing and promoting; that they draw on linking processes and multimodal resources to fulfil their functions; and that they share similar social and discursive practices. The homepages are textually organised (in terms of visual and verbal layout) by following a standardised three-move generic structure: IDENTIFYING THE INSTITUTION, PROVIDING SERVICES, and SOLICITING PARTICIPATION (for USA Government see Figures 2 and 3, for UK Parliament see Figures 4, 5 and 6).



Figure 2. USA Government official homepage – 1<sup>st</sup> scroll

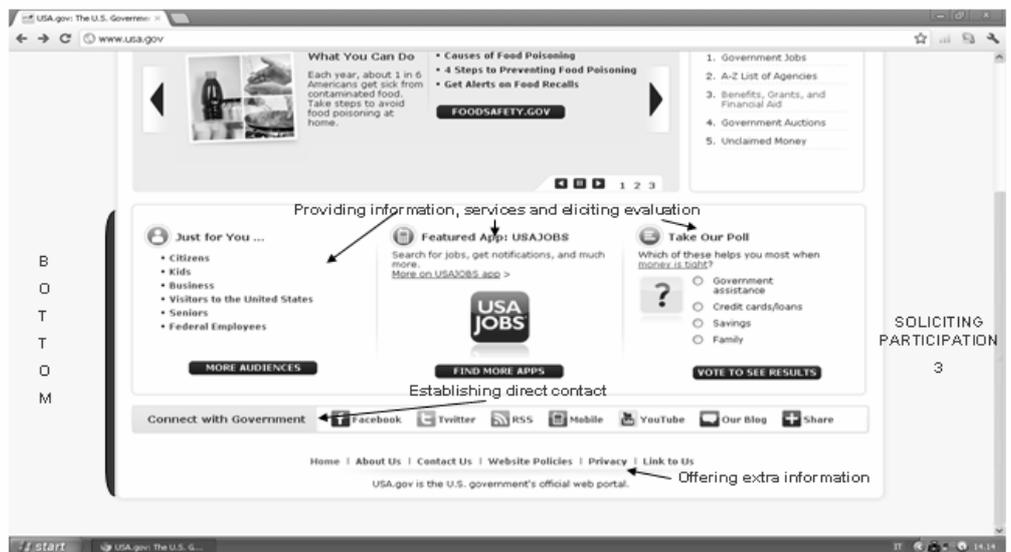


Figure 3. USA Government official homepage – 2<sup>nd</sup> scroll

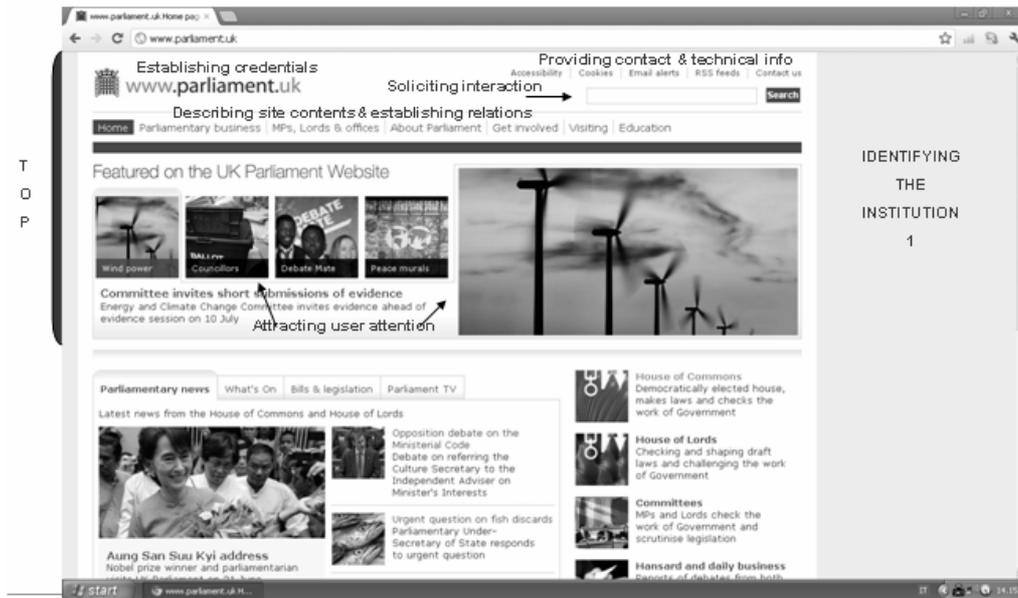


Figure 4. UK Parliament official homepage – 1<sup>st</sup> scroll



Figure 5. UK Parliament official homepage – 2<sup>nd</sup> scroll

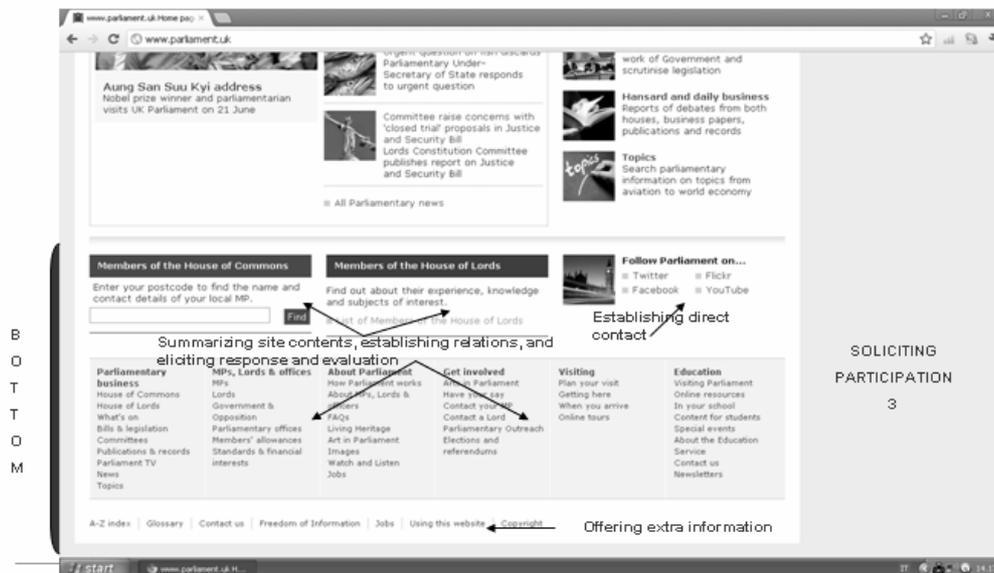


Figure 6. UK Parliament official homepage – 3<sup>rd</sup> scroll

By dividing the homepages into significant and conventionalised sections, moves have been matched with the corresponding sections, as Tables 1 and 2 show.

Table 1. The three-move generic structure of the USA Government homepage

SECTION	MOVE/SUB-MOVE
<p><b>TOP AREA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site info (left/right-side)</li> <li>• Logo area (left-side)</li> <li>• Interactivity area</li> <li>• Top horizontal navigation bar</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. IDENTIFYING THE INSTITUTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing contact and technical info</li> <li>• Establishing credentials</li> <li>• Soliciting interaction and participation</li> <li>• Providing services, news and establishing relations</li> </ul>
<p><b>CENTRAL AREA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First priority zone</li> <li>• Vertical right-hand navigation menu</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. PROVIDING SERVICES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracting user attention</li> <li>• Providing information</li> </ul>
<p><b>BOTTOM AREA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second priority zone</li> <li>• Social Network area</li> <li>• Site info</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. SOLICITING PARTICIPATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing information, services and eliciting evaluation</li> <li>• Establishing direct contact</li> <li>• Offering extra information</li> </ul>

Table 2 The three-move generic structure of the UK Parliament homepage

SECTION	MOVE/SUB-MOVE
<p>TOP AREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logo area (left-side)</li> <li>• Site info (right-side)</li> <li>• Interactivity area</li> <li>• Top horizontal navigation bar</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First priority zone</li> </ul>	<p>1. IDENTIFYING THE INSTITUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing credentials</li> <li>• Providing contact and technical info</li> <li>• Soliciting interaction</li> <li>• Describing site contents and establishing relations</li> <li>• Attracting user attention</li> </ul>
<p>CENTRAL AREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First priority zone</li> <li>• Vertical right-hand navigation menu</li> </ul>	<p>2. PROVIDING SERVICES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing news and entertainment</li> <li>• Providing information</li> </ul>
<p>BOTTOM AREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second priority zone</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Network area</li> <li>• Site info</li> </ul>	<p>3. SOLICITING PARTICIPATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarizing site contents, establishing relations and eliciting response and evaluation</li> <li>• Establishing direct contact</li> <li>• Offering extra information</li> </ul>

The three-move generic structure seems to be well-patterned, but the invasion of promotional and conversational discourses emerges immediately from the third move, SOLICITING PARTICIPATION, and less overtly from the first two moves IDENTIFYING THE INSTITUTION and PROVIDING SERVICES through the sub-moves such as *Soliciting interaction and participation* and *Attracting user attention*<sup>6</sup>, or *Providing entertainment*. In the first move, we have the logos that fulfil the function of *Establishing credentials*, but the USA site transforms verbally, metaphorically, and graphically the institutional logo area into a commercial brand name area (“Government\_\_ made easy”) by exploiting promotional rhetorical strategies. The second move works at two levels: firstly, by indicating the government’s perception of the interests and needs of citizens in terms of information; and secondly, by convincing them that the government can satisfy their needs. The third move is strategic, although it is not positioned in the priority zones (with the exception of the USA homepage where the *Soliciting interaction* sub-move is positioned in the top area, very close to the priority zone<sup>7</sup>). Apart from the typical moves of promotional genres, the key element of the persuasive strategy used in institutional digital communication is the possibility of being connected continuously to social networks, but first and foremost of being part of the government community. ‘Governments’ promote themselves, their democratic and citizen/consumer-oriented face (Goffman’s public image), through the discourse technique of

<sup>6</sup> These sub-moves rely on visuals.

<sup>7</sup> The term “priority zone” comes from Website Usability and Eyetracking studies. According to these, priority zones are the most-viewed areas of a web page (Nielsen 2000; Nielsen and Pernice 2010).

soliciting participation of citizens in the life of governments. By doing so, Governments are constantly aware of obtaining the consensus of their citizens.

If we shift the focus onto language, it is interesting to notice how these homepages create social relationships (in terms of solidarity and equal relationships), as the interpersonal metafunction emphasises (Halliday, 1994). In order to understand to what extent informalisation, conversationalisation and promotional culture are instantiated by language in these social and discursive practices, we have drawn attention to those markers typical of promotional discourse. These markers are: personal pronouns, possessives and imperative clauses, considering that in imperative clauses the second person *you* is implied without direct textual reference. Pronouns have been analysed in relation to their location within the move structure, whereas imperatives in relation to their occurrence within the verbal groups composing the verbal links.

*I-you* relations are typical of dialogic constructions and conversational discourse. The first personal pronouns *I* and *we* (but also *me*, *us*, *my*, *our*) refer to the addresser (here the Institution) and the second personal pronoun *you* (and *your*) to the audience (here the citizens). However, *I* and *we* are totally absent in both homepages and the addresser is often identified by terms such as *Government*, *Parliament*, *House of Lords*, *House of Commons*, and *Committees*, 9 words (out of 219) for the USA site and 45 (out of 411) for the UK site. This mechanism aims at establishing social distance rather than involvement, thus endorsing the function of conveying a sense of authority often fulfilled by the *exclusive we*. A text with *we*, in fact, speaks on behalf of an organisation but not always with an inclusive value. In both sites, the addresser is also identified through the pronouns *us* and *our* (57% in the USA homepage and 23% in the UK homepage) but only when the institution plays the role of object in the clause. They are generally located after the imperative clauses and embedded in links, re-balancing thus the social distance amplified by the absence of the *inclusive we*.

The second person pronouns *you* and the possessive *your* take up 43% in the USA site and 54% in the UK site. *You/your* is a typical promotional and persuasive marker used in advertising to imply an intimate and equal relationship of solidarity and to guarantee an effective interaction. Additionally, if we consider the presence of *you* as the indirect textual reference in the imperative clauses, the percentage increases substantially. The third person pronoun *they* (plus *them* and *their*) occupies 24% only in the UK homepage. This indicates that while the USA Government is wholly citizen-oriented, the UK Parliament also focuses on issues external to the institution-citizen interaction. By cross-checking pronouns with the move structure, it is possible to claim that consistency has been widely respected. In fact, in

the USA site, the word *Government* is present in every move. *Us* and *Our* pronouns are used once in the first move (IDENTIFYING THE INSTITUTION) and later in the third move (SOLICITING PARTICIPATION). The first *you* pronoun is in the second move (PROVIDING SERVICES) and exactly in the sub-move *Attracting user attention*; the others are in the third move. In the UK site, the diverse names used for the institutions, are repeated in every move, too. *Us* pronoun is used as well once in the first move and then in the third move. *You* and *your* are all in the third move .

As for the imperative clauses, these are “an attention-seeking advice known from promotional and advertising discourse” and are often used as “a friendly, direct call for action” (Askehave, 2007: 736). They play a twofold role: one is to command others to do something; the other is to invite the audience to do something together. Again, the former implies the exclusion of the addresser from the action while the second involves an inclusive equal relationship. Furthermore, imperative clauses allow the addresser either to build up authority or to appeal to the audience to follow his/her instructions. In our sample (see Table 3), in the USA homepage there are 21 imperative clauses out of 28 verbal groups and in the UK homepage there are 18 out of 29 verbal groups. With the exception of just one imperative in both sites, the rest are embedded in links, that is to say they represent potential actions (practices) solicited by the addresser. Verbal language is mostly instantiated via links as the homepages in question have incontrovertibly demonstrated and these connections are the foundation of promotional potential of homepages<sup>8</sup>.

Table 3. Imperative clauses

USA Government homepage	UK Parliament homepage
<i>Email us</i>	<i>Contact us</i>
<i>Chat</i>	<i>Search</i>
<i>Get e-mail updates</i>	<i>Get involved</i>
<i>Change text size</i>	<i>Search</i>
<i>Search the Government</i>	<i>Enter your postcode[...] and contact [...]</i>
<i>Search</i>	<i>Find</i>
<i>Get services</i>	<i>Find out</i>
<i>Explore topics</i>	<i>Follow Parliament on</i>

<sup>8</sup> Their realisation in combination with nonverbal resources compensate for the fragmentation of content deriving from hypertext structure and, therefore, for the loss of salience and informativity of verbal language itself on homepages.

<i>Find</i> Government Agencies	<i>Watch and Listen</i>
<i>Contact</i> Government	<i>Get involved</i>
[...]. <i>Take</i> steps to avoid [...]	<i>Have your say</i>
<i>Get</i> alerts	<i>Contact your MP</i>
<i>Search</i> for jobs, <i>get</i> notification [...]	<i>Contact a Lord</i>
<i>Find</i> more apps	<i>Plan your visit</i>
<i>Take</i> our poll	<i>Contact us</i>
<i>Vote</i> to see results	<i>Contact us</i>
<i>Connect</i> with Government	
Share	
<i>Contact</i> us	
<i>Link</i> to us	
21 imperatives out of 219 total words	18 imperatives out of 411 total words

## 5 Discussion of Results

Hyperlinking and interactivity are respectively the means and the process through which users create social practices. In the case studies here analysed, these adverbial territories are represented by institutional homepages where textual organisation on the one hand and the presence of some relevant linguistic markers (personal pronouns, possessives and imperative clauses) on the other cooperate coherently to fulfil their communicative purposes, i.e. informing and persuading. These are constantly intermingled and the semiotic resources involved endorse this fusion by exploiting the potentialities of links. Clicking on verbal or visual constructions leads users to endless processes of re-negotiation of meanings.

Findings demonstrate that not only is promotional culture widely pervasive but it is also construed through verbal resources along with other multimodal resources and, first and foremost, by the massive presence of links that signify interactivity and the potentiality of establishing relations between the institution and the citizen. The attractiveness and salience of promotional culture no longer reside in language as such but in the fact that the verbal resource is part of linking processes. Words merely label links through which users/citizens participate in Government activities and interact.

For example, the imperative clauses - pointed out as markers of promotional discourse – are here embedded in links. These promote interactivity by appealing to citizens to establish equal and solidarity relations and to participate in the institution’s life. If we consider that

imperative clauses represent 75% and 62% of the total verbal groups respectively, this means that salience also resides in links. The use of imperative is one of the most effective strategies which permits promotional culture and informality to invade institutional contexts and to transform deference into solidarity, formality into conversation. The difference between USA Government and UK Parliament reflects the difference in culture and ideology. As stated above, while the American site is completely and coherently citizen-oriented, the English site oscillates between promoting its “face”, establishing collaborative, participatory, and social relations and, at the same time, maintaining deference and social distance. In fact, the higher percentage of lexical density and nominalisations present in UK homepage reflects those formal constituents typical of conventional institutional discourse.

In the web domain, interactivity, meant as a technology/technique for human-computer interactions and carried out by links and buttons, can be considered as a new discourse technology. As a matter of fact, it simulates human interaction – with the computer itself or with other users via interfaces - that run along a continuum shifting from public towards private spheres (e.g. social networks). To a certain extent, the democratisation of discourse too should be considered as a technology of discourse since it simulates informality and conversational style on the part of the institution.

## **6 Conclusions**

The aim of this research is to illustrate how processes of informalisation and commodification of institutional discourse are empowered and amplified when they occur on the web. Thus, digitality entails promotional culture and this mechanism affects the way we produce and decode meaning in every setting. The fluidity and permeability of contexts which allow promotional discourse to invade other domains of practice are also augmented by digital technologies.

The adverbial territories here analysed are the representations of this pivotal process thanks to which we are no longer able to identify the boundaries of web genres. Interdiscursivity on the web accounts for the presence of multiple communicative purposes and this implies a combination of different discourses, and different textual resources and rhetorical strategies, in the same text type, e.g. an institutional homepage. As it is, its function should be that of ‘informing and reporting’ about the institution by making use of specific lexico-syntactic as well as socio-pragmatic resources typical of institutional discourse. The UK site does this partially whereas the USA site seems mainly to ignore this. The two case studies, in fact, show that embedded and blended in the ‘informing and reporting’

communicative purpose there is that of ‘promoting and persuading’ since promotional discourse colonizes most discursive practices (as Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate).

When users are engaged in both reading modes<sup>9</sup> they interplay with hypergen(e)ricity and transgen(e)ricity at the same time. Figure 3, for example, gives evidence that in the bottom area of the homepage, within the macro-move SOLICITING PARTICIPATION, diverse functions are fulfilled: providing information and services, eliciting evaluation, establishing direct contact, etc. This means that there are different representations of genre (e.g., report, letter, poll, legal document, chat, etc.) which co-exist in the single homepage genre (hypergen(e)ricity). As soon as users click on a link in any area, they become immediately involved in the exploitation of the affordances of the navigation mode. Users can be led either to another sub-division of the same text type (e.g. the link ‘more on/about’), but this process does not deserve particular attention as it is the hypertextual counterpart of the linear sequence, or to another different genre, as happens when users start their navigation by reading reports or news and continue by watching a video coherently linked to the first content (transgen(e)ricity). The possibility of shifting from one genre to another produces the blurring of genre boundaries and hence, in the social networking area for example, chat conversations or single posts (Facebook) can exist along with tweets (Twitter) or with videos (You Tube). Users can consume the same information by traversing different genres within the same institutional setting.

If interdiscursivity takes place in digital settings and digital affordances are totally exploited, this does not lead necessarily to hybrid forms, as occurs in conventional discursive practices and genres, but leads instead to an endless process of semiotic re-negotiation of meaning, properly named resemiotisation. Resemiotisation mirrors the transformative dynamics of socially situated meaning-making processes on the web which is due to its hyperlinked and multimodal nature on the one hand and to the constant presence of advertorial territories on the other. In this study multimodality has not been taken into consideration, even though it plays a substantial role together with interactivity, hyperlinking and transgen(e)ricity in the meaning production of a homepage. This combination calls traditional meaning-making construction analysis into question. Resemiotisation, indeed, does not look only at the multiplicity of semiotic resources but also at why and how these resources are co-deployed and how multiple interconnections among them are designed in order to make web genres and discourses always attractive and persuasive.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. section 4.

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