Digital genres: a challenge to traditional genre theory

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to account for the genre characteristics of non-linear, multi-modal, web-mediated documents. It involves a two-dimensional view on genres that allows one to account for the fact that digital genres act not only as text but also as medium.

Design/methodology/approach – The theoretical framework of the article is the Swalesian genre theory used in academic settings all over the world to investigate the relationship between discourse and social practice and to teach genre conventions to students of language and communication. Up till now most genre research has focused on the characteristics of "printed" texts, whereas less has been done to apply the genre theory to digital genres.

Findings – The article discusses the characteristics of digital genres, notably the media constraints that have a significant effect on the production and reception of digital genres and suggests an extension of the Swalesian genre model that takes the digital characteristics into account.

Research limitations/implications – The suggestion for a revised genre model is not based on an extensive empirical study of various types of web sites. The observation is restricted to a limited number of commercial web sites.

Originality/value – The article proposes new insights into the concept of genre adapting traditional models of genre theory to web-mediated texts. A revised two-dimensional genre model incorporating media elements into the concept of genre thus takes account of the particular characteristics of the navigation and reading elements of web-mediated genres.

Keywords Digital storage, Worldwide web, Hypertext Markup Language

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Since its introduction in the 1980s, the concept of genre has been a matter of considerable discussion in research communities throughout the world. In Australia systemic functional linguists such as Martin (1992) and Eggins (1994) have used the concept to complement the Hallidayan notion of register, in America the seminal work of Miller (1994), Bazerman (1994), Swales (1990), and Yates and Orlikowski (1992) have contributed to a wider understanding of the concept of "genre" by defining the concept, introducing models suitable for performing genre analyses, and not least capturing the complexities of genre systems and genre development. And finally, in Hong Kong Bhatia (1993) has paved the way for the practical application of genre theory by suggesting a comprehensive framework for analysing non-literary genres – especially ESP texts. While these genre studies offer important insights into the notion of genre, it is also a well-known fact that most of the above genre theorists (except for Yates and Orlikowski) tend to focus on genres transmitted through speech or print. Recent years, however, have seen a steady increase in genre research which deals with genres transmitted through one of the most significant electronic media of today: the internet[1]. This is no coincidence as the use of web-mediated communication has

skyrocketed during the last ten years, not least due to the immense popularity of the internet among businesses and organisations worldwide. In this article we shall, however, not follow directly in the foot steps of the researchers of genres in electronic media[1], which means that instead of studying the frequency with which digital genres are used, how they are used, where they are used, and by whom they are used, etc. we propose a closer examination of the research object – the electronic genres themselves. Consequently, we want to develop a genre analysis model that is able to capture the essence of genres mediated through the net.

Our research purpose involves a controversial claim namely that it may be necessary to incorporate the notion of "medium" into the notion of "genre", i.e. we cannot really account for the characteristics of genres mediated on the net (for example a corporate profile) if we simply analyse "print-outs" of the web profile and treat them as static products and, thereby, neglect the fact that the internet as a medium have a number of characteristics which significantly influence and contribute to the way the web-mediated genres look and are used. Thus the aim of the article is twofold. First, the article serves as a theoretical exploration of the Swalesian genre model. It attempts to establish whether the model is suitable for capturing the essence of web-mediated genres or whether the digital context of web genres may call for a reconsideration of – or at least provide new insights into – the constituents of the genre model. Second, even though a systematic characterization of web-mediated genres is outside the scope of this article, we use the homepage as exemplary material in our theoretical discussion and in that way provide a tentative characterisation of the homepage as a genre. The reasons for choosing the homepage are: it is a web-generated genre in the sense that it came into existence with the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW) and has no direct parallel outside the web (as opposed to other texts on web sites such as extracts from annual reports, corporate brochures, etc.); and it is among the first web-generated texts to have reached genre status which means that the form and content of the homepage is now becoming conventionalised after more than ten years of "rhetorical anarchy".

2. The concept of genre in functional genre theory
Ever since the "new", functional genre movement began to gather momentum in the early 1980s, there has been a widely-shared view that genres are best conceptualised as goal-directed or purposive. This emphasis on functionality is clearly reflected in the definitions of genre provided through the years – perhaps most eloquently expressed in the words of the systemic functional linguist, J.R. Martin: "Genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (Martin, 1985, p. 250). Yates *et al.* (1999, p. 84) define genres as "socially recognized types of communicative actions . . . that are habitually enacted by members of a community to realize particular social purposes. A genre may be identified by its socially recognized purpose and shared characteristics of form.".

One of the most extensive definitional discussions of the concept of genre, however, remains that of Swales (1990):

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

2.1 The Swalesian genre model

The above definition does not only emphasise the purposive nature of genres, it also makes an interesting claim concerning the way genres "look". The communicative purpose constitutes the rationale for the genre that means that the purpose of a genre (what we try to accomplish in a social context) triggers a particular text structure and – more often than not – a host of conventionalised verbal and visual rhetorical strategies. To conceptualise this interdependency, Swales (1990) suggests the following three-level genre model whose three constituents capture the essence of what we call "genres":

(1) *communicative purpose*; realised by

(2) *move structure*; realised by

(3) *rhetorical strategies*.

We shall now take a closer look at the constituents in the model as they form the basis of our two-dimensional genre model in section 5.

2.1.1 Communicative purpose. As appears from the definition above, genres are purposeful activities and the functional genre movement suggests that the primary criterion for classifying certain communicative events as a "genre" is a set of shared communicative purposes[2]. In other words if we want to claim that the homepage constitutes a "proper" genre, we obviously need to look for a shared communicative purpose (or purposes) which the communicative events (in this case the homepages) are intended to fulfil[3]. The communicative purpose of a genre-text (i.e. a typical representative example of a genre) cannot be determined by looking at the text in isolation. If we want to establish what people accomplish by means of a particular text, we have to turn to the context, the discourse community, in which the text is used. if the researcher is a novice to this community, i.e. have no previous experience and background knowledge of the community activities, s/he obviously needs to talk to the expert members of the discourse community who use the genre in question.

2.1.2 Move structure. Genres are not only characterised by shared set of communicative purposes, they are also highly structured and conventionalised in the sense that the genres represent or lay down the way to go about accomplishing particular communicative purposes. In other words when we use language to perform a communicative event, we do so systematically; we go from A to B – and draw on the conventionalised internal structure as recognised by our discourse community. Thus the major linguistic reflection of communicative purpose is in the staging structure by which a text of a particular genre unfolds (referred to as the "schematic structure" or "move structure")[4]. The move structure of a genre typically consists of several functionally distinct stages or steps, the reason being:

> . . . we cannot make all the meanings we want to at once. Each stage in the genre contributes a part of the overall meanings that must be made for the genre to be accomplished successfully (Eggins, 1994, p. 36, after Martin, 1985).

Even though the structure of a genre is highly conventionalised, there is obviously room for rhetorical variation and through the years researchers have tried to incorporate this flexibility in the genre model, thereby modifying the claim of a "fixed" staging structure with a specific number of moves and a predetermined sequence. Today most researchers in fact agree that instances of genres do not necessarily

contain a fixed set of obligatory moves. Instead the genre-texts select their structural elements from a common move repertoire (see, for example, Ventola, 1989).

The notion of moves is particularly useful for displaying generic conventions in terms of text organisation. However, the "utility value" of the concept is somewhat hampered by the fact that strong disagreement exists as to which criteria should be used for identifying move structure (see Paltridge, 1994). Swales (1990) appears to base his criteria on two different systems namely lexis and grammar and rhetorical function (though most often the latter), Eggins (1994) relies solely on lexis and grammar, Martin (1992) focuses on the layout of a text, suggesting that "titles, sub-titles, headings and subheadings are commonly deployed to keep track of the composition structure [of the texts]" (p. 443), while Bhatia (1993) concludes that "the ultimate criteria for assigning discourse values to various moves is functional rather than formal" (p. 87). In the analysis of the move structure of the homepage in section 6.2.1 we shall get back to the problem of move identification.

2.1.3 Rhetorical strategies. As suggested by Swales (1990) the communicative purpose of a genre not only shapes the schematic structure of the discourse, it also influences and constrains choices of content and style. Therefore, the next step in the genre analysis model is to explore the level of form – more specifically the rhetorical strategies (verbal as well as visual) used to realise a particular communicative intention. Generally, there is no one-to-one correlation between a particular move and the verbal and non-verbal strategies used to instantiate a move. However, texts belonging to the same genre often deploy identical or at least very similar rhetorical features. For example when we hear expressions like "mix well for approx. 5 minutes" or "sections 35 to 46 of this Act do not apply to a tenancy", we intuitively presume that we are dealing with genres such as recipes and legal Acts because the choices of lexis and grammar are extremely genre-specific. The aim of the rhetorical analysis is to look for such regularities or standard practices in the actual formulations of genres. This does not mean, however, that there is no room for variation when writing a genre-text. In the same way as writers may choose between moves from a "common repertoire" when structuring their texts, writers choose between rhetorical strategies from a network of linguistic/non-linguistic strategies and end up with their (more or less) personalised versions of a particular genre. As Bhatia says in his extension of Swales' genre definition:

> Most often it [the genre] is highly structured and conventionalised with constraint on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. These constraint, however, are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognized purpose(s) (Bhatia, 1993, p. 13).

In the actual genre analysis, one of the most interesting findings is to explore the "common repertoire" of rhetorical strategies, i.e. all the different possibilities which exist for saying practically the same thing (realising the same move), and equally important – to establish whether some expressions are more preferred, and therefore more genre-specific, than others.

3. The homepage as a web-mediated genre
The homepage can be defined as the top-level document of a web site[5] which performs two overall functions[6]. First it introduces the user to the general content of

the site by presenting "informative" tables of contents and providing "enticing" text bits. Secondly, it functions as the official gateway of the web site as it enables the reader to access and navigate the site by providing navigational tools or links that branch off into the web site as a whole. This duality inherent in homepages may best be described by conceptualising the homepage as a front door with a door sign. The door sign indicates the name of the residents (i.e. the "content" of the house) while the door itself is the gateway (the medium) which enables guests to enter the house and visit the residents inside. Having said this, one must of course bear in mind that there are other ways of accessing a site. In the same way as people may choose the back door of a house, one may also access the web site through "unofficial" gates and need not be "let in" at the main URL address.

Even though the homepage is a new genre, it would be wrong to suggest that we have never seen anything like it. In fact some of its main characteristics are replicates of well-established discourses from the world outside the net. Most prominent are its affinity with promotional and news texts of which two stand out; namely the exordium and the news paper front page. The exordium is a promotional genre that goes back to Aristotle and classical rhetoric. The exordium is the introductory part of an oral speech that indicates the content and structure of the presentation that is about to come, while at the same time serves as an appetiser that identifies and promotes the speaker and his/her speech. Thus in the exordium attention is drawn not only to the subject of the speech (including its relevance and importance) but also to the speaker him/herself. Although the exordium originates from oration, its properties have been transferred to the written mode and can be seen in a wide range of promotional/introductory genres such as prefaces, introductions and forewords. Now, with the advent of the net, the exordium has found its digital realisation and the similarity between the homepage and the exordium is obvious: the homepage also displays an interesting mixture of promotional features intertwined with content information where for example pictures, sound, music and animation are combined with enticing summaries of web site contents to make the user stay and explore the site.

The other genre elements, which homepages seem to imitate, are those of newspaper front pages. The newspaper front page also serves as a promoter and content indicator (like the exordium) but where the similarity between the exordium and the homepage lies mainly in terms of similar purposes, the similarity between the front page and the homepage concerns other elements as well, such as content, form, and lay-out. Thus we often see the following characteristics of newspaper discourse on the homepage as well: small summaries, key words, catchy headlines, tables, frames, attention-seeking photos, and information value attached to the placement of elements (e.g. the inverted pyramid format and given information on the left and new information on the right)[7].

So far we can conclude that even though we have presented the homepage as a new genre born with the net, it shares several features with already existing genres and discourses from printed and oral media. This does not mean, however, that the homepage is simply a digital version of already existing genres. As we shall see in the sections to come, the fact that the homepage draws on a new kind of medium, namely the WWW, adds to it a distinctiveness hitherto unseen in "traditional" genres. Thus the WWW as a medium conveys unique properties to the homepage as a genre and this co-existence of genre and medium, which seems to be ignored in traditional genre

theory, is fundamental to web communication and must not be overlooked with trying to determine the genre characteristics of the homepage.

4. The WWW as a medium – properties and characteristics

Due to the importance of the interplay between genre and medium when dealing with web-mediated texts we shall now account for the properties and characteristics of the medium through which the homepage is distributed.

The WWW provides a public space in which anyone with access to the internet is free to search for information and establish virtual presence in cyberspace. The technology of the WWW allows for the mediation of different software or media genres, such as chat, mail, Usenet, and web sites. It is well-known in media studies that "the medium is the message", as pointed out by McLuhan (1962) in the 1960s. Therefore, the WWW should not be seen only as an important contextual feature of web genres; rather the WWW is an integrated part of web genres. This means that, although many web genres have printed counterparts (e.g. an annual report may be published in print and on the net), the medium adds unique properties to the web genre in terms of production, function and reception which cannot be ignored in the genre characterisation.

We shall now take a closer look at two media properties, namely multi-medianess and hypertext/hyper-reading, which are of course also part of the general properties of the WWW but whose characteristics have a significant influence on the nature of web-mediated texts and therefore become valuable concepts in our genre characterisation of the homepage in section 6.

4.1 Multi-medianess

The WWW may be characterised as a main medium that integrates various sub-mediums into one common format. Most web texts exploit this huge potential of combining text, images, sound, and animations and the result is a "text" (a screen page) which has more in common with a television/video screen than with a text in its traditional sense[8]. As pointed out by Mitra and Cohen (1999, p. 188):

> Improved technologies of video compression, developments in better data transmission technology, and speedier processors in computers are making it possible to supplement the written text of the WWW with streaming video and audio. Thus the written word is not only hyperactive in the WWW text, but its meaning is constantly implicated by the multimedia images that accompany the text.

Not all web designers exploit the multi-media potential generated by the WWW. But those who do, provide the web users with the possibility of reading a text, listening to a piece of music or a speech, or watching a movie – either separately or in combination, as we shall see in section 6.3 on rhetorical strategies. The multi-medianess of the web tends to promote the tabular and non-sequential reading process of web texts[9]. The reading process is not only interrupted because of the graphical frame structure of homepages (similar to newspaper front pages), but also by the users' modal shifts – where they either read, listen, or watch depending on the nature of the media. What is more, the multi-medianess of web texts supplies the texts with a rich polysemous potential where the web user is "invited" to participate actively in assigning meaning in the process of text consumption (Landow, 1997; Bolter, 2001).

4.2 Hypertext and hyper-reading

Hypertext is the key medium used on the WWW to present information on the web. Hypertexts relate web texts to each other; thus enabling a non-linear transmission of information. The general characteristics of hypertext influence and constrain text production and reception on the web and the concept is therefore extremely relevant to consider when trying to characterise web texts as genres. From a sender-oriented point of view hypertext is a system of non-hierarchical text blocks where the textual elements (nodes) are connected by links. For hypertext technologists dealing with hypertexts from a content-oriented perspective, focus is on the textual structure formed as a "network" (a term used to emphasise the non-linearity of hypertexts (Fritz, 1998). According to many hypertext technologists and linguists, hypertext is characterised as a non-sequential text system. However, for many literary hypertext researchers, who apply a more receiver-oriented perspective (e.g. Landow, 1997; Bolter, 2001), the definition of hypertext is not based on how hypertexts are produced and structured but on how they are accessed by the reader. Thus according to Landow (1997) and Bolter (2001) there is no clear distinction between text production and text reception on the internet. They argue that the readers can choose where to begin their reading and where to end it. They choose their own path and thereby create their "own" text in the hypertext system – becoming a kind of web author. So rather than basing their definition of hypertext on the structural patterns, the literary approach tends to base its definition on the reading process associated with hypertext.

So what is the effect of hypertext on the web-users and their approach to web-mediated texts? Compared to traditional text, the hypertext system places certain constraints on the reading pattern, which result in a new kind of reading referred to as hyper-reading (Sosnoski 1999: 135). The most obvious difference between "traditional reading" and hyper-reading boils down to that of linearity; with hypertext reading being regarded as non-linear (where the reader filters, skims and scans the text), and traditional text reading being regarded as linear. Nevertheless, many researchers have started questioning whether hyper-reading can be considered a new reading technique born with and peculiar to the WWW. In fact, some literary hypertext researchers consider hyper-reading a particular reading mode, which can be found both in printed as well as in web-mediated text. Finnemann (1999) suggests for example that the reading process of web texts is in fact very similar to that of traditional texts; in printed texts we also filter, skim and fragment the information (thus performing a non-linear reading) and in web texts our reading process may also be characterised as linear because the user cannot connect to five nodes at a time but must make each connection in turn:

> In an ordinary text you are supposed to move from chapter 1 to chapter 2 while in a hypertext you are supposed to choose your own serial order at various stages on the journey. But even so, you still have to choose, you have to determine the order in which you will read the text and this order will always have to be sequential. The optional freedom in hypertext systems is not a freedom from sequentialized linearity, since the user cannot make more than one choice at a time (Finnemann, 1999, p. 25)[10].

4.2.1 Reading mode and navigating mode. Instead of operating with the linear/non-linear dichotomy, Finnemann suggests that we regard hypertext as a text system which has the capacity of activating at least two modal shifts in the reading

process: the "reading-as-such" being one mode (the reading mode); and the navigating mode (or linking mode) being the other[11]. The "reading mode" leaves the user in a traditional reader position with sequential reading as the guiding principle (similar to traditional reading, no matter whether the actual reading is strictly linear or not). The "navigating mode" allows the reader to navigate the site and actively construct his/her own reading path through one or several sites. So when consuming web texts, the web user employs two different cognitive capacities and demonstrates two different types of behaviour when s/he shifts from the reading to the navigating mode and vice versa.

The concept of "modal shifts" in hypertext reading offers an interesting perspective on web genres and seems to be an extremely useful tool for a refinement of the traditional genre analysis model. We suggest that the analysis of web genres should be centred round the two modes. Thus when we consider the use of the text in the reading mode, the traditional genre analysis model seems to be an appropriate tool for a genre description (because in this mode, text consumption is in fact not very different from traditional texts). What we need then is an extension of the genre model to account for the fact that a web text also functions in the navigating mode where the text, due to its media constraints, becomes an interactive medium, used actively to navigate the web site.

5. The traditional genre model – revisited

As mentioned above the genre model has proven quite useful for describing the characteristics of one-dimensional genres or genres in which media properties play a less significant role. However, due to the fact that the hypertextual nature of web documents forms an integral part of the generic properties and communicative purposes of these texts, one must not overlook the media characteristics when describing web-mediated texts as genres. As mentioned above we need to introduce a genre model that captures the essence of text and medium simultaneously and thereby provides a more complete picture of genres. To return to our door metaphor, we need to consider both the characteristics of the door sign (the text) and the door itself (the medium). Our solution is to reconsider the genre model; keep the basic premises of the model (the three-level analysis of communication purpose, move structure, and rhetorical strategies), but add the hypertextual mode (i.e. Finnemann's concept of navigating mode) to all levels of analysis, thus producing a two-dimensional genre model. Schematically it looks like Figure 1.
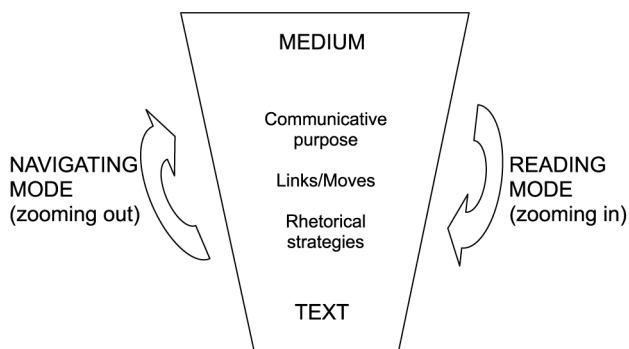

Figure 1.
The two-dimensional genre model

The model in Figure 1 is supposed to signify that web documents are two-dimensional:

(1) Users of web documents carry out modal shifts – shifts between acting as a reader and acting as a navigator.

(2) Shifts are circular – there is a constant change between reading and navigating.

(3) When in the reading mode, the reader zooms in on the text and uses the web document as if it was a "printed" text (basically reads the text).

(4) When in the navigating mode, the navigator zooms out of the text and uses the web document as a medium (exploiting its navigation possibilities).

(5) An account of the generic properties of genres on the web involves a three-level analysis of both modes:

• in the reading mode, the text must be characterised in terms of its communicative purpose, moves, and rhetorical strategies; and

• in the navigating mode, the medium must be characterised in terms of its communicative purpose, links, and rhetorical strategies.

Apart from introducing a two-dimensional perspective on genres, the model also enables the analyst to consider the roles of both text producer and text receiver. Swales and Bhatia's genre analysis model is sender-oriented, i.e. the communicative purpose and the functional moves are tokens of what the sender wants to achieve with the genre in question. However, in spite of the fact that our model also considers the functional properties of the text and the medium from the point of view of the text producer, it also considers the role of the receiver. Thus the introduction of modal shifts in our two-dimensional model opens up for the discussion of the roles of receivers and provides a broader perspective, and perhaps also more realistic view, on the communication process and the complexities of communication as a whole.

5.1 The interplay between medium and genre
The model of analysis proposed above not only suggests a close interplay between medium and genre but claims that media properties influence both the purpose and form of web-mediated genres and should therefore be included in the genre identification. This is a controversial view and other researchers warn against this position. For example Yates *et al.* (1999, p. 100) claim that "it is the genres enacted within a medium that establish the communicative purpose of the interaction not the medium". Nevertheless, Yates and Orlikowski (1992, p. 310) recognize an interplay between medium and genre when they claim that "Although our notion of genre is clearly differentiated from that of medium, we recognized their interaction by positing that medium may play a role in both the recurrent situation and the form of a genre". In Yates *et al.* (1999, p. 84) they become even more explicit, suggesting that the medium (which they then define as an aspect of form) can indeed be used to identify genres. The reason for this uncertainty and confusion when it comes to the role of the medium in characterising and identifying genres seem to have appeared concomitant with the shift in genre research from traditional printed genres to genres published in electronic media such as the WWW. When studying web-mediated genres, the researcher is faced with genres which are more than "traditional genres transferred to the net"; in fact web-mediated genres may be substantially different from printed genres because the web genre often exploits the characteristics of the hypertext medium. This calls for a

genre analysis model, as the one outlined above, which deals with both genre and media characteristics in order to avoid the serious mistake some researchers may make if they analyse web-mediated genres as static products (e.g. by making a print from the screen and start analysing the print (as done by Ryon *et al.*, 2003) in their study of government homepages)). Those research methods do not take into account that a homepage uses links to provide access to the rest of the web site and this purpose is clearly not achievable outside the net. Thus the fact that hyper texts become severely "handicapped" when printed out on paper and removed from their medium suggests that the medium forms an integral part of the genre and should be included in a genre analysis model of web-mediated genres.

On the other hand, we do not mean to suggest that the medium always plays a role in genre identifications. An uploaded pdf file of an annual report, or an audio-taped novel cannot be said to constitute a new genre. They are still annual reports and novels because the medium does not significantly change the status and function of the genres. However, if the annual report or the novel are published as hypertexts on a web site – and therefore not only provide information about the financial year or tell a story – but also contain links which provide access to other sites on the web, their genre status and function change and thus the media characteristics should be included in their identification.

6. Analysis of the homepage – using the two-dimensional genre model

In the sections that follow, we shall put our two-dimensional genre model into practice and show how our extension of the traditional genre model may be used to account for the complexities of web-mediated genres. For practical purposes we have decided to make a rather "linear" presentation, which, unfortunately, does no do justice to our view of web-mediated genres as dynamic documents with constant modal shifts.

However, before putting our model to the test, we would like to address the methodological and empirical framework of our analysis. First, our analysis does not involve quantitative studies of a large corpus of web text nor does it include user surveys or reception analyses. The implications are that our analyses do not provide us with a valid and representative identification of the genre characteristics of homepages. On the other hand our purpose is not to establish a taxonomy of digital genres and/or genre specific features of digital texts. Nor do we intend to carry out a field study of the social practice of digital genres in a particular setting. Rather our goal is to propose an analytical framework for genre analysis that does not reduce media specific elements to something which is beyond the genre itself. Our analysis is purely interpretative relying on our own observations as default readers of web sites. We restrict our empirical analysis to a single prototypical corporate homepage (i.e. the introductory page[12] of a corporate web site) from the corporate web site of a large European industrial company, Danisco. The Danisco homepage (www.danisco.com) is the "front page" of a large commercial site used by the company to communicate with stakeholders (e.g. investors, agents, retailers, local politicians, the press, consumers, etc.). We thereby exclude other types of homepages such as individual homepages, family homepages, splash screens, portals, etc. from our examination. This also means that the analysis is an exemplary analysis only – motivated by our wish to put our extended genre model to the test.

6.1 Analysis of communicative purposes on the homepage

Having defined web documents as two-dimensional, suggesting that an important functional feature of such documents is their ability to perform a communicative function in the reading as well as in the navigating mode, we obviously have to account for the communicative purpose of web documents in the both modes when making a genre analysis.

6.1.1 Analysis of communicative purpose in the reading mode. When the reader accesses the homepage s/he is usually in search of information. The aim of the homepage is to assist the reader in this search. Therefore, the homepage is a condensation of the most important information on the site and serves as a swift, brief, and scannable site introduction. The homepage does not provide the reader with a complete overview of the entire site (which is the purpose of the site map). Instead it presents a selection of topics – ranging from the names of very broad topic categories such as "help", "careers", "about us" to more elaborate summaries or leads (especially news summaries). The choice of topics present on the homepage is governed by what the web author believes will satisfy the immediate information need of the reader (the default information) when the reader consults the web page. Thus from our knowledge of the social practice related to the production and consumption of homepages, we suggest that the primary communicative purpose of the homepage in the reading mode is to introduce the site.

However, as with many other "traditional" genres, the homepage fulfils secondary purposes as well. These purposes cannot be said to constitute the core function of the homepage, but seem to have emerged concurrently with the increase in web communication among companies/organisations and their publics. These secondary purposes are:

- to create/consolidate the image of the sender; and
- to present news (local or global news).

We have added the secondary purpose of image creation/consolidation because one would miss the point if suggesting that homepages play a purely informative role. To return to our "door metaphor", and stretch it a bit further, one could add that the "look" of the front door, says something about the sender (is it the "shabby chick" look with patches of paint in pale colours, is it "high-tech" with steel, glass and charcoal colours, or perhaps the "past times" look with inlaid panels, glass panes and solid oak). In the same way, the choice of information as well as the design and layout of the homepage say something about the sender; i.e. play an image-creating role.

The other secondary purpose (to present news) should be related to our discussion of the homepage as a kind of news genre. As mentioned above the sender of the homepage chooses to highlight some of the web site content by relegating a "front page" position to part of the information. Some of this information is permanent, e.g. the headings such as "investor", "press", etc. which simply refer to the main content/topic categories of the web and look the same whenever you access the homepage. However, some of the information changes within the hour/day, especially the information that takes the form of small news summaries. The news summaries provide the reader with a quick overview of the main news of the company/organisation or the daily news in general.

6.1.2 Analysis of communicative purpose in the navigating mode. Drawing on our discussion of hypertexts in section 4, we suggest that the purpose of all web documents in the navigating mode is to provide access to relevant web pages and web sites, i.e. to act as a means of transportation allowing the reader to travel the WWW moving from one web page or web site to another[13]. Thus in the navigating mode, the hypertext system of the homepage enables the navigator to use the links on the homepage to access the rest of the web site. Therefore, the main purpose of the homepage in the navigating mode is: to provide access to the web site.

As a result, we suggest the concept of communicative purpose in traditional genre theory be broadened to account for communicative purposes in the two modes, which means that we end up with a double-edged purpose as well as a sub-division of one of the main purposes (see Table I).

6.2 Analysis of functional units (moves and links) on the homepage

According to Swales' genre model a communicative purpose is realised by a functional staging structure which consists of a number of functional "chunks" (see section 2.1.2). In the previous section we concluded that the homepage has two parallel – yet distinct – communicative purposes (depending on its modality) and we, therefore, need to identify the functional "chunks" of each mode separately.

6.2.1 Analysis of moves in the reading mode. The analysis of moves in the reading mode is straightforward and similar to that of traditional texts. The moves are clearly distinct with boundaries between them marked off by: changes in the type of information present in the different sections of the homepage (content); often supported by changes in frames, empty space, shifts in colours, shifts in font size/type, etc.[14].

A brief look a various corporate homepages suggests that the following moves are prototypical on the homepage in the reading mode:

- *Attracting attention.* This move is meant to attract the attention of the reader when entering the homepage.
- *Greeting.* This move accentuates the door metaphor of the homepage; the purpose is to create a feeling of welcoming someone at your doorstep.
- *Identifying sender.* This move serves to identify the web-owner. The identification is quite important from the point of view of both web user and web-owner; it enables the web user to orientate him/herself and keep track of his/her whereabouts on the net, and it plays an important role as part of the web-owner's image creating strategy. This move is often realised by a logo.
- *Indicating content structure.* This move, often referred to as the main menu, is one of the most fundamental characteristics of the homepage. It provides the web user with a clear overview of the content of the web site.

Mode	Reading	Navigating
Main purpose	To introduce the web site	To provide access to the web site
Sub-purpose	To consolidate/create an image	
	To present news	

- *Detailing (selected) content*. This move provides more detailed information about the topics listed in the main menu in the form of small news summaries. Apart from detailing information, the move also realises the news presenting and image creating function of the homepage as news of various kinds seem to be the preferred content of this move (be it international/national news or news of the self-promotional kind (financial results, product news, latest events in the company or community, etc.). However, it is extremely important for the web writer to strike a balance between presenting news that not only promote the web-owner but also seem relevant to the web user, to ensure that the user stays on the site.
- *Establishing credentials*. This move is meant to establish a trustworthy image of the web-owner.
- *Establishing contact*. This move enables the reader to contact the sender.
- *Establishing a (discourse) community*. This move enables loyal or frequent web users to establish communities within the web site (often realised by a login facility).
- *Promoting an external organisation*. This move promotes another company, product, etc. It usually takes the form of a banner advertisement.

As the name suggests the move structure of a text indicates a preferred way of organising the text in order to realise a particular communicative purpose – most notably obtained by creating a sequence of moves through which to go when writing and later reading the text (Bhatia, 1993, p. 30). However, this view is only partly applicable to homepages. The homepage is a genre that exploits the entire spectrum of rhetorical creativity – also in terms of text structuring. There is a vague tendency towards a preferred text organisation which is similar to that of newspaper front pages: the most important information first and the least important last. However, to suggest a conventional or prototypical move structure of the moves on the homepage is not particularly relevant. As mentioned in section 4.2, web documents (including the homepage) are texts in which sequence and linearity seem to be suspended. The web text is not intended to be read in its entirety but rather scanned by the reader before s/he finally decides which elements to read. Thus the author of the homepage may have decided on a particular path for the reader to follow when entering the homepage but in the scanning process the reader selects the element which will be read first, second, third etc. thus making his/her own personalised move structure.

6.2.2 Analysis of links in the navigating mode. The next step in our genre analysis is to analyse the realisation of the communicative purpose in the navigating mode. In the reading mode, and within traditional genre analysis, communicative purposes are realised by moves, as we saw in 2.1.2. However, in the navigating mode we cannot use this unit as a structural/functional criterion. The communicative purpose of providing access to the web site is not realised by moves, but by hyperlinks witch tie together the text chunks into a web structure. And since hyperlinks are an inherent property of the web medium as such – and not related to specific text genres – we suggest an investigation into the functional value of links on the web in general.

A link may be defined as a clickable object (for example appearing as an icon or as underlined/highlighted text as in "read more") which allows the navigator to go from one place to another on a web page or a web site. Present day research into the

functional value of links seems to focus on how one (mostly the text producer) links documents on the web site in terms of two variables: "what should come first and what should come last", i.e. using structural links to organise the information on the web site hierarchically; or "what would the reader like to know more about", i.e. organising the documents in an associative manner, adding associative links which allow the navigator to go from, e.g. a site containing cooking recipes to a site with information on food ingredients (i.e. information which may be related semantically, but is not organised in terms of one document being more general or specific than the other). However, our notion of the functional value of links is concerned with the relationship established between the two chunks of information being connected; i.e. what is web page B (the textual point of destination) doing in relation to web page A (the textual point of entry)? Links do more than simply guide the navigator from one place to another. Links add meaning to the chunks of information that they connect, as they postulate a relationship between the two information units connected by the link. As Tosca (2000, p. 3) suggests: "every link communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance . . . Links don't interrupt the flow of meaning; on the contrary, they enliven it". In other words – if there is a link, it is because the information, which the navigator gets access to through the link, is relevant to the information which has just been read. It is this notion of links as meaningful, functional units that allows us to regard links as equivalent to "moves" in printed text.

6.2.2.1 Generic and specific links. We claimed above that a functional typology of links requires an investigation into the semantic relation between the two texts connected by the link. Nevertheless, as text analysts, we adopt a "linear" approach in our analysis and take our point of departure in the link itself, i.e. the clickable objects on the homepage, referred to here as "web page A".

Links on web page A are used to provide access to the entire web site. However, there are different ways of doing this. Either the links provide access to very general topic categories at the upper levels of the web site (which we refer to here as "generic" links) or they provide access to more specific information at a lower level on the web site serving as small previews or appetizers of what the web site also contains (referred to here as "specific" links).

6.2.2.1.1 Generic links. Generic links correspond to an entry in a traditional library catalogue where the entry takes the form of subject terms. In this sense they provide access to the main topics on a web site. Due to their general, topical status, generic links are frequently inserted in the top section of a web document (e.g. in the navigation bar or a hyperlinked table of contents) where they provide shortcuts to the main subject areas of the web site as in the example below[15] from www.danisco.com

home	products	about us	sustainability	people	press	investor	contact

This placement leaves the generic link with a particular high information value as ideal and salient information[16] that is in line with the above-mentioned pragmatic relevance value of links in general. Many of the generic links are static – in the sense that they act as navigation bars on the entire site; and not only on the homepage. Generic links are always of a descriptive nature as the function of a generic link is to bring the navigator on to an information chunk which identifies a general topic. In other words the link brings the user from a point of entry of the topic (A) to the topic

itself (B). The link is a kind of "empty" content category – waiting to be "filled out"; which also means that the generic link is thematically "decontextualised" in the sense that it points to nothing but its own topic at a "deeper" level on the web site (hierarchically speaking) and contains no explanation of its relevance besides the one given to it by its status as link. Linguistically, generic links are often realised by a noun phrase (as, e.g. the term "investor" in the navigation bar above) and if the link is accompanied by a text, the text is usually a meta-discoursal text providing navigational information, not information about the topic, as in the example shown here:

> You can also <u>download the report</u> as a PDF file.

6.2.2.1.2 Specific links. The homepage is more than a table of contents; it is also meant to evoke curiosity in the navigator, making him/her want to enter the site. For this particular purpose the web producer provides his/her homepage with specific links which function as appetizers or previews of what is to come. Specific links are thematically contextualised. They are usually introduced by "leads" which explain the relevance of the link; and where the link in generic links was an "empty" category, specific links (not least because of their leads or "paratexts") not only introduce the topic itself, but provide us with information about the topic and show the relevance of the link. The specific link takes the navigator to B where s/he may find a text chunk with a more elaborate description, a causal explanation, an argument or a brief story, etc. in support of the topic in A. Specific links are often inserted further down the homepage primarily containing real information and the links are of a changeable nature; text connected by specific links change by the hour, day or week which helps accentuate the dynamic nature of web texts as opposed to printed text. Here is an example of a specific link from the danisco.com homepage:

> **Press release**
>
> **Danisco Venture invests in**
> **Dutch biotech company**
> Dutch biotechnology company
> CatchMabs BV announces the
> closing of its second round of financing
> including Danisco Venture.
>
> <u>read more</u>

The specific link, as we define it here, consists of the lead and the clickable object. The lead presents the topic – sets the scene, so to speak, and gives the navigator an idea of what type of information to find behind the link whereas the link is the actual "gateway". In the example above the link and the lead constitute the first macro-sequence in a narrative sequence, i.e. the orientation stage. It sets the scene, but to complete the story, the navigator has to click on "read more" and be transferred to

web page B where the entire news report – the press release – can be found. In other words the specific link functions as a "reading guide" suggesting the relevance of a link and acts as an appetizer, a taste of what is to come.

6.2.2.2 The distribution of generic and specific links on the homepage. As mentioned in section 6.1.2 the purpose of the homepage in the navigating mode is to provide access to the web site. Both generic and specific links fulfil this purpose – though in rather different ways. Generic links give an overview of the main topics covered on the web site, which is quite important on the homepage because the navigator tends to use the homepage as a gateway to the "real stuff".

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that generic links are more frequent on the homepage compared to specific links. Specific links, on the other hand, function as appetizers, they are previews of what the web site contains; their primary function is not to provide an overview of the web site content but rather to "lure" the navigator into accessing the site. The presence of specific links on the homepage is limited. The reason may be that the homepage is the front door of the web site. The "serious" navigator needs generic links as a sort of navigational map to work his/her way through the web site in a systematic way.

Nevertheless, specific links perform an important role on the homepage as well. They are placed here to make the homepage more interesting and relevant to the "daring" or perhaps "hesitant", navigator, whose way into the web site is not guided by a particular route, but is based on intuition, a sudden impulse; i.e. the navigator who may not be looking for any particular information but is more prone to act on specific links with enticing leads.

As it appears from the examples above it is possible, and fruitful, to add a functional dimension to links. Our research shows that adding links to the homepage is not simply a question of enabling the navigator to "move on" but rather a question of connecting items on the web page in a meaningful and sensible way, setting up a semantic relation between web page A and web page B. The notion of functional links may thus prove useful for the text producer when designing his/her homepage as it provides him/her with an idea of which information warrants a generic and a specific link. And, if choosing a specific link, what kind of semantic relation works best, i.e. should s/he introduce a topic such as "sustainability" by using a generic link which suggests to the navigator that "on this site you can find information on sustainability" or should s/he anticipate a discussion of the topic already on web page A and use a specific link which already presents the information from a particular angle? By approaching links from this perspective they come to play the exact same role as moves (or stages) in traditional genre analysis:

> . . . we cannot make all the meanings we want to at once. Each stage in the genre contributes a part of the overall meanings that must be made for the genre to be accomplished successfully (Eggins, 1994, p. 36, after Martin, 1985).

In the same way we cannot (or it does not make sense to) enter the web site by means of one link or one link type on the homepage. We need a variety of links, with different functions that ensure that the communicative purpose of the homepage in the navigating mode is accomplished.

6.3 Analysis of rhetorical strategies used to realise moves and links

We have now reached the final stage in our extended genre analysis model, i.e. the way moves and links are realised in web documents. Here we need to consider the rhetorical strategies (verbal and visual) available to the web user in each mode. However, we do not intend to account for the plethora of strategies which web producers may use to express themselves when for example "detailing selected content" or "indicating content structure" in the reading mode or "providing explanatory information" in the navigating mode. Instead we shall make general observations about the most characteristic strategies available to the web writer in the two modes, leaving detailed analyses for later research.

6.3.1 Analysis of rhetorical strategies in the reading mode. In order to account for possible rhetorical strategies in the reading mode we shall take a closer look the danisco.com homepage. As mentioned before we do not intend to make an in-depth analysis of all the rhetorical strategies found on the homepage as the aim of the analysis is to "test" our genre model – rather than making a thorough analysis of the homepage. Therefore, we shall restrict our analysis to the rhetorical realisation of two moves, namely: "attracting attention" and "establishing credentials".

6.3.1.1 Analysis of rhetorical strategies used in the move: "attracting attention". The "attracting attention move" is usually realised by a combination of verbal, visual and/or audiovisual elements. Pictures with extraordinary vibrant colours, flash effect and particular typographical elements, etc. are commonly used to attract the reader and make him/her stay on the homepage. However, strong verbal elements such as catchy slogans, jingles, puns, news vocabulary such as "new", "recent", "today", etc. sometimes replace or complete visual design elements in the realisation of the attracting attention move. The attracting attention move, placed in the top frame of the Danisco homepage, is one of the most important moves on the homepage, from the web designer's point of view, as it may determine whether the reader leaves or stays on the site. Maybe as a result of its key role, the attracting attention move on Danisco's homepage has chosen to exploit the media potential of the WWW to its full. Here the flash technique is cleverly used to combine video, text and graphics and thereby create an optimal, attention-grabbing effect. The flash sequence begins when four cups of coffee, representing four different flavours, enters the "scene" (by means of the flash technique). A text appears saying that "Today coffee is not just coffee" and a bottom text adds: "you can enjoy it with many tasty flavours". A smaller picture appears on top of the first illustrating two female researchers in a laboratory, dressed in white coats, one of them holding a bottle of liquid. A new text appears saying: "It takes human knowledge to produce", followed by another text saying: "A variety of flavours for a variety of people". A second picture pops up which shows a man lying on a patio working on a lab top with a cup of coffee beside him. The sequence ends with a final flashing text: "We are proud of adding flavour to your day". It is also relevant to notice that the choice of type size in the text is also used to attract the attention of the reader;, e.g. key words are highlighted by an increase in type size.

6.3.1.2 Analysis of rhetorical strategies used in the move: "identifying web-owner". The purpose of the "identifying web-owner" move is of course to reveal the identity of the sender using verbal and/or visual design elements which can be associated with the sender. For organisations and companies, such as Danisco, the logotype serves as an obvious rhetorical strategy for identification, sometimes complemented by a picture of

the company, its buildings, the founder and/or its staff. Apart from logotype and pictures – colours and typographical elements are also used as a means of identification and recognition because web sites often adopt the conventions of the design programme of the company in general and thereby create a familiar and identifiable look. On the Danisco homepage logo, colours and typographical elements are used to identify the web-owner. Thus in the top frame of the page, next to the "attracting attention" move, we find the Danisco logo followed by its slogan "First you add knowledge ...". What is more, the page employs the fonts and colours of Danisco's design programme which again leads to an easy identification of the sender.

6.3.2 Analysis of rhetorical strategies in the navigating mode. The realisation of a link lies in the technological properties of the net; in order to establish a link between page A and B, the author has to encode the document. The codes are not immediately visible to the user but may be accessed if required. However, obviously, links also need an "external" realisation which indicates to the navigator that a gateway is available. In "traditional" genre analysis, moves are realised by both verbal and visual strategies. In the navigating mode the "external" realisation of links is almost exclusively realised by visual strategies, which may be: implicit, i.e. hidden at first sight[17]; or explicit, i.e. readily visible to the reader.

6.3.2.1 Implicit link realisation. The implicit realisation is not visible to the web user when s/he enters the web page. The user has to navigate the document using the mouse – more specifically the curser. When the curser "hits" a gateway, it transforms itself into the "pointed hand" icon. Apart from the pointed hand we may also see a transformation of other elements when the curser hits a gateway such as a change in colour or shape of a text, a picture or a navigation button box, and/or in combination with a mouse-over effect which reveals a sub-menu or a brief link text indicating the content of the menu. But the realisation is still implicit because movements are needed to disclose and activate the link.

6.3.2.2 Explicit link realisation. To produce more reader-friendly web sites, the author often adds an extra explicit dimension to the realisation where the link indication is immediately visible to the navigator. Concomitant with the increase in web-mediated communication, a "common repertoire" of explicit rhetorical strategies has gradually emerged and the following strategies are more or less universal on the web site:

(1) Icons:
  - iconic icons (e.g. envelope icon (indicating link to mail facilities) or pictures/photos in general (e.g. ✉)); and
  - symbolic icons (e.g. the house icon – indicating link to homepage).
(2) Underlining of text (e.g. "introduction").
(3) Colour shifts in text (e.g. "introduction").
(4) Meta-text (e.g. "read more" – combined with colour shifts or underlining).

In the present analysis we have not looked into the relationship between link type and rhetorical strategy. But it may be worth exploring whether generic and specific links (and the sub-categories descriptive, argumentative, narrative, etc.) differ in their choice of rhetorical strategy.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to "up-grade" the genre model and suggest ways in which the traditional model could be extended to account for web-mediated texts. Since the web medium forms an integral part of web genres we proposed a solution that incorporates medium-related features into the genre model. Therefore, the notion of modal shifts – where the web user alternates between reading the text and navigating the medium – was introduced. The notion of modal shifts led to the development of a two-dimensional genre model whose constituents are more or less similar to the traditional genre model but which accounts for the characteristics of web documents in two modes – first as traditional texts and then as a medium providing access to the entire web site. The most significant addition to the traditional genre model was the introduction of links as functional constituents in web documents. Our findings suggest that adding links to the homepage is not simply a question of enabling the navigator to "move on" but rather a question of connecting items on the web page in a meaningful and sensible way, setting up a semantic relation between web page A and web page B. Our analyses showed that there are indeed different ways of fulfilling the communicative purpose of web documents in the navigating mode, in the same ways as a whole list of moves may be used to realise the communicative purpose of web documents in the reading mode.

A systematic characterization of web-mediated genres was outside the scope of this article, as we only used the danisco.com homepage as exemplary material in our theoretical discussion and ended up with a tentative characterisation of the homepage as one of the first conventionalised, digital genres. A thorough investigation into the characteristics of web genres should obviously not be restricted to the homepage but calls for in-dept analyses of the interplay between the web medium and all the other genres and sub-genres used by various discourse communities on the net.

Finally, in the article we suggest that web genres cannot be characterised as genres in isolation from their medium. However, we also realised that in spite of the fact that we all seem to know the meaning of "genre" and "medium", a clear distinction between and definition of the two terms – not least the borders between the two – still remains to be seen. For instance a brochure is sometimes classified as a medium (in terms of format) and sometimes as a genre (in terms of its communicative purpose). The same duality seems to characterise a wide range of other every-day texts such as letters, posters, direct mails, etc. We suggest a closer investigation into these concepts which may help clarify the difference between medium and genre – or which (as we do here) acknowledges that in some cases we may talk about "media genres" – where the two seem to be inseparable because the media is not only a distribution channel but also a carrier of meaning, determining aspect of social practice (how a text is used, by whom it is used, and for what purpose).

Notes

1. See, for example, Yates and Orlikowski (1992) on the production, reproduction and modification of genres over time, e.g. the memo's transfer to the electronic medium; Yates *et al.* (1999) on the transfer of genres into the computer conferencing medium; Roussinov *et al.* (2001) and their study of people's recognition of genres on the web, Crowston and Williams (1997) on the reproduction and adaptation of genres on the web; Ryon *et al.* (2003) on the evolution of US state government homepages, and finally Furuta and Marshall (1996) on genres used on the internet to facilitate information.

2. Though critical voices have been raised concerning the difficulty of using communicative purpose as a privileged criterion (Askehave and Swales, 2001).

3. This purpose should be recognised by the members of the discourse communities – that is the companies who produce the homepage and the receivers of the homepage.

4. Lexical and syntactic choices are of course also constrained by the communicative purpose (Swales, 1990, p. 53).

5. The use of the term "top-level" presupposes, however, that the web site content is organised hierarchically, which may not always be the case.

6. Our use of the term "homepage" is not to be confused with another common genre on the web namely personal and corporate homepages which cover entire web sites with pages of corporate or personal information. Our term "homepage" corresponds to the French expression *page d'acceuil* (reception page). For similar distinctions see also Crowston and Williams (1997).

7. See Kress and Van Leeuwen (1998) for a description of given and new information in newspaper front pages.

8. Obviously, we also find multi-modal features in printed text genres (e.g. a combination of verbal and visual strategies), but what is peculiar to web-mediated genres is the possibility of combining these strategies with other media, e.g. sound and moving images/flash films.

9. This reading pattern can also be seen in many printed media.

10. For more on hypertext reading see for instance Landow (1997) or Bolter (2001).

11. In his paper Finnemann (2001) distinguishes between three modes, viz. reading, browsing/navigating and editing modes. We have left out the editing mode, as this mode is concerned with user-generated pages and other interactive processes that are outside the scope of our analysis.

12. See also section 3.

13. Before we address the question of communicative purpose in the navigating mode, we should like to point out that, unlike Swales, who uses the concept of communicative purpose as the primary tool for classifying genres, we consider the purpose of web documents in the navigating mode to be constant and not genre specific, owing to the fact that we are dealing with aspects of the WWW as a medium (more specifically that of hypertexts) – and the characteristics of the medium are the same irrespective of the web documents with which we are concerned (be it a homepage, a company profile, a FAQ, etc.).

14. However, to return to our discussion of move identification in section 2.1.2, it is important to note that the label given to a move is functional – rather than content-based – because the move is a functional unit whereas elements of content or layout are rhetorical strategies used to realise a move.

15. For practical reasons we underline the actual links (the clickable objects) in our examples.

16. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1998, p. 193) ideal information is usually placed at the top of a front page and is defined as information "presented as the idealised or generalized essence of the information, and therefore also as having ideologically one kind of salience". Elements placed at the bottom are identified as real information presenting "more specific information (e.g. details) and/or more 'down to earth' information . . . and /or more practical information (e.g. practical consequences, directions for action, etc.)" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 193).

17. Though it should of course be added that the implicit and explicit rhetorical strategies simply indicate that a link is available; the actual activation of the link requires a mouse click.

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