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MULTIMODAL KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATION IN A RECONTEXTUALIZED GENRE: AN ANALYSIS OF EXPERTISE DISSEMINATION AND PROMOTION STRATEGIES IN ONLINE ACADEMIC TRAILERS

Abstract

Drawing from our previous research related to academic knowledge communication in new, transitional or intermediate generic configurations and various digital contexts (Engberg & Maier, 2015, in press; Maier & Engberg, 2013, 2019), the overall purpose of this article is to explain how knowledge dissemination and promotion strategies are manifested in a new multimodal academic genre. The data collected from the GetSmarter (www.getsmarter.com) organization comprises academic trailers, where experts persuasively disseminate domain-specific research work while also promoting the course that is built upon the respective academic knowledge. Considering the specific endeavor of these trailers, this article focuses on how multimodal strategies are employed for accomplishing the double communicative purpose while maintaining generic integrity. Thus, the multimodal analyses reveal how promotional knowledge communication takes place in the multimodal generic moves of academic trailers. Both implicit promotional research-related knowledge communication and explicit promotional course-related knowledge communication are in focus. Furthermore, the levels of explanatory depth are also identified and explained in each multimodal generic move. While tracing tendencies in the diversification of multimodal knowledge communication strategies, the article also clarifies the challenging consequences of promotional generic recontextualization, and thus contributes to the advancement of multimodal perspectives in academic knowledge communication research.

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Key words

academic trailer, academic narrator, promotional genre recontextualization, knowledge communication, explanatory depth, multimodality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Usually, in our research work, we have been interested in the ongoing diversification of academic genres and of publishing formats facilitated by the dynamic development of digital technologies and by the expertise of the present multiliterate generations (Engberg & Maier, 2015, in press; Maier & Engberg, 2013, 2019).

In the present study, we explore a new genre which we call the *online academic trailer*, that is one of the latest expressions of “the increasing *generification* of administrative and academic life” (Swales, 2004: 4). Through this new genre promoting online academic courses, scholars are supposed to persuasively disseminate domain-specific research work while also promoting courses designed on the basis of the respective knowledge. The selected academic trailers appear on the website of *GetSmarter*, a company that “delivers online education from world-leading universities and institutions to transform the lives of thousands of students across the globe” (GetSmarter, 2022). They state that their aim is to improve 1,000,000 lives through better education by 2030.

As the data of this study is represented by a genre which has partially been recontextualized from one social practice to another, namely from film business to academic education, it is relevant to shed some light on what film trailers are. According to Maier (2009, 2011, 2013), film trailers belong to a complex promotional genre characterized by a dynamic interplay of semiotic modes meant to integrate smoothly the diegetic context of a film’s story and characters with the non-diegetic context of the film’s makers. Usually, this integration is mainly realized through a voice-over narrator that (mis)guides the prospective viewers’ expectations. In the case of online academic trailers, the integrative element is preserved; however, the promoted product is not a film but an online academic course, and therefore the anonymous voice-over narrator from film trailers is replaced by scholars renowned in their expertise domain. Consequently, due to this adopted generic configuration, a diversification of researchers’ roles takes place: from creators and disseminators of academic knowledge, they also become promoters of this knowledge in the new genre of academic trailers.

When highlighting that film trailers represent an important element of the promotion campaign that precedes and accompanies the release of a new film, Maier states that “the main purpose of film trailers is to arouse viewers’ curiosity and expectations so that they will be persuaded to go and see the film” (Maier, 2009: 159). According to Maier (2011), to attain this promotional purpose, the generic configuration of film trailers incorporates both explicit and implicit promotional moves depending on the diegetic or non-diegetic character of the provided information. As it will be shown below, both implicit and explicit promotional generic moves appear in the academic trailers too.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned characteristics of film trailers that have been borrowed and adapted in academic trailers, in this study we examine the consequences of the generic recontextualization of film trailers in the academic

field, leading to the new genre of academic trailers, so that we can clarify aspects of knowledge dissemination and promotion strategies. These aspects are also present in the genre of multimodal video abstracts (Spicer, 2014; Vincze & Poggi, 2022), which has emerged in recent years in order to provide better visibility for the researchers' work across publication platforms. However, the promotional features of video abstracts are not so evident, since "video abstracts typically communicate the background of a study, the methodology employed, the study results and potential implications, much like a text-based abstract might do" (Reupert, 2017: 2).

As "the confinement of academic knowledge to the boundaries of the written text is more and more challenged these days" (Maier & Engberg, 2013: 149), we take a multimodal perspective to make possible for other researchers to adapt this methodological framework to other new academic genres. Apart from this core aim, the study is also intended to serve as a source for researchers interested in working systematically with the analysis of the levels of explanatory depth in multimodal knowledge communication. Finally, taking into consideration the overall framework of the evolving set of promotional purposes of universities, we touch upon the relevance of this genre's repurposing from the film business context to the academic one.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1. Multimodal Knowledge Communication and genre mixing

After observing that "philosophers have been interested in and debating knowledge for thousands of years", Crane highlights the influence of Plato's definition of knowledge as "true justified belief" upon influential theories on knowledge (Crane, 2016: 2). According to this definition, a belief can be considered knowledge if it is a justified truth, with a focus upon the concept of 'justified' (Crane, 2016: 24). This definition is especially relevant for our research endeavors because it emphasizes that knowledge is to be seen as an action rather than as a commodity: Knowledge is constructed and upheld through communication. This approach thus serves as a basis for our perspective upon knowledge. In this study, we look at knowledge that is communicated and thus constructed in the academic context for promotional purposes and through promotional communicative means.

This approach means that the challenging issue of knowledge communication is at the core of research about knowledge (Engberg et al., in press; Fage-Butler, 2022; Kastberg, 2019; Porup Thomasen, 2015). As communication in itself has undergone tremendous changes in the last decades, the field of knowledge communication research is constantly evolving, as indicated in the Introduction. However, the main focus of knowledge communication research can be considered to be to investigate the construction of knowledge through

the intentional and decision-based communication of specialised knowledge in professional settings (among experts as well as between experts and nonexperts) with a focus upon the interplay between knowledge and expertise of individuals, on the one hand, and knowledge as a social phenomenon, on the other, as well as the coping with knowledge asymmetries, i.e., the communicative consequences of differences between individual knowledge in depth as well as breadth. (Engberg, 2016: 37)

We find prototypical instances of knowledge communication in genres like the research article (experts inviting experts to construct knowledge) and textbooks (experts inviting non-experts or experts-to-be to construct knowledge). Common to both of these prototypical genres of knowledge communication is that the sending experts' main communicative purpose is to convey insights into the field of knowledge treated in the text. However, under the heading of "Knowledge Communication" we also find a number of genres that consist of a mixture of rhetorical elements belonging to the traditional academic genres and genres from the promotional genre colony (Bhatia, 2004: 59-62).

The genre studied here is a case in point, as it stems from the recontextualization of a promotional genre (the film trailer) into the academic field. Bhatia talks about such hybrid genres as mixed in the sense that they constitute a mix of "socially accepted communicative purposes conventionally served by two different genres" (Bhatia, 2004: 87). The interesting thing here is the balance between the process of recontextualizing a genre (thus adjusting it to its new context) and the process of hybridization or even colonization (Bhatia, 2004: 90), in which the 'invading' genre forces its rationale onto the existing genre. From the point of view of knowledge communication such a process may be seen as a balancing act between the types of knowledge to be constructed by the receivers of the multimodal knowledge communication: Does the sending expert want to justify beliefs about the content of the topic itself (as in prototypical instances of knowledge communication), or does the justification relate to the value of the topic for the receiver of the communication (as in more promotional knowledge communication)?

The spotlight on contemporary academic knowledge communication reveals that, to facilitate knowledge communication and dissemination, designing meaning-making structures that are stretched across several semiotic modes and media has become a priority because "both the constraints and the affordances of each semiotic mode, as well as the modes' specific interplay, create meaning and, consequently, our reality" (Engberg & Maier, 2022: 4). This means that it makes sense to investigate actual instances of knowledge communication not only from the point of view of their verbal component, but also to take a multimodal perspective in the analysis. Furthermore, following the idea of inherent constraints and affordances of different semiotic modes, it becomes relevant to assess to what extent specific semiotic modes have been employed to the best of their potential. For instance, we have shown in previous work that research articles presented in an online format often do not take advantage of the actual potential of non-verbal semiotic modes, but actually mainly use them for purposes of adornment or

repetition (see, e.g., Engberg & Maier, 2020: 232). This aspect will be included in the analysis.

2.2. Procedural and structural components in Multimodal Knowledge Communication

In order to assess the balance between a focus upon communicating content and communicating value (prototypical knowledge communication vs. promotional knowledge communication), we will apply some of the analytical tools we have developed in previous work (Engberg & Maier, 2015): processes of knowledge expansion, of knowledge enhancement and of knowledge evaluation, on the one hand, and the structural tool of levels of explanatory depth, on the other hand. These tools are developed in order to analyze different aspects of complexity of the knowledge to be constructed from the multimodal knowledge communication. In this way, we may assess the importance of the prototypical knowledge communication in the balancing of communicative purposes. The assumptions behind the analysis are that the more we can find expansions and enhancements of content knowledge in the multimodal semiotic interaction, and the more we find attempts to enable receivers to construct knowledge at a deep explanatory level, the higher the importance of the prototypical knowledge communication in the mix – and vice versa.

TYPES OF MULTIMODAL KNOWLEDGE BUILDING PROCESSES			
Multimodal knowledge expansion: Processes by which, through the interaction of different semiotic modes, more aspects of the treated topics may be built by the viewers.		Multimodal knowledge enhancement: Processes by which, through the interaction of different semiotic modes, the quality of the knowledge to be built by the viewers may be enhanced, especially in the form of more details.	
Multimodal core knowledge building processes: The additional aspects expand the central topics treated by the researchers.	Multimodal peripheral knowledge building processes: The additional aspects expand background aspects of concepts treated, typically aspects presupposed by experts.	Evident enhancement of knowledge: The additional aspects offered enrich the quality of the knowledge by actually enabling the construction of new knowledge.	Apparent enhancement of knowledge: The additional aspects offered only apparently enhance the quality of the knowledge to be constructed through repetition.

Table 1. Types of multimodal knowledge building processes

Due to space limitations, we have chosen to present the procedural analytical concepts only in the condensed format of Table 1. For more elaborate descriptions we refer readers to our previous work (see, e.g., Engberg & Maier, 2015).

The more recently developed concept of level of explanatory depth will be presented in a little more detail. Under the concept of “illusion of explanatory depth” (Rozenblit & Keil, 2002), psychologists understand the empirically tested phenomenon that we are generally quite content with the complexity and extent of our present knowledge, as long as the communicative context does not appear to require more extensive knowledge of a concept than what we have. If no challenge comes from the context, we tend not to make any actual evaluation of the depth of this knowledge, but to feel secure that it is deep enough. The phenomenon may be related to the basic mechanism of “relevance theory” (Sperber & Wilson, 1988), which claims that we accept the first interpretation of communicative input that has relevance in the perceived situation as the meaning intended by the other communicator, without longer evaluations of possible alternatives. Both in the analytical approach described above (knowledge building processes) and in the one presented here, we aim at assessing the complexity of the knowledge that may be constructed on the basis of the analyzed multimodal textual input. In the analysis of knowledge enhancement and knowledge expansion, focus is upon the extent of the knowledge (breadth or depth). When analyzing knowledge evaluation, we concentrate on the evaluative components added to the conceptual knowledge treated in the multimodal text. In the analysis of the explanatory depth, on the other hand, we look for qualitative characteristics concerning the complexity of the knowledge to be constructed: We are interested in how complex the knowledge to be constructed is from an explanatory point of view. Together with the other analytical approaches, this is an interesting assessment if researchers want to say something about the level of ambition concerning the insights to be gained from the knowledge communication effort: the more details (knowledge building processes) and the more complex explanations (explanatory depth), the higher the ambition (Engberg, 2020).

On the basis of empirical studies of the illusion of explanatory depth, psychologists have suggested a scale of different degrees of explanatory depth. We use this scale for qualitatively describing and characterizing instances of knowledge communication. The researchers working with the illusion of explanatory depth distinguish between three types of skeletal explanatory knowledge structure: causal relevance, causal powers, and causal relations (Keil, 2003: 675-680, 2011: 254-255). To underline the defining characteristic of the last-mentioned category, we have changed the term and use the term ‘causal system’ for this category instead. The three types may be described as follows:

- Causal relevance: This explanatory relation is the coarsest of the three levels proposed by Keil. It indicates a rather low level of explanatory ambition. “Coding

of causal relevance does not encode specific patterns of causal interactions but rather a sense of what properties matter most in a particular domain” (Keil, 2003: 675). The example given by Keil is that calling something a hand tool shows that specific aspects of the thing (e.g., shape and size) are more causally relevant for understanding the functioning of the thing.

- Causal powers: If a multimodal instance of communication is labeled with this category, it means that a receiver may build up knowledge not only about the fact that there is some kind of functional relation between two characteristics (as in causal relevance) but also about what kind of influence one characteristic has on the other. “I know that magnets have the ability to exert an attractive force on various metals but may know little about magnetism and the reasons that some metals make good magnets while others do not. We can think of this level as the first level at which distinct causal roles are attributed to properties” (Keil, 2003: 678). The explanation remains coarse and shallow, although demonstrating a higher level of explanatory ambition than causal relevance representations.
- Causal system: What distinguishes this type of explanatory complexity from the other two is that the knowledge structure to be built from the multimodal text has the character of a system, albeit still at a rather coarse level, compared to the knowledge structures of actual experts. “For many people, their mental representations of the causal relations for cars may largely be confined to knowing that they convey people from place to place on roads, that they are propelled by an engine whose output is increased by pressing on an accelerator, and that they are slowed down by brakes” (Keil, 2003: 679). However, compared to the other type categories, the functional role of the car is presented as part of systems of transportation and of physical rules and regularities underlying the functioning of the car. Thus, the knowledge to be built reaches a more complex level of explanatory depth.

It is relevant to reiterate an important characteristic. In contrast to the application of the categories in psychology, our analysis does not assess the depth of the explanatory cognitive structures of people, but the knowledge structure to be built based upon the verbal text. The outcome of the analysis is a substantiated hypothesis about the complexity of the knowledge structure to be constructed by the user in order to comply with the textual intentions of the author.

3. DATA AND METHOD

The data selected for this study include four academic trailers promoting online courses on sustainability topics offered by the University of Cambridge: *University of Cambridge Sustainable Supply Chain Management Online Short Course* (2020, 01:52 minutes), *University of Cambridge Business and Climate Change: Towards Net Zero Emissions Online Short Course* (2021, 01:34 minutes), *University of Cambridge*

Sustainable Real Estate Online Short Course (2021, 01:45 minutes) and *University of Cambridge Sustainable Food Online Short Course* (2022, 01:51 minutes). Thus, only these academic trailers dealing with sustainability courses have been selected here because the main purpose of this study is to explain a specific analytical method and not to provide a general picture of the genre. In what follows, the videos have been labelled as V1, V2, V3 and V4 for preserving the readability of this text.

In analyzing our data, we apply genre analysis as a methodological lens in combination with a multimodal perspective on knowledge communication. As already mentioned in the introduction, academic trailers and film trailers have similar communicative goals as both genres are meant to “sell” something, have some similar generic moves and both address prospective communities; film trailers address the prospective community of film goers, while academic trailers address the perspective community of new students who are also the members of a larger global community affected by sustainability issues.

Thus, during the first phase of our analysis, we inductively identified the generic moves, and we categorized them according to their promotional functions in relation to the research-related and course-related knowledge that is communicated: topic identification, course identification, topic justification, course justification, and course recommendation. In the next phase, we proceeded to group the knowledge building processes according to their types (i.e., knowledge expansion, knowledge enhancement and knowledge evaluation) at the level of each generic move. The knowledge evaluation processes have also been categorized according to the perceived quality of the knowledge presented in relation to the course’ or topic’s relevance. We then determined the intersemiotic relations through which those processes were materialized at the level of each shot. We took into consideration how the multimodal relations can “make the items of information coherent in relation to each other in such a way that they become relevant, that they become knowledge you can do something with” (van Leeuwen, 2005: 247) and we identified three types of relations between the co-deployed visual and verbal modes: illustrating, validating, and complementing. During the last phase of the analysis, we identified the levels of explanatory depth appearing in each generic move.

Table 2 presents an excerpt of one of the analytical tables that has been created for the analysis of each video.

MULTIMODAL CONTENT OF SHOTS	MULTIMODAL GENERIC MOVES	PROMOTIONAL KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATION	KNOWLEDGE PROCESS TYPES	LEVELS OF EXPLANATORY DEPTH
(visual & aural interplay: illustrating, validating, complementing)	(topic/course identification interpretation justification recommendation)	Implicit promotional research-related knowledge communication	(focus on individual, organization, society, nature) Knowledge expansion	Causal relevance Causal powers Causal system

		Explicit promotional course-related knowledge communication	Knowledge enhancement	
<p>Shot 1</p> <p>The globe seen from space</p> <p>“Climate change is a globally pressing issue, but almost as important is...”</p> <p>Complementing interplay between image and voice-over narrator</p>	Topic justification	Implicit promotional research-related knowledge communication	<p>Multimodal peripheral knowledge building process</p> <p>Multimodal knowledge evaluation process</p>	No explanatory attempt

Table 2. Excerpt of one of the analytical tables

4. FINDINGS

In what follows, according to the proposed procedure above, we characterize the generic configuration of the selected academic trailers, and we explain the knowledge communication processes that appear at the level of each generic move together with the knowledge process types. Simultaneously, the multimodal interplay characterizing each generic move has been identified. The levels of explanatory depth have also been explained at the level of each generic move.

According to our findings, the selected academic trailers are characterized by a cluster of promotional generic moves that can be categorized according to their focus on the course topic or on the course itself. These moves, presented in Table 3, do not follow a precise order because of the significance assigned to one of the moves (the course identification move) that can appear several times in the generic configuration of an academic trailer. Below, we elaborate on each move.

PROMOTIONAL GENERIC MOVES	EXAMPLES OF GENERIC MOVES	MULTIMODAL KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATION CHARACTERISTICS			LEVELS OF EXPLANATORY DEPTH
		Multimodal interplay	Promotional knowledge communication	Knowledge process types	

Topic identification	<p>Visual content: Long shots of various products</p> <p>Voice-over narrator: “Just look around where you are at the moment. Every single product has come from somewhere” (V1).</p>	Illustrating	Implicit promotional research-related knowledge communication	Multimodal peripheral knowledge process	Explanatory attempts infrequent; some few cases of causal powers to highlight the relevance of the topic
	<p>Visual content: Close-up shot of the researcher</p> <p>On-screen narrator: “It has come from a forest, a hole in the ground, literally anywhere in the world” (V1).</p>	Validating	Implicit promotional research-related knowledge communication	Multimodal peripheral knowledge process	Explanatory attempts infrequent; some few cases of causal powers to indicate importance of component of topic
Topic justification	<p>Visual content: Long shots of natural and human contexts</p> <p>Voice-over narrator: “Climate change is a globally pressing issue, but <u>almost as important as our response</u> to it and how we will transfigure and repurpose our economy” (V2).</p>	Complementing	<p>Implicit promotional research-related knowledge communication</p> <p>Explicit promotional research-related knowledge evaluation</p>	<p>Multimodal peripheral knowledge process</p> <p>Knowledge evaluation</p>	Explanatory attempts infrequent; some cases of causal powers to indicate importance of component of topic
Course identification	<p>Visual and verbal content: Shots with the university’s name and/or name of the promoted course superimposed on blurred images (all videos)</p>	Complementing	Explicit promotional course-related knowledge communication	Evident multimodal knowledge enhancement process	No attempts of explanation
Course justification	<p>Visual content: Medium shot of researcher</p> <p>On-screen narrator: “In this course, you’ll explore <u>a broader</u> definition of value. We’ll introduce you to <u>new</u> economic models, we’ll</p>	Validating	<p>Explicit promotional course-related knowledge communication</p> <p>Explicit promotional course related</p>	<p>Evident multimodal knowledge enhancement process</p> <p>Knowledge evaluation</p>	Explanatory attempts are used to indicate and explicate importance; causal relations are often vague and thus explanatorily weak.

	provide you with a <u>new</u> lens to observe the built environment” (V4).		knowledge evaluation		
Course recommendation	Visual content: Medium shot of researcher On-screen narrator: “Please join us for this <u>expertly curated</u> online learning experience” (V3).	Validating	Explicit promotional course-related knowledge communication	Evident multimodal knowledge enhancement process Knowledge evaluation	Explanatory attempts are used to indicate and explicate importance; causal powers relations dominate

Table 3. The cluster of generic moves and multimodal knowledge communication characteristics in selected examples

4.1. Topic identification

In this generic move, the background of the course’s topic is identified through a rich multimodal interplay as images can illustrate, complement, or validate the verbal narrative of the researchers. When illustrating, the images display symbolic representations. For example, in V1, the first images of the academic trailer introduce the viewer to long shots of ships and trucks. The next shots introduce the human factor in the images while complementing the voice-over narrator’s statement: “Just look around where you are at the moment. Every single product has come from somewhere” (V1). Then, from being just a voice-over, the researcher appears on the screen in a close-up shot while continuing to utter his statement that accompanied the previous shots. In the right corner of this shot, the name of the university and its logo appear also, thus validating his words.

This communication of implicit promotional research-related knowledge is fulfilled through the strategy of knowledge expansion by using multimodal peripheral knowledge building processes as the provided background knowledge is definitely necessary but also presupposed, covering knowledge that the prospective viewers are supposed to possess.

Concerning the level of explanatory depth, this generic move is dominated by mere description, whereas explanations play a minor role. There are some few instances of structures at the level of causal powers in order to highlight the importance of a component of the topic. As an example, in V2 one of the researchers states: “The future of supply chains is going to be significantly disrupted. Climate change, biodiversity loss, rising inequality”. Hence, three aspects are set as causal for the disruption of supply chains and therefore important in the situation, to which the course reacts. The visual mode plays no role in presenting explanatory structures, but only functions as exemplification of the important factors.

4.2. Topic justification

This generic move is characterized by providing implicit promotional research-related knowledge meant to justify the relevance of the course's topic. As in the case of the topic identification move, a wide variety of shots can also appear in this move that recontextualizes visually two aspects of reality: those aspects of reality that are directly related to the course's topic and those disclosing the narrating researchers. As in the case of the topic identification move, the researchers are verbally present both on and off screen. In V3, for example, the validating name of the university and its logo appear from the very beginning together with the narrating researcher in a medium shot while she is uttering the words: "There is a number of key emerging trends that will influence the long-term viability of the real estate sector: climate change, demographic change, widening inequalities, and digitalization" (V3). The narrating researcher is no longer on screen while uttering the respective key emerging trends, but we can still hear her while the screen displays those terms in white letters on long shots visualizing aspects of reality related to those terms.

Similar to the topic identification move, this move is also dedicated to communication of implicit promotional research-related knowledge fulfilled through the strategy of knowledge expansion by using multimodal peripheral knowledge building processes. However, the topic justification move also includes knowledge evaluation processes as evaluative adjectives are employed in expressions such as "key emerging trends" and "the long-term viability" in V3 or similarly "The global food system is facing a huge number of challenges" in V4. Knowledge evaluation processes can also be manifested multimodally as, for example, in V1 where the off-screen evaluative words of the narrating researcher, "A system approach is key to understanding and addressing the vulnerabilities of the food system" (V1), are accompanied by animated images displaying in an abstract way the respective approach. Additionally, the topic's relevance is evaluated in direct connection with the future career of the prospective students: "To succeed in your career, you need to be conversant in sustainability" (V3).

Concerning the level of explanatory depth, this generic move is also dominated by mere description. Explanations play a minor role, albeit a greater role than in topic identification. There are some instances of structures at the level of causal powers in order to highlight the importance of a component of the topic. As an example, in V2 one of the researchers states: "What excites me about supply chain management is it's one of the greatest opportunities to improve business performance". Hence, supply chain management is constructed as having a causal role in improving business performance, therefore being an important component of the course's topics. But no indications are given on the reasons for the importance. The visual mode plays no role in presenting explanatory structures.

4.3. Course identification

This generic move consists of shots displaying the name of the university and/or of the course on a neutral background, usually a blurred still image of a street presumably from Cambridge.

As a recurrent multimodal strategy, the explicit promotional course-related knowledge is manifested through evident enhancement of knowledge. It might be discussed if this is not a case of apparent enhancement of knowledge as the name of the promoted course can already be seen by the prospective viewers under the video's screen on YouTube. However, as this is a genre analysis of the video itself, we consider that the course identification move existing in the videos offers an evident enhancement of knowledge.

There are no explanatory attempts in this generic move.

4.4. Course justification

As this move is meant to justify the expected attendance to the course, a wide variety of shots can recontextualize visually two aspects of reality: those aspects of reality that are directly related to the course's topic, and those disclosing the identity of the narrating researchers. However, the shots displaying aspects of reality that are directly related to the course's topic have different functions than in the topic justification move as they accompany the narrating researcher's on and off-screen persuasive statements while s/he comments on course relevance, design, and/or consequences. For example, in V2, the narrating researcher first highlights the relevance of the course: "The Climate Change: Towards Net Zero Emissions course will inform you and put you in a position to understand the rate and pace at which our world is changing" (V2). Similarly, in V3: "In this course, you'll explore a broader definition of value" (V3). Then, the design of the course is presented: "This course is going to take you on a journey with some of the leading experts in the field, but together with your fellow students, you will also learn to apply practical solutions" (V2). When these presenting statements are not accompanied by the shots displaying the narrating researcher, they are illustrated by animations. However, in this video's multimodal interplay, the functions of the accompanying images are more varied because when the narrating researcher is off-screen, his statements can also be accompanied by the close-up shots of other experts and not only by animations. These experts seem to be speaking to the camera, but the viewers can only hear the off-screen narrating researcher. The shots merely function as exemplification of the statement that the course is taught by esteemed scholars.

This generic move is dedicated to communication of explicit promotional course-related knowledge by providing evident enhancement of knowledge. Knowledge evaluation processes can recurrently be manifested as in "This course differs from many other climate change courses because we focus..." (V2), "You will

meet over 20 thought leaders and practitioners” (V4), or “In this course, you’ll explore a broader definition of value” (V3), for example. Furthermore, the knowledge-related consequences of attending the future course are also evaluatively highlighted, as in “Through your Personal Action Plan, you’ll be equipped to be a confident and persuasive individual with the resilience to overcome barriers and to lead change” (V4), or “On completing the course, you will have a clear action plan to change your corner of the world” (V3). By highlighting the individual gains related to the expected attendance to the course, the persuasive stance of the narrating researcher addressing directly the viewers is intensified.

Explanatory structures are again here used in order to highlight the importance of (sub-)topics with a focus on their role in the course, not just in the situation. As an example, in V2 a researcher states that “this course is a very practical opportunity to really understand some of the big issues impacting the way that things are bought and made and distributed in a very rapidly changing world”. Due to the very vague indication with no listing of what issues are meant, the level of explanatory depth is rather at the level of causal relevance, i.e., not intending to offer actual explanations, but just indicating that some causal relations exist. There is no attempt to use the visual mode for presenting explanatory structures, only the verbal mode is employed.

4.5. Course recommendation

In this generic move, the distance between the narrating researcher and the prospective viewers is minimized not only through the maintained eye contact as in the other generic moves, but also through statements that either address the viewers directly by using imperatives or, as in the course justification move, the personal pronoun “you”. For example, in V4, an imperative is superimposed in white letters on the shot: “Lead the way to a sustainable future” (V4). In V3, while maintaining eye contact with the viewers, the narrating researcher encourages them imperatively: “Join us for this interactive, online Sustainable Real Estate course from the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership” (V3). In V1, the direct address is enhanced by persuasively singling out the prospective student: “So, if you’re the type of person that wants to understand that change and become a business leader in the new economy, then this course is for you” (V1).

This generic move is also dedicated to communication of explicit promotional course-related knowledge, but the multimodal processes that characterize this generic move are core knowledge building processes.

In this generic move, explanatory structures based on causal power relations between the components are frequent. What is predominant is the intention to construct the course and the competences gained from it as causal for being able to solve the problems presented in topic identification moves. As an example, following the verbal statement from V1 presented above, the researcher says: “Time is not on

our side and the sooner we start to act and the better we manage that change [i.e., the one mentioned as course topic above], the more likely we are to build a better, more inclusive sustainable and resilient world.” (V1). A causal power relation is constructed between the competences to be achieved through the course and the new world that must be built. Again, the structures are only presented in a verbal format, visual formats play no role.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When addressing multimodal knowledge communication in the recontextualized genre of academic trailers, this study provides insights related both to the specific generic configuration and its consequences, and to how to proceed when analyzing such academic genres.

As this genre is recontextualized in the academic context from the film business context, it has been shown that its multimodal generic configuration replicates the well-known generic configuration of film trailers, although it belongs to a different social practice and it addresses a different discourse community. Both genres disseminate information about a specific product: a film in the case of film trailers, and an academic course in the case of the academic trailers. Furthermore, if in film trailers both the film making’s story (the film’s non-diegetic content) and the film’s story (the film’s diegetic content) are promoted, in the academic trailers, both the course’s topic and the course itself are promoted. Consequently, just as prospective film viewers, the prospective academic course participants are persuaded to understand the relevance of the promoted product for the improvement of their lives. As a consequence, it can be claimed that this new generic development participates in the intensification of the *commodification* phenomenon (Bhatia, 2004; Fairclough, 2010; Swales, 2004) that characterizes the dynamic cluster of academic genres. Online academic trailers contribute to “the subordination of meaning to, and the manipulation of meaning for, instrumental effect” (Fairclough, 2010: 99). The present analytical work has revealed that the multimodal generic configuration of this new genre is meant to persuasively disseminate domain-specific research work and to promote the courses designed on the basis of the respective knowledge. It has also been revealed that in each of the analyzed academic trailers, in order to accomplish the double communicative purpose of the genre, the generic moves are brought into existence by specific knowledge building processes that take place multimodally.

Concerning the level of explanatory depth, explanatory attempts stay at a level where there are no attempts to actually explain things to the audience. Causal relations are found at the levels of causal relevance and causal powers, but in the form of mere postulates. For instance, it is stated that climate change influences supply chains, but no explanation of the underlying causal system relations for this are offered. This means that from the point of view of explanatory depth, the senders

of these videos rely on commonplace relations that they expect the readers to accept; or they use very vague constructions of causal relations indicating that the course is rationally structured, but without offering the rationale to the potential participants. This is interesting, because it shows that the senders thus deprive themselves of offering more arguments with a *logos* orientation and instead rely on arguments oriented towards *pathos* (*this is useful for you*) and towards *ethos* (*we are well-educated and experienced people*). Furthermore, explanatory attempts rely solely on the verbal mode. In some cases of course justification (e.g., in V4), the visual mode is used to present what could be animated slides from the courses, presenting conceptual systems that may even be explanatory. However, they are just used for illustrating topics to be taken up. The verbal mode does in no way reflect the explanatory potential in what is presented through the visual mode.

It can be assumed that such unbalanced strategies are adopted in order to avoid raising some viewers' expectations that might not be met when the promoted course takes place. Even in film business, when the expectations aroused by deceptive film trailers are not met, the consequences may be quite problematic (Razac, 2022). Thus, the level of explanatory depth that could have been achieved in these academic trailers through a multimodal interplay is strategically not attained in order to ensure the course providers a certain degree of liberty for changing the course if necessary. Instead of the possible academic level of explanatory depth, a certain level of edutainment is attained which is not too far from the one necessary in science slams (Niemann et al., 2020) or TED talks, although academic trailers are shorter.

As a matter of fact, the expectations might be influenced by the very label of this new genre: trailers. Therefore, what should also be taken into consideration here is the unsettling range of consequences of this generic repurposing in relation to the diversification of the roles of the researchers because "genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action" (Bazerman, 1997: 19). If genres are also "forms of being", then, the researchers participating as promotional social actors in academic trailers also acquire a new role apart from the traditional academic ones. By fulfilling this promotional role that transforms their academic identity, they also expand the horizon of expectations of both their discourse communities and of the prospective viewers outside the academia.

It may be that academic trailers are designed the way they are due to investigations made by the senders to identify the aspects potential course participants value, and that they therefore comply with the requirements of their use. However, we cannot conclude this study without reflecting upon the future consequences of encountering more and more promotional academic genres as "we are, of course all constantly subjected to promotional discourse, to the point that there is a serious problem of trust" (Fairclough, 2010: 100). Therefore, we consider to be of utmost relevance to further investigate how the growing ascendancy of promotional tendencies is manifested in the complex academic context and how this

affects not only the researchers' and students' identities but also the contemporary societal expectations concerning the academia. By this time, we all know that "university lecturers are constantly urged to adapt their professional practices to meet the emerging challenges of new cohorts, face-to-face and virtual teaching environments and worldwide events" (García-Ostbye & Martínez-Sáez, 2023: 55).

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