7th International Conference on Corpus Linguistics: Current Work in Corpus Linguistics: Working with Traditionally-conceived Corpora and Beyond (CILC 2015)

'Perfectly smooth, creamy and full flavoured': Online cheese descriptions

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Abstract

This paper presents a corpus-based analysis of online cheese descriptions in English. These texts follow specific conventions which make them recognizable as belonging to a particular subgenre. In this study we will follow Swales' move-step method to establish the rhetorical structure, and a subsequent lexico-grammatical analysis will provide relevant information such as common phraseological and lexical suggestions for each move and step. The final aim of the study is to produce a writing tool for Spanish-speaking professionals in the dairy industry to assist them in the production of this specific text type.

Keywords: Corpus; cheese descriptions; genre; rhetorical structure; lexico-grammar; ESP.

1. Introduction

This paper presents a macro and micro-linguistic corpus-based analysis of online cheese descriptions in English. Nowadays, in the region of Castile and León, a number of small companies devoted to tourism and the manufacturing of food products are interested in internationalizing their services and, thus, expanding their trades to other countries. This implies a growing need for linguistic services, not only direct translation and/ or interpreting services, but also services involving assistance in professional writing for various purposes. The ACTRES project currently in progress at the University of León, Spain (http://actres.unileon.es), aims at meeting this need by building software for professional writing in a number of different fields, including wine tasting notes (López-Arroyo and

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Roberts, 2014), heritage recipes, herbal teas, rural accommodation, online advertisements (Labrador, Ramón, Alaiz and Sanjurjo, 2014), and others. In the same line, the present study aims at providing a detailed account of online cheese descriptions, to help Spanish-speaking professionals in the dairy industry to write this specific text type.

Online cheese descriptions follow specific textual conventions which make them recognizable as belonging to a particular subgenre. These conventions imply a common overall structure where all the texts contain a similar arrangement of purposeful communicative units determined by the context of use: "language use in a conventionalized communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution which gives rise to stable structural forms by imposing constrains on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discoursal resources." (Bhatia, 2004: 23).

Several authors have proposed ways of describing the different functional units within texts that identify them as belonging to a particular genre or subgenre, including the typical linguistic features associated to each unit (Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Swales, 1990, 2004; Biber et al., 2007). Swales' move-step method has been used to establish the rhetorical structure of online cheese description in this study. According to Biber et al., a move "refers to a section of a text that performs a specific communicative function. Each move not only has its own purpose but also contributes to the overall communicative purpose of the genre" (Biber et al., 2007: 23). A move can be further divided into steps to give an account of more detailed rhetorical structures. All these purposes together contribute to shaping the lexical content and style of texts in a particular genre so that all the texts exhibit "various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience" (Swales, 1990: 58). A preliminary analysis of a small number of online cheese descriptions provided a tentative list of rhetorical tags to be used in the process.

A corpus-based methodology has been used here for extracting the relevant information to produce a writing tool. The corpus consists of 150 cheese descriptions in English, in all cases dealing with a wide range of cheeses produced in the UK. All the texts were downloaded from websites of either cheese manufacturing companies or more general websites describing different types of cheese.

The final product obtained from the research will be a computer tool designed to assist in the writing of online cheese descriptions in English, providing the relevant rhetorical and lexico-grammatical information for this particular text type.

2. Data and method

This is a corpus-based study where all the empirical linguistic information has been extracted from authentic material: online cheese descriptions. A total of 150 texts were collected from British websites of cheese manufacturing companies or general websites about British cheeses. The corpus contains all in all 23,089 words, with an average number of approximately 154 words per text.

A preliminary analysis of a small number of texts provided a tentative list of rhetorical tags to be used in the process. These labels will be employed to tag the texts with an ad-hoc tagger, which will later enable us to extract concordances in particular moves, steps or sub-steps. By observing the concordance lines, the specific phraseology typical of a particular move or step is thus easily retrieved. A total of 8 different moves, some of them with steps were identified in cheese descriptions, including tags such as the geographical and historical provenance of the cheese, the type of milk and rennet used, and serving suggestions like food and drink pairing. A detailed analysis will be carried out to obtain the most relevant lexico-grammatical elements contained in each move and step to produce a number of model lines which may function as suggested phrases for the writing of online cheese descriptions on the part of non-native speakers.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The rhetorical structure

The first step in this study consisted in the analysis of a number of representative texts to obtain a prototypical rhetorical structure for the particular subgenre of online cheese descriptions. Below we can see the 8 moves with the corresponding steps identified as most frequent and relevant in online cheese descriptions in English:

Move 1: IDENTIFYING THE CHEESE
Step 1: name of the cheese
Step 2: name of the company/ manufacturer
Step 3: provenance
Move 2: SHOWING A PICTURE
Move 3: DESCRIBING THE PRODUCT
Step 1: characteristics: shape, size, texture, coating and weight
Step 2: ingredients: type of milk and rennet used
Move 4: DESCRIBING THE PROCESS
    Step 1: preparation
    Step 2: aging
Move 5: DESCRIBING SMELL AND TASTE
Move 6: OFFERING SERVING SUGGESTIONS
    Step 1: temperature
    Step 2: presentation
    Step 3: food-pairing
    Step 4: drink-pairing
    Step 5: best season
Move 7: SUGGESTING RECIPES
Move 8: PROVIDING QUALITY ASSURANCE

Even though many cheese descriptions are not very long, we can observe that they often share a common set of functions from among the list compiled above. Figure 1 shows a sample text analyzed according to this functional classification. As we can see, not all moves and steps are necessarily present in a given text, nor ordered as in the list above. A move or step may be represented in different ways or places in the text, but fulfills the same function.
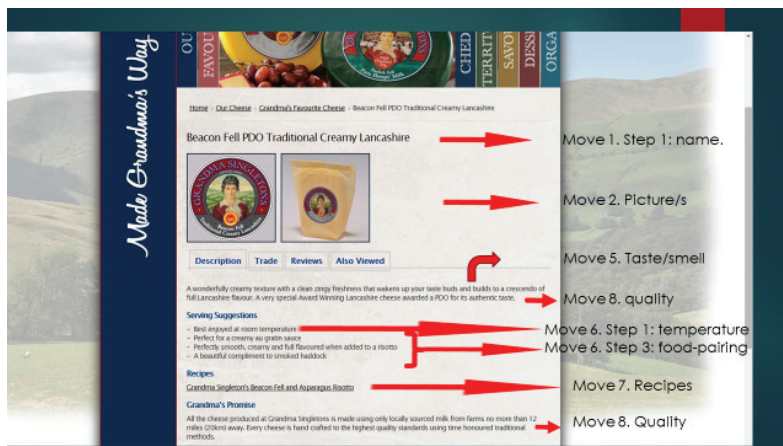

Figure 1. Sample rhetorical analysis: Beacon Fell PDO Traditional Creamy Lancashire.

In Figure 1 we can see that the rhetorical structure includes first the name of the product (Move 1. Step 1) and two pictures of the cheese (Move 2). Next comes Move 5 with a statement on the taste of the cheese: (1) *full Lancashire flavour*. In the same paragraph we can find a sentence about the quality of the cheese: *awarded a PDO for its authentic taste*, which has been classified as Move 8. The following section deals with Serving Suggestions and falls within Move 6: The first sentence refers to temperature (step 1): *best enjoyed at room temperature*. The other three sentences refer to food-pairing suggestions (step 3): *perfect for a creamy au gratin sauce; perfectly smooth, creamy and full-flavoured when added to a risotto; a beautiful complement to smoked haddock*. After that, there is a link to suggested recipes (Move 7): *Grandma Singleton's Beacon Fell and Asparagus Risotto*. And finally, we find a short paragraph providing further quality assurance for this particular cheese under the heading *Grandma's promise*: *All the cheese produced at Grandma Singletons is made using only locally sourced milk from farms no more than 12 miles (20km) away. Every cheese is hand crafted to the highest quality standards using time honoured traditional methods*.

3.2. The lexico-grammar

In this section we will present some of the most common lexico-grammatical structures identified in the moves and steps in our corpus of online cheese descriptions. Some recurrent phraseology has been underlined in the examples given below providing writing suggestions or model lines in the form of a loose outline where the remaining words should be replaced by the particular features of another cheese.

Move 1 refers to the function of identifying a particular cheese as different from all other cheeses. It includes 3 steps; steps 1 and 2 correspond to the name and manufacturing company and are therefore not relevant from a lexico-grammatical perspective. Step 3, in contrast, identifies the cheese with respect to its historical and/ or geographical provenance and here we do find different wordings. This provenance may be mentioned in the form of a list along with other features of the cheese, e.g.:

> *Country of origin: England and United Kingdom*
> *Region: Buxton, Derbyshire*

Alternatively, this meaning may be described in further detail in the form of a full sentence or even paragraph, sometimes headed by the word *Provenance* itself, e.g.:

> *Provenance*
> *It is thought that cheese making was first brought to the Yorkshire dales in the 11th century by Cistercian monks who arrived from Normandy and settled in the local abbeys. They in turn passed on the cheese making techniques to the local farmers of Swaledale and thus, Swaledale cheese was born. The Reed family has been making Swaledale cheese in Richmond since 1987.*

Move 2 contains one or more pictures. As for move 3, it contains 2 steps, one on the physical characteristics of the cheese and the other one on the ingredients, both often intertwined in the same sentence. The physical characteristics of the cheese may be expressed either in the form of a list of characteristics or in the form of a paragraph with full sentences or verbless clauses, or both in the same text, e.g.

> *Made from cow's milk*
> *Type: soft, artisan, blue-veined*
> *Fat content: 45%*
> *Texture: crumbly*
> *Rind: natural*
> *Color: yellow*

White in colour with a soft moist open texture; Shaped in small, round flat cylinders and coated with a white rind, Bonchester is made from unpasteurized Jersey cow's milk.

The step related to the ingredients includes mainly information on the type of milk and type of rennet employed in making a particular cheese. We may find examples of full sentences: *This is made from full cream milk from the morning milking, and skimmed milk from the evening milking. All the milk is unpasteurised, and vegeterian rennet is used;* and also examples of verbless clauses: *Hard pressed yet moist goats milk cheese which is a handmade, farmhouse type; Made using locally sourced milk and vegetarian rennet.*

The description of a cheese includes interesting combinations of adjectives and other pre-modifying structures, such as compound adjectives. The authors of these texts are often very creative when describing the colour, texture, shape, rind, etc. of a cheese: *A full fat, semi-hard pressed pale creamy-coloured cheese with a natural honey coloured rind.*

Move 4 refers to the description of the process of cheese making and includes two steps: preparation and aging, again both often intertwined in the same paragraph: *The cheese is still made in the traditional shape using the traditional method and skills. After the addition of starter culture and rennet to the milk, the curds are cut and scalded at a temperature of 32-35°C with the whey for 20-30 minutes. The whey is then drained away leaving the curd which is milled and salted. The cheese is then moulded and mechanically pressed for up to 5 days; Norfolk White Lady is [...] hand-made at Poppylot Farm in Feltwell near Norfolk; The cheese is ready for consumption at around 2 months; It is aged for a minimum of 6 months.*

Move 5 refers to the description of the smell and taste of the cheese, both of which are essential sensory characteristics of this particular product, thus deserving a separate move, different from the general physical features such as size, shape or weight, which may be objectively measured. In this particular move, adjectives are crucial. A wide range of different adjectives are used in this context, all with obviously positive connotations: *clean, fresh, sweet, soft, slightly sharp, tangy bite, a full-bodied flavor; rich, mellow, powerful, earthy, almost smoky*, etc. Sometimes these adjectives are pre-modified by positive adverbs: *deliciously creamy*. Descriptive adjectives are often found in these chunks of text in long enumerations: *It has a young, fresh, slightly tangy taste; Mild and smooth with a slight tang.*

Online cheese descriptions usually include a section on serving suggestions (move 6) where the author recommends the best temperature for the consumption of that particular cheese, other foods and drinks that go well with it, and the season in which it is available.

- Step 1: temperature: *Best enjoyed at room temperature; To eat: If serving on a cheeseboard remove the cheese from the fridge an hour before serving, to allow it to come to room temperature and to develop its full texture and flavour.*
- Step 2: presentation: this step includes words that refer to the physical shape in which the cheese is presented, either cooked or uncooked: *cubed, grated, sliced, in blocks, in chunks*, etc. The presentation may also be referred to by means of a number of specific verbs such as *grate, add, sprinkle, slice, mix, use, cut*, etc. Examples of step 2 include: *Stilton is one of the classic cheeses to include on a cheeseboard; Malvern can be served cooked or uncooked; grate and add to quiches, sauces or omelettes. It is ideal for serving as part of a cheeseboard.*
- Step 3: food-pairing: this step presents common phraseology such as: *served with, combined with, scattered over*, etc. Examples are: *a beautiful complement to smoked haddock; Serve with slices of apple and pear; A lovely accompaniment to fresh juicy grapes and crispy apples.*
- Step 4: drink-pairing: in most cheese descriptions we find comments about certain drinks that are recommended to have with a particular cheese. It is usually a particular type of wine, cider or beer: *Cheese and wine are a match made in heaven and which wine you enjoy with which cheese relies a lot on personal preference. Our*

suggestion for this one is a dry Riesling; It is also delicious served after dinner with a glass of dessert wine or white port; Enjoy with a traditional pint of Lancashire bitter or a full bodied glass of red wine.

- Step 5: best season: this step includes information on when a particular cheese is best consumed, whether young or mature. Examples are: *Available throughout the year due to the readiness of Swaledale cows milk; Best eaten at between 4 and 6 weeks old; is best eaten when young at 3 or 4 weeks of age.*

It is often the case in this move that several steps occur in the same paragraph or even sentence, as their meaning is closely related: *Uses: Serve simply with biscuits or bread* (step 3) *and a glass of red wine or cider* (step 4) *or include on a cheeseboard. Keens is also ideal for use in cooking and adds a rich flavour to sauces, bakes and pies* (step 2).

In addition to food and drink-pairing, online cheese descriptions often contain full recipes including the cheese being described (move 7). However, in most cases we have found recipes not directly in the text itself, but accessible via hyperlinks: *Recipes: Grandma Singleton's Vintage Cheddar Cheese & Cauliflower; Recipes: Grandma Singleton's Mild Cheddar Cheese & Smoked Haddock Fishcake.*

Move 8 includes references to the quality of the cheese, mainly awards and PDO status: *A very special Award Winning Lancashire cheese awarded a PDO for its authentic taste; The Swaledale recipe and methods are protected and accredited with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status. This is recognised world wide and safe guards the future production and quality of one of the dales most cherished treasures; All the cheese produced at Grandma Singletonsis made using only locally sourced milk from farms no more than 12 miles (20km) away. Every cheese is hand crafted to the highest quality standards using time honoured traditional methods.*

4. Conclusions

This paper has given a general overview of a particular subgenre, namely online cheese descriptions, from both a rhetorical and a grammatical perspective. The aim is to assist non-native speakers of English in writing this particular text type in English by providing as many pre-written language chunks as possible.

A small corpus of descriptions of British cheeses has been compiled for this purpose. The empirical data from this corpus of authentic language material have been used to identify the most frequent rhetorical conventions of this particular text type in the form of moves and steps, each of which with a particular function contributing to the overall meaning of the text. Secondly, the texts have been analyzed in greater detail in search of the most common phraseological patterns in each move and step. The phraseology found is closely related to the rhetorical section it belongs to, i.e., not every pattern is to be found in every move, but each pattern is characteristic of a particular move or step. Recurrent patterns are termed 'model lines' and they may be adapted to different needs by changing only a few words, thus constituting useful suggestions for the writing of new texts in the same subgenre.

All the lexical, grammatical and rhetorical information obtained in this study conforms a prototype of online cheese descriptions which will be implemented into a computer tool designed to assist in the writing of this text type in English on the part of native speakers of Spanish.

Acknowledgements

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