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GOOGLE TALKS AS A NEW KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION GENRE

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Abstract – This study explores the new knowledge dissemination (KD) online genre of Google Talks, in both qualitative and quantitative terms. In particular, the study combines two complementary strands of linguistic investigation – discourse analysis and corpus analysis – to inspect and describe the features that characterise Google Talks as popularisation discourse, as compared to both traditional and new web-based genres. The qualitative analysis of three case studies belonging to the fields of economics, political science, and medicine shows both a continuity between Google Talks and other forms of popularisation, such as TED Talks, and a departure from more traditional genres in academic and institutional settings addressed at non-experts (academic lectures) or colleagues (conference presentations). A quantitative corpus-based analysis of evaluative adjectives shows that Google speakers frequently use aesthetic and emotion adjectives to encourage audience participation and create intimacy and proximity with hearers. In general, Google Talks imposes not only a simplification but also a reformulation and recontextualisation of specialised knowledge in a more interactive and dynamic web-based context.

Keywords: Google Talks; knowledge dissemination (KD); popularisation; evaluative adjectives; web genre.

1. Introduction

Nowadays the increasing importance of knowledge dissemination (KD) has led to the emergence of a wide array of genres – from newspaper or journal articles to more recent web-mediated genres such as TED Talks, science blogs, and Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter). New genres on the World Wide Web, with their growing level of participation and interaction, cater to the necessity of reaching a wide global audience and of making specialised knowledge accessible also to non-experts (or experts in other fields) (Caliendo 2012; Compagnone 2014; Garzone 2012; Luzón 2013; Mauranen 2013; Myers 2010).

This study focuses on Google Talks, i.e. a new online genre which

consists of a series of video presentations by invited speakers given at various Google offices throughout the world and available on the website *Talks at Google. Where Great Minds Meet* (https://talksat.withgoogle.com/). On this website, Google speakers are manifold, including expert CEOs and physicians, but also well-known celebrities (e.g. singers, actors, athletes), or famous politicians. The talks generally last about fifty minutes, but their length can vary, especially depending on the final discussion session, which follows the initial monologic part. No transcripts of the talks are available on the website.

The aim of this study is to highlight the features of Google Talks and the linguistic strategies adopted (and adapted) in relation to stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds, either experts or non-/semi-experts. In particular, the study explores three case studies of Google Talks belonging to different domains, namely business/economics, political science, and medicine. For the corpus-based analysis, the emphasis is on evaluative (subjective) adjectives and their contribution to reinforcing meaning and creating "proximity" (Hyland 2010) with the audience.

In the study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Which features characterise Google Talks as a new genre of popularisation discourse and how does it differ from other KD genres?
2. What are the incidence and role of subjective adjectives in the processes of (a) speakers' expression of epistemic stance and (b) hearers' engagement?

In Google Talks, speakers constantly operate within and across generic boundaries creating a new hybrid form of text. In particular, Google Talks provides evidence of "Genre-Mixing" (see Bhatia 1995, 2012), in that it mixes features of both established genres, such as university lectures or research talks, and emerging popularisation genres, such as TED Talks.

2. Theoretical framework and other oral genres

2.1. The theoretical framework

For the analysis of Google Talks, this study combines two complementary approaches: i.e. 1) discourse and genre analysis, with special attention to new digital genres of popularisation discourse, and 2) corpus-based analysis.

For the qualitative analysis, the study adopts a discourse and genre analysis approach (Bhatia 1993, 2004, 2012; Fairclough 2003; Swales 1990, 2004). In particular, for Discourse Analysis, it draws on Fairclough's (2003) social, discourse and textual analysis, with special focus on the concept of "intertextuality", that is, reliance on prior texts and text types (de

Beaugrande, Dressler 1981). It investigates the production of meaning using linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, and other non-verbal semiotic resources, with some attention paid to the communicative purposes that the new genre of Google Talks tends to serve and the professional context it is situated in.

As for Genre Analysis, it draws on Swales' (1990, 2004) and Bhatia's (1993) development of genre theory to analyse academic and professional genres, with specific focus on the identification of the qualities characterising Google Talks as a hybrid or mixed genre that allows speakers to give expression to their private intentions (Bhatia 1995). A propos, Bhatia (2012, p. 24) introduces the concept of "interdiscursivity", which can be viewed as a function of "appropriation of generic resources" across three kinds of contextual and/or text-external resources: i.e. genres, professional practices, and professional cultures. Thus, while intertextuality operates within the textual space and concerns appropriations across text-internal resources, interdiscursivity concerns appropriations across text-external semiotic resources, such as genres, professional, institutional, and disciplinary practices. These appropriations simultaneously operate at all levels of discourse to realise the intended meaning, and have been widely used in the "recontextualisation" or "reformulation" (Calsamiglia, van Dijk 2004; Gotti 2014) of existing discourses and genres into novel or hybrid forms. The diagram representing Bhatia's (2012) "Interdiscursivity in Genre Theory" is provided in Figure 1.

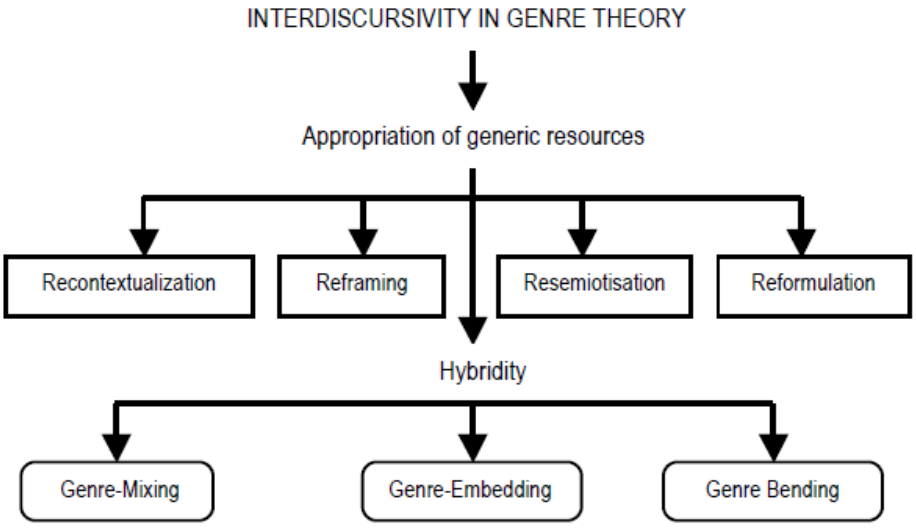

Figure 1
Interdiscursivity in Genre Theory (Bhatia 2012, p. 25).

In particular, the hybridity of Google Talks results from "Genre-Mixing", in that this new digital genre mixes features of various others, not only widely studied traditional ones, such as university lectures (Artiga León 2006;

Bamford 2009; Caliendo, Compagnone 2014; Crawford Camiciottoli 2008, 2015, 2016; Fortanet 2004; Walsh 2004), but also genres of popularisation discourse, such as TED Talks and other web-mediated genres of popularisation (Caliendo 2012; Compagnone 2014; Garzone 2006, 2012; Mauranen 2013; Myers 2010; Scotto di Carlo 2013, 2015). The next section is dedicated to the description of the main features of university lectures, conference presentations, and TED Talks as comparable KD genres.

2.2. Other oral genres

In the last few decades, scholars have focused their interest on the way experts disseminate specialised knowledge both to their peers and to non- or semi-experts. Among widely explored oral genres, traditional genres, such as university lectures and conference presentations or research talks, have been studied along with emerging popularisation genres, such as TED Talks or blogs, as a way to identify their main features and functions.

The genre of academic lectures, for instance, has attracted the attention of several scholars, whose focus was especially on the use of first and second person pronouns (Fortanet 2004; Walsh 2004), phraseology (Artiga León 2006), evaluation (Bamford 2009), and epistemic lexical verbs used to promote an interactional approach (Caliendo, Compagnone 2014). Studies dedicated to lecture discourse have highlighted numerous linguistic features used by lecturers to explain disciplinary concepts and enhance the novice's understanding. Among the latter are interactional devices, i.e. comprehension checks, questions, imperatives, as well as language features linked to informality, including idioms and puns.

Recently, Crawford Camiciottoli (2015, 2016) has also adopted a multimodal approach to investigate the interplay of verbal and non-verbal strategies in OpenCourseWare humanities lectures. Remarkably, her findings show how verbal (e.g. questions, humour) and non-verbal features (e.g. prosodic stress, gaze direction, and hand/arm gesturing) can work synergistically in university lectures to improve comprehension and promote a learning-friendly classroom atmosphere.

Another type of oral genre which has attracted the attention of scholars is the conference presentation. Conference presentations are planned speech events, which are organised and prearranged to comply with the time slot provided. According to Jurado (2017, p. 46), conference presentations can be classified as "an academic genre" since it is mainly used by discourse communities within academia in order to present a scientific novelty, give visibility to research, and reinforce social cohesion within the discourse community (Rowley-Jolivet 1999, p. 179). Carter-Thomas and Rowley-Jolivet (2003) also notice that conference presentations are mainly informative, displaying high-density informational content, but at the same

time persuasive, thus implying the use of rhetorical devices.

An issue of particular relevance raised in the literature on conference presentations is the immediacy in time and place in relation to an expert audience with whom a great amount of shared knowledge can be expected. For instance, Hood and Forey (2005) and Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005) maintain that the presence of an audience and the consequent need for real-time processing strongly influence the way a presentation is designed (e.g. less dense, simpler, with a considerable amount of signposting and inclusive use of pronouns).

Hood and Forey (2005) also notice how the use of verbal features, such as evaluation, and non-verbal features, such as inclusive gestures, can contribute to the presentation design. Moreover, as noticed by Bucher and Niemann (2012) and Hertz (2015), recent research talks are commonly PowerPoint-supported by slideshows or similar visuals, allowing speakers to be better understood and arousing higher interest among participants.

There are also some interesting studies that deal with specific sections of conference presentations. For instance, the discussion (or Q&A) session has been dealt with by Wulff, Swales and Keller (2009), who consider it as part of the genre, but still notice some important differences, namely, while the presentation is more prepared and closer to written language, the discussion session is more conversational and closer to spoken language.

Another particular type of research dissemination genre which has recently gained the attention of scholars is TED Talks (Caliendo, Compagnone 2014; Compagnone 2014; Masi 2016 *inter alia*). Caliendo and Compagnone (2014, p. 105) define this genre as "a series of short popularizing talks (of approximately twenty minutes), addressing a mass audience and delivered by top-level experts in a wide variety of domains". They consider TED Talks as an on-line genre which provides experts with the chance to disseminate knowledge outside their disciplinary communities, both to a physically present audience, and to the web-users at home.

The literature on popularisation has explored TED Talks from different angles, highlighting their characteristics. Scotto di Carlo (2013, 2015), for instance, has investigated TED speakers' use of humour and subjective adjectives to establish a connection with the audience, while Mattiello (2017) has analysed TEDsters' use of simple vocabulary and informal register as strategies of science popularisation. In the latter study, the qualitative analysis also stresses the importance of humour and narration for increasing speaker-hearer empathy.

Among web-mediated genres, TED Talks has been described as a "new hybrid genre" (Caliendo 2012, p. 101) that is gaining more and more interest also in the area of screen-mediated communication and multimodal literacy. Interestingly, Caliendo (2012) and Compagnone (2014) have acknowledged

the multimodal nature of this genre, noting that it mixes different semiotic modes (i.e. spoken, written, video, and audio), and Masi (2016) has recently highlighted the important contribution of non-verbal devices, principally deictic and metaphoric gestures, to the meaning of TED Talks in the field of economics.

Since Google Talks seems to share some features with each of these oral genres, it is the purpose of the analysis conducted in this paper to identify which characteristics are shared and which instead qualify it as a new autonomous genre of knowledge dissemination. The following section describes the corpus and methodology.

3. Corpus and methodology

3.1. The corpus

The corpus selected for the analysis includes three Google Talks available on the *Talks at Google* website.

On *Talks at Google*, areas or domains can be selected either by category (e.g. 'Economics', 'Health & Wellbeing'), or, alphabetically, by topic (e.g. 'Business' under B, or 'Capitalism' under C). Videos are chronologically ordered from the most to the least recent one. For this study, I have selected recent talks belonging to three different domains:

- Business/Economics: "Superbosses: How Exceptional Leaders Master the Flow of Talent" [10,994 words], by Sydney Finkelstein, delivered on 14th July 2016, duration 50:50;
- Politics: "Naked Diplomacy" [9,328 words], by Thomas S.F. Fletcher, delivered on 7th June 2016, duration 46:32;
- Medicine/Health: "Anatomy of a Breakthrough in Targeted Cancer Treatments" [15,034 words], by Brian J. Druker, delivered on 1st June 2015, duration 01:20:04.

The overall corpus totals 35,356 tokens and is drawn from a larger corpus that is being collected for a national research programme.[1]

3.2. The method

In order to highlight the main features characterising Google Talks, the three talks selected were first investigated from a qualitative perspective. The

[1] This research has been financed by the Italian Ministry for the University (PRIN 2015 no. 2015TJ8ZAS). Other fields of interest for the national PRIN programme are Law, Technology, and Tourism.

multimodal analysis focused on both verbal strategies, such as informal register, figurative language, and narratives, and non-verbal strategies, such as hand/arm gestures, head/body movements, and gaze direction (Baldry, Thibault 2006; Kress, van Leeuwen 1996). For the investigation of gestures, reference was made to McNeill's (1992) classification, covering 1) beats, i.e. repeated hand movements used to provide emphasis, 2) emblems, carrying conventional meanings, 3) deictic gestures, pointing at referents, and 4) iconic and metaphoric gestures, representing concrete and abstract notions.

The qualitative method was then integrated with quantitative research. For the analysis of adjectives, this study employed two corpus linguistics tools, namely:

- Free CLAWS WWW tagger, which is a free web tagging service offered by UCREL at Lancaster University (Garside 1987) and available at http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws/trial.html.
- AntConc, which is a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordances and text analysis developed by Laurence Anthony (Anthony 2016) and available at http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc

In order to proceed to the analysis of adjectives, the corpus was tagged using Free CLAWS WWW tagger, which divides adjectives into 'JJ' (Adjectives), 'JJR' (Comparative Adjectives), and 'JJT' (Superlative Adjectives). The list obtained was then manually cleaned to verify the correctness of the results. For instance, nouns with an adjectival function, such as *key* in *key competencies*, were excluded from the analysis. Based on this analysis, the final total number of occurrences of the tags JJ, JJR, and JJT in the corpus was 1,480. In other words, 4.18% of the tokens in the entire corpus were adjectives. In order to classify these adjectives, Kerbrat-Orecchioni's (1980) and Felices Lago's (1997) taxonomies were used, as explained in section 5.

4. Qualitative analysis: Three case studies

In Genre Theory, Bhatia (2012, p. 24) distinguishes between "intertextuality", which operates within the "textual space" or across "text-internal resources", and "interdiscursivity", which operates across "text-external semiotic resources". The following analysis focuses on both text-internal verbal cues and text-external non-verbal cues.

4.1. An economics Google Talk

The first Google Talk selected for the analysis belongs to the economics sphere and is related to the topic of "Superbosses". The extract in (1)

illustrates some of the interactive features and forms of audience engagement used by Sydney Finkelstein in his talk:

(1) It's good to have a chance to share some ideas around superbosses. And I'm really interested in what you have to say about that. And I'm going to have some questions for you as well. A professor can't help that type of stuff.
So let's start with – I'm a foodie. I'm really into great restaurants. That's why I live in Hanover, New Hampshire, for example.
And one of the things I noticed in the early days of getting interested a little bit about talent is I heard about this woman that, after graduating from college, she went to France. And she lived the Paris – the Parisian lifestyle. She went to the markets. […]
And she comes back to America after a few years. […] And she opened up a restaurant in Oakland, in Berkeley, by the name of Chez Panisse.
And some of you will know who this is. It's Alice Waters, legendary chef, who, along with being this innovator when it comes to food, also has, over the course of her career – and I'll say so far because she's still going strong – has spawned literally over 200 people. […]
And I said, wow, here's somebody who's really kind of interesting, kind of cool – and what she has been able to do. (S. Finkelstein, 00:12-01:59)

In this excerpt, the speaker uses the first person pronoun 'I' to introduce himself, his specialised topic, and his personal experience (*I'm really interested*, *I'm going to have some questions*, *I'm a foodie. I'm really into great restaurants*) and the second person pronoun 'you' to address directly to the audience (*what you have to say*, *some questions for you*, *And some of you will know*). The use of these pronouns lowers the level of discourse to familiarity, thus helping increase proximity with the public and create a sense of inclusivity which is comparable to the interactional approach identified in academic lectures by Fortanet (2004) and Walsh (2004) by means of the same devices.

Other verbal devices that are used by the speaker to increase proximity with his audience consist of instances of informal register: i.e., contractions (*It's*, *I'm*, *let's*, *That's*), informal or slang words (*stuff*, *foodie*, *cool*), general words (*one of the things*, *somebody*), and idioms (*she's still going strong*).

Humour is also used as a sort of icebreaker (*A professor can't help that type of stuff*, *That's why I live in Hanover*). It catches the hearers' attention and simultaneously reduces the distance between the expert speaker and the non-expert (or not necessarily expert) audience. Metaphorical language (*she […] has spawned literally over 200 people*) also contributes to the creation of a familiar environment. The verb *spawn* is here used in the sense of 'to lead somebody to success' and referred to employees starting their successful career.

As for the lexicon, specialised vocabulary is not highly technical in the talk, but easily accessible to the layman (e.g. *career*). Furthermore, non-verbal devices are employed to reinforce meaning and strengthen the message conveyed. For instance, the speaker's hands going up and body movement from the left to the right side when saying *over the course of her career* are

representative of Alice Waters' career path and success achievement (see Figure 2; cf. 'iconic and metaphoric gestures' in McNeill 1992; for the interpretation of gestures in TED Talks, see Masi 2016).

Figure 2
Example of hand gesture and body movement in the economics Google Talk.

Finally, what distinguishes Google Talks from the textual viewpoint is the use of narration, prevailing over argumentation and instruction. For instance, the speaker in (1) exemplifies an abstract concept (i.e. *superbosses*) by narrating the actual story of Alice Waters (*I heard about this woman that, after graduating from college, she went to France, And she opened up a restaurant in Oakland*). Concrete experiences and actual actions can assist the audience in understanding abstract concepts or ideas, such as 'superbosses' and 'successful career'.

4.2. A political Google Talk

The second case study is a political Google Talk on "Naked Diplomacy", based on the homonymous book by Thomas Fletcher.

Extract (2) especially shows the interplay of different forms of humour, narration, and gestures:

(2) There's a story about when my son turned up at the PM's house as a four-year-old completely naked, and the housekeeper came to the door and said, you're the first guest the Prime Minister's ever had arrived naked. A sign of how professional the British Foreign Service is. There's a story in there about the time I was at the G8 Summit with David Cameron – his very first summit. And I don't know if it's like this in your world, but there's a kind of physicality and theatricality to the way that leaders interact. […]
Word went round, and when we arrived at the meeting, Obama was feeling his muscles, and Sarkozy was looking a bit jealous, and so on. Perfect.

> And then Berlusconi saw this and was a bit put out that someone else was stealing that space. And so he disappeared off and came back 10 minutes later with a stack of photos of himself lightly oiled and wearing a pair of very, very tight Speedos. (T. Fletcher, 03:59-05:10)

Humour occurs here in the form of incongruity: there is a contrast between the absurdity of the situation (*my son turned up at the PM's house as a four-year-old completely naked*) and the cold reaction of the housekeeper (*the housekeeper came to the door and said, you're the first guest the Prime Minister's ever had arrived naked*).

Still another form of humour is addressed towards politicians attending the G8 Summit. In particular, three politicians are targeted by the speaker, namely, the US ex-President Barack Obama (*Obama was feeling his muscles*), the French ex-President Nicolas Sarkozy (*Sarkozy was looking a bit jealous*), and the Italian ex-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (*then Berlusconi saw this and was a bit put out*). Figures 3 shows the speaker's use of body posture and arm gestures jokingly imitating Obama's attitude.

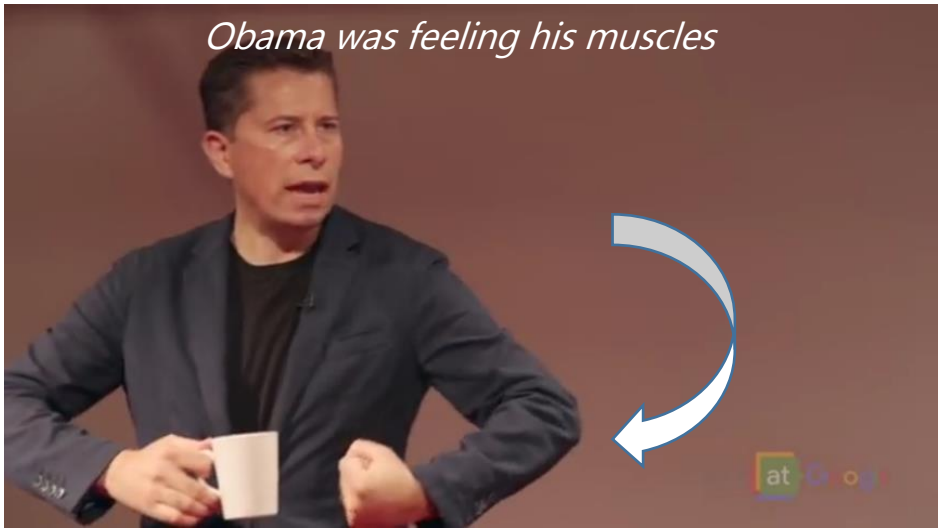

Figure 3
Example of body posture and arm gestures in the political Google Talk.

By contrast, Berlusconi was especially ridiculed by the photographs that he showed of himself wearing a Speedo swimsuit (*photos of himself lightly oiled and wearing a pair of very, very tight Speedos*) and by the metaphor referring to the other politicians attracting the attention in his place (*someone else was stealing that space*) (cf. Scotto di Carlo 2013 and Mattiello 2017 for different forms of humour in TED Talks).

Finally, the prevailing text type in (2) is again narration, as the speaker uses first person pronouns (*I*, *we*) and verbs in the simple past tense to describe his personal experiences (*turned up*, *came*, *said*, *went*, *arrived*, etc.), as a way to share them with the audience. The use of colloquial expressions (*Word went round* 'the news was disseminated', *put out* 'aggrieved', *a stack*

of 'a large quantity of') lastly helps create a familiar atmosphere and increase proximity with the audience.

4.3. A scientific Google Talk

The last Google Talk selected for the qualitative analysis belongs to the scientific field. In this field, many research talks are nowadays presented at conferences using visuals such as slides, transparencies, or PowerPoint displays (Carter-Thomas, Rowley-Jolivet 2003; Hertz 2015), thus allowing speakers to be better understood and arousing higher interest among participants. However, unlike conference presentations, whose language is more prepared and close to written language (Wulff *et al.* 2009), Google Talks are not completely planned speech events, nor have they to comply with the time slot provided or with the specialised tone of a conference.

For instance, the presenter of the Google Talk entitled "Anatomy of a Breakthrough in Targeted Cancer Treatments", Dr. Brian Druker, developer of a chemotherapy medication used to treat cancer, sounds spontaneous, and his tone is relaxed, even if the topic involves a serious matter. In extract (3), for instance, he is using a rather familiar tone when describing the disease on which he is doing research (i.e. chronic myelogenous leukemia):

(3) Now the disease I worked on – called chronic myeloid leukemia – started with its first description in 1845. We understood the cause by about 1985. And by 2001, we had a specific therapy. So that's the timeline for the disease I worked on.
The other thing that's important about this is, this is what I call my translational research slide. [POINTS AT FIRST SLIDE]
You describe a clinical entity. You understand it. And then you can actually do something about it. [SHOWS SECOND SLIDE]
So clinical description of CML. [SHOWS THIRD SLIDE] […]
And just to give you an idea of what the current generation is growing up with – my daughter is eight years old, my youngest daughter. And she just recently achieved a black belt in taekwondo. And as a reward, she wanted me to buy her a typewriter so she could type out old fashioned Google Docs. That was her impression of the world. She has not lived in a world without Google. (B. Druker, 03:42-05:29)

Familiarity is especially created by verbal strategies. Short sentences are introduced by discourse markers (*Now*, *And*, *So*). General words prevail over precise or technical ones (*The other thing that's important, you can actually do something about it*). Specialised abbreviations are only given as anaphoric references to their full forms (e.g. *CML* referring back to *chronic myeloid leukemia*), whereas more colloquial clippings are left unexpanded (e.g. *Google Docs* for 'documents'), since they are familiar also to non-experts.

Furthermore, the speaker addresses directly his audience by using a second person pronoun 'you' (*And just to give you an idea*), thus enhancing proximity with hearers, and repeatedly points at his slideshow to gain the audience's attention and improve understanding (cf. 'deictic-spatial gestures'

in McNeill 1992). The speaker's gaze is always directed towards the hearers as an effort to keep eye contact. Intimacy and empathy are also created via gesturing and facial expressions, for instance when Dr. Druker intertwines his hands and adopts a serious expression of concern (see Figure 4).

Figure 4
Example of gesturing and facial expression in the scientific Google Talk.

Descriptive and informative text types, which are typically required in scientific discourse, here co-occur with self-narration (e.g. *my daughter is eight years old, my youngest daughter. And she just recently achieved a black belt in taekwondo. And as a reward, she wanted me to buy her a typewriter*). Finally, the speaker adopts an ironic tone when he comments on his daughter's thought about the 'old-fashioned' search engine Google (*That was her impression of the world. She has not lived in a world without Google*). Besides familiarity, both narration of personal events and humour help release the tensions deriving from the serious topic dealt with.

However, the three features highlighted in (3) are not the only strategies adopted by the speaker to involve hearers and reinforce meanings. Unlike conference presentations (Bucher, Niemann 2012; Hertz 2015; Jurado 2017), Google Talks have no time limits, and this allows speakers to enrich their PowerPoint-supported presentations with additional electronic devices, such as embedded videos. For instance, Dr. Druker includes in his talk the video clip of a young cancer survivor, Katie Knudson, as shown in extract (4):

(4) B.D.: But the reality is, there are lots of people who are benefiting. And let me just share one story with you. [VIDEO PLAYBACK]
K.K.: Hello, everyone. My name is Katie. And I'm very excited to be here tonight. I'm going to start out by telling you all a little bit about myself. I'm 18 years old. I'm a nursing student at University of Portland. I graduated in the top 8% of my high school class. I was… [APPLAUSE] Thank you.
I was part of the Royal Crowns Dance Team, where I was team captain, all state athlete, and state champion. I love my dogs, Italian food, and "Grey's Anatomy".

> And when I was six years old, I was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia.
> We all know what happens in a treatment for cancer – chemo and radiation, hair loss and nausea.
> But would you like to know a secret? I never had any of that. I had Gleevec.
> Because of Brian Druker, my life is as I described it to you. Dr. Druker began developing Gleevec the same year that I was born. And it was FDA approved just one month before I was diagnosed. And if you want to talk about timing, that's some of the best that I've ever had. (B. Druker/Katie Knudson, 21:48-23:06)

The video 'narrates' Katie's story from the teenager's viewpoint. She is not a specialist, of course, but a young woman who has experienced the illness and the treatment and decided to share her experience with Imatinib (or *Gleevec*) to provide evidence of its extraordinary effects. Hence, the language involved is far from being specialised or technical. On the contrary, she uses naïve expressions (*I'm very excited to be here tonight*), simple sentences (*I love my dogs, Italian food, and "Grey's Anatomy"*), and questions (*But would you like to know a secret?*) to involve the audience.

This embedded video demonstrates that, in Google Talks, scientific communication is not only addressed to an audience of specialists, as it generally happens in research talks (Swales 2004), but reframed and recontextualised in a new digital genre accessible also to non-specialists, or even absent addressees: i.e., people who are fighting daily against cancer.

5. Quantitative analysis: The case of evaluative adjectives

Let us turn now to the quantitative corpus-based analysis, which focuses on evaluative adjectives. Evaluative adjectives as a means of expressing epistemic stance have attracted the attention of several scholars in the field of specialised and popularisation discourse. For instance, Caliendo and Compagnone (2014, pp. 119-120) have remarked the co-occurrence of the stance marker *think* with the evaluative adjectives *interesting*, *major*, *best*, and *complicated* in TED Talks, as a way to express a subjective opinion.

In a study on the same genre, Scotto di Carlo (2015) has shown that TEDsters use emotional and evaluative adjectives to transform their presentations into a more personal experience with the audience. In particular, she concludes her article by claiming that, in TED Talks, both aesthetic and emotive adjectives allow "the speakers to convey their knowledge humanising the intellectual experience, getting close to what the audience feels" and "guide the audience to accept [the speakers'] claims" (Scotto di Carlo 2015, p. 214). In general, she concludes that evaluative adjectives are crucial in knowledge dissemination, as they appeal to the audience's sense of identity, self-interest, and emotions. Thus, it is my

interest in this study to verify whether or not these adjectives are equally relevant to Google speakers and audience.

My analysis of adjectives in the three Google Talks selected draws upon Kerbrat-Orecchioni's (1980) and Felices Lago's (1997) classifications.

In line with Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980), adjectives can be distinguished into objective, which enunciate a quality independent from the enunciator (e.g. *single*, *male*), and subjective, which imply an emotive reaction or value judgement (e.g. *happy*, *pathetic*). The subjective class of evaluative adjectives is further divided into axiological and non-axiological. Non-axiological adjectives, such as *hot* or *large*, imply a qualitative or quantitative evaluation of the modified noun, but do not reflect any emotion on the part of the speaker/writer. By contrast, axiological evaluative adjectives, such as *correct* or *nice*, are fully subjective, as they imply a qualitative evaluation, adding a positive or negative judgement to the modified noun. In other words, axiological adjectives reflect the speaker's/writer's favourable or unfavourable position with regard to the modified noun.

In section 5.1, the objective adjectives retrieved in my small corpus were analysed in the three talks separately, in order to establish whether they belonged to general or specialised vocabulary, whereas in section 5.2, given their higher number, the subjective adjectives were analysed in the three talks taken together.

In section 5.2, the quantitative results deriving from an analysis of the subjective adjectives were then sub-categorised into semantic groups. The non-axiological adjectives were classified into the gradable categories of 'quantity' (*multiple*), 'colour' (*black*), 'position' (*distant*), 'dimension' (*little*), 'material'/'consistency' (*soft*), 'time'/'age' (*new*), 'weather'/'temperature' (*cold*), and 'relational' (*normal*). Similarly, axiological adjectives were classified according to Felices Lago's (1997, p. 105) functional scale, dividing them into ten semantic groups: i.e., 'aesthetics' (*beautiful*), 'emotion'/'behaviour' (*exciting*), 'function'/'pragmatism' (*simple*), 'prominence' (*important*), 'intellect' (*interesting*), 'veracity' (*possible*), 'general qualities' (*good*), 'vitality' (*healthy*), 'religion'/'politics'/'ethics' (*moral*), and 'economy'/'material' (*expensive*).

Overall, the analysis of the subjective adjectives in the corpus has not been easy, as it has required additional examination for disambiguation. For instance, collocational patterns were checked in order to discriminate between the non-axiological and the axiological type: e.g., *advanced* in the collocation *advanced disease* was assigned to 'time' (non-axiological), but, in *advanced technologies*, it was assigned to 'prominence' (axiological). The adjective *high* was similarly ambiguous, in that it generally indicates 'position', but in collocational patterns such as *high quality* or *high risk*, it was better classified as indicating 'prominence'. In other words, *high* was

considered non-axiological on some occasions, but axiological on others. Moreover, both *naked* (as in *naked diplomacy*) and *transparent* (as in *honest and transparent*) were classified as belonging to 'politics', while *warm*, rather than under the 'temperature' label, was put under 'emotion' when collocating with *relationships*.

5.1. Objective adjectives

Table 1 shows a list of the top ten most frequent objective adjectives in the corpus, ordered by number of occurrences (O), respectively in the economics Google Talk (EC_GT), political science Google Talk (PS_GT), and medical Google Talk (MD_GT). By definition, objective adjectives enunciate a quality independent from the enunciator. For instance, origin adjectives, such as *American*, *British*, or *African*, do not imply any evaluation or emotion from the speaker's part.

A closer observation of the data has also shown that the objective adjectives in the corpus mostly correspond to specialised terms. This is chiefly evident in the scientific Google Talk, in which objective adjectives such as *immune*, *clinical*, *toxic*, *infectious*, or *genetic* are the most frequently used, but also in the economics talk, with adjectives such as *professional*, *consulting*, and *hired*, as well as in the political one, with *foreign*, *professional*, *political*, *presidential*, and *civil* as recorded examples.

Token EC_GT	O	Token PS_GT	O	Token MD_GT	O
Organic	4	Foreign	11	Immune	23
American	3	Professional	7	Clinical	13
Professional	2	British	6	Toxic	6
Consulting	2	Iranian	3	Infectious	6
Burning	2	Political	2	Genetic	6
Open	2	Islamic	2	Molecular	5
Academic	2	Online	2	Scientific	4
African	2	Natural	2	Environmental	4
Japanese	2	Presidential	1	Human	4
Hired	1	Civil	1	Open	3

Table 1
Ten most frequent objective adjectives in the corpus.

However, objective adjectives represent a low percentage of the overall number of adjectives found in the corpus, namely 21.03% in MD_GT, 14.03% in PS_GT, and 10.19% in EC_GT (or 15.88% in the whole corpus). The remaining subjective adjectives represent the majority of the adjectives in the corpus (1,245 or 84.12%) and they are supposed to contribute to the level of subjectivity of the talks.

5.2. Subjective adjectives

All the subjective adjectives resulting from the analysis of the corpus were manually categorised according to Kerbrat-Orecchioni's (1980) axiological vs. non-axiological distinction. The analysis revealed that a majority of the 1,245 subjective adjectives belonged to the axiological group (i.e. 767, corresponding to 61.60%), while 478 (38.39%) were classifiable as non-axiological.

5.2.1. Non-axiological adjectives

The non-axiological adjectives were categorised into the above-mentioned gradable categories. Table 2 illustrates the ten adjectives with the highest number of occurrences (O) for each category in the entire corpus. For reasons of space, some of the adjectives with the same number of occurrences had to be excluded. The selection was mainly made on the basis of synonymous adjectives already represented in the table: e.g., *intermediate*, *countless* (1 occ.) were included, while their respective synonyms *halfway*, *endless* (1 occ.) were not.

Quantity	O	Colour	O	Position	O	Dimension	O
Single	6	White	2	Higher	4	Big	22
Multiple	4	Black	2	High	2	Biggest	12
Only	3	Blue	1	Far	1	Long	10
Massive	2	Red	1	Near	1	Large	10
Quadruple	2	Gray	1	Spatial	1	Little	7
Much	1			Low	1	Gigantic	6
Scarce	1			Lower	1	Huge	6
Double	1			Intermediate	1	Bigger	5
Countless	1			Bilateral	1	Small	5
Continuous	1			Bottom	1	Three-dimensional	3
Material/ Consistency		Time/Age		Weather/ Temperature		Relational	
Soft	3	New	35	Warm	1	Different	31
Rough	1	Early	24			Whole	16
Granulocytic	1	Old	11			Specific	13
Solid	1	Chronic	10			Social	11
		Traditional	6			Similar	10
		Earlier	6			Entire	8
		Unusual	5			Individual	5
		Younger	5			Related	4
		Youngest	5			Common	4
		Advanced	5			Global	4

Table 2
Ten most frequent non-axiological adjectives in the corpus.

It is not surprising that some of the non-axiological categories, such as 'colour', 'material', and 'weather', are less relevant than others (e.g. 'dimension', 'time', 'relational') in terms of both frequency and range of items that they include. Within 'dimension', it is worth noting that adjectives indicating big size (e.g. *big*/*bigger*/*biggest*, *long*, *large*, *gigantic*, *huge*) prevail over those referring to small size (e.g. *little* or *small*). In the same way, within 'time', adjectives denoting novelty (*new*, *early*/*earlier*, *unusual*, *younger*/*youngest*) prevail over those indicating tradition (*old*, *traditional*). In general, the latter result suggests that the speakers' attitude is growth- and future-orientated.

5.2.2. Axiological adjectives

The axiological adjectives were similarly divided into multilevel categories, or prototypical evaluative terms (Felices Lago 1997, p. 105), as can be seen in Table 3. For reasons of space, only the ten most used adjectives for each category have been reported in the table, using for the selection the same criteria as those adopted for Table 2.

Aesthetics	O	Emotion/ Behaviour	O	Function/ Pragmatism	O	Prominence	O	Intellect	O
Great	26	Crazy	7	Effective	14	Important	18	Interesting	22
Amazing	9	Tremendous	5	Ready	9	Famous	11	Interested	10
Special	6	Competitive	5	Hard	8	Successful	7	Clear	4
Greater	6	Favorite	4	Powerful	7	Head	7	Smart	4
Super	5	Friendly	4	Simple	5	Senior	6	Curious	4
Fascinating	5	OK	3	Difficult	4	Remarkable	4	Brilliant	2
Unbelievable	5	Willing	3	Complicated	4	Louder	4	Analytical	2
Legendary	4	Exciting	3	Tough	4	Prevailing	3	Creative	2
Incredible	4	Loved	3	Adaptable	3	Relevant	3	Obvious	2
Cool	3	Sorry	3	Easy	3	Leading	3	Logical	1
Veracity	O	General Qualities	O	Vitality	O	Religion/Politics/ Ethics	O	Economy	O
Real	18	Good	41	Lethal	7	Right	43	Poor	3
Sure	13	Better	19	Developing	5	Naked	11	Untapped	3
Certain	8	Best	16	Agile	3	Wrong	7	Rich	2
True	7	Bad	8	Fastest	3	Holy	4	Sustainable	2
Possible	3	Optimistic	6	Safer	2	Fair	4	Richer	1
Likely	3	Positive	5	Fatal	2	Diplomatic	3	Inexpensive	1
Authentic	3	Pessimistic	2	Slow	2	Transparent	2	Balanced	1
Genuine	2			Rapid	2	Uncompromising	2	Unbalanced	1
Potential	2			Fast	1	Honest	2	Scalable	1
Supposed	2			Dead	1	Secret	2	Attained	1

Table 3
Ten most frequent axiological adjectives in the corpus.

In general, the high token frequency of adjectives referring to positive qualities in all categories, such as *good*, also in its comparative and superlative forms (76) (vs. *bad* 8), *right* (43) (vs. *wrong* 7), *important* (18), or *interesting* (22), demonstrates that the speakers' overall attitude is optimistic, confident, and encouraging. As a result, the audience will be inspired, even reassured, by the speakers' talks.

A closer observation of the data in the axiological table also shows that 'aesthetics' and 'emotion'/'behaviour' are quite numerous classes of adjectives. In other words, many of the axiological adjectives are used to express aesthetic appreciation and emotive reactions. Moreover, looking at the quantitative data, it can be noticed that most of the adjectives attribute positive aesthetic or emotive properties. Aesthetic axiological adjectives, for instance, include *amazing*, *great*, *fantastic*, *cute*, *super*, and *cool* as relevant examples. The same can be observed for the emotional adjectives *OK*, *favorite*, *friendly*, *exciting*, or *fun*, all rather atypical in specialised (con)texts. The emotions triggered by these adjectives let the audience perceive the speakers as closer to them, and make them feel the same positive emotions.

However, the category of 'emotion'/'behaviour' is much more varied than the others and many 1-occurrence adjectives which had to be excluded from the table (e.g., *abysmal*, *disastrous*, *emotional*, *frightening*, *frivolous*, *gratifying*, *happy*, *horrific*, *hostile*, *mad*, *motivated*, *nuts*, *objectionable*, *pleased*, *proud*, *provocative*, *rancorous*, *rewarding*, *ridiculous*, *shocking*, *shy*, *striking*, *surprising*, *unwilling*, *upset*, *unfriendly*, etc.) can actually testify to the range of emotions/attitudes involved in Google Talks.

Therefore, like TEDsters (Scotto di Carlo 2015), also Google speakers appear to have the overall goal to create a shared emotional experience with the audience. Indeed, they use aesthetic and emotion adjectives to guide the audience to understand their perspective and accept their claims. Aesthetic and emotive adjectives are crucial in knowledge dissemination, in that they appeal to the audience's emotions, thus entailing a higher degree of involvement and emotive participation, which facilitates speaker-hearer proximity, intimacy relationships, and sharing of ideas.

6. Summary and final remarks

This study has shown that Google Talks is a hybrid genre lying at the intersection of a series of more or less traditional oral genres, such as university lectures, conference presentations, and TED Talks. In particular, the study has shown that, given their diverse audience (with different degrees of expertise), Google speakers display a blending of discursive practices from different genres and discourses and harness the affordance of new media to achieve their rhetorical purposes, as well as to reduce the distance with their

non-expert audience.

The analysis conducted here has shown that, in Google Talks, specialised vocabulary and technical subjects are made more accessible to laymen or non-specialists via a range of linguistic strategies. First, speakers often adopt an informal register, figurative language, and humorous tone, which may help increase proximity with hearers. Second, they use subjective adjectives to express their stance, opinions, and ideas, or to convince their audience. Another frequently occurring strategy is the use of narratives and anecdotes, or the introduction of specialised subjects by means of personal or other people's experiences. Narration reflects a style that appeals to emotions and is especially useful to encourage participation, or to create a familiar ambiance where the audience may feel at ease and involved.

Therefore, this hitherto unexplored genre displays features of various and different other genres, both traditional and more innovative ones. On the one hand, like academics, Google presenters use an informal language (e.g. contractions, slang words, general words, idioms) and figuration (esp. metaphor) to enhance proximity with the audience. Moreover, in both genres, hand gestures and head/body movements are used to reinforce meanings and to facilitate understanding. However, in Google Talks, interaction is obtained via direct address to receivers ('you') and narration prevails over instruction, thus helping exemplify abstract concepts by using concrete experiences.

Google Talks also share some features with conference presentations. For instance, the use of visual support in PowerPoint presentations is shared by the two genres. Moreover, in Google Talks, a monologic first part is followed by a dialogic Q&A part, with a moderator who fills a role similar to that of a session chair in a conference presentation. However, Google speakers' language is more spontaneous, close to relaxed conversation, with discourse markers, specialised abbreviations that are anaphoric referents to their full forms, and colloquial clippings that are typical of spoken discourse as main verbal strategies. As for non-verbal strategies, Google speakers direct their gaze towards their recipients, and even use embedded videos to support their claims. Therefore, personal experiences may be even narrated by a third party, providing a different viewpoint from the expert's one.

However, TED Talks is the closest genre to Google Talks. These two genres share a reduced technicality in specialised content, the use of narratives, and a humorous tone. Humour occurs in various forms, including a sense of contrast and ridicule addressed to others or irony used to release the tensions deriving from a serious topic. Furthermore, narration and hand gestures are used by both TEDsters and Google speakers to arouse a sense of sympathy or empathy.

The closeness between TED and Google Talks has also been confirmed by a quantitative analysis of evaluative adjectives. Although the quantitative

analysis is small-scale and limited to three case studies, the most frequent and relevant evaluative adjectives in the corpus have highlighted their importance in hearer's engagement. In my corpus, subjective adjectives (84.12%) prevail over objective ones, thus contributing to the level of subjectivity of the talks. Moreover, axiological evaluative adjectives mainly belong to the aesthetics and emotion classes, that is, they express aesthetic appreciation and appeal to the audience's emotions. Specifically, aesthetic axiological adjectives (e.g. *amazing*, *great*, *fantastic*) refer to positive properties, while emotional ones (e.g. *OK*, *favorite*, *exciting*) trigger emotions which help KD in a sympathetic or empathetic ambiance.

Therefore, Google Talks can be defined as:

- A hybridised genre taking full advantage of the impact of the Internet and digital technologies on the recipient. The communicative immediacy of the medium and the wide spectrum of multimodal practices offer Google speakers the opportunity to reinforce meaning and facilitate understanding by using non-verbal strategies (e.g. hand/arm gestures, body movements, gaze, facial expressions) and visual support (e.g. images, videos) in their PowerPoint presentations. As a result, in Google Talks, specialised knowledge is recontextualised in a more interactive and dynamic web-based multimodal setting.
- A worldwide popularising form of KD. Indeed, while university lectures are addressed to a disciplinary community of semi-/non-experts (i.e. students) and conference presentations primarily target a community of specialists (mainly academics), Google Talks engage with a wider audience, including expert and professional communities, but also non-specialists or experts in other fields. Therefore, their use of an informal and familiar register, humour, personal narratives, and non-verbal semiotic resources is primarily meant to reduce the asymmetry between expert speaker and non-expert audience.

Thus, from the viewpoint of the genre aims, the goal of Google speakers is not only the transmission of specialised knowledge or the sharing of inspiring ground-breaking ideas, but also the sharing of feelings, thoughts, and (generally positive) personal experiences meant to trigger the hearer's emotive reactions.

Lastly, from the viewpoint of the genre use within the academia, as with other oral genres, the multimodal asset of Google Talks could be exploited in educational contexts (cf. Masi 2016 for the important role of gestures in TED Talks to facilitate memorisation/understanding in foreign language teaching). Given their adaptation to the needs of a wider audience and orientation to interaction and extensive participation on digital platforms, Google Talks particularly suit the requirements of ESP in current university contexts, and could be exploited in educational settings, for example, to

improve foreign learners' speaking and listening comprehension skills.

The author's future research intends, first, to verify Google Talks' features on a larger scale, by using a more extensive corpus also involving other domains, and, second, to investigate the linguistic features that more noticeably distinguish Google Talks from TED Talks. A larger corpus of Google Talks could allow us to identify, besides length, a final discussion session, and the usual presence of videos embedded in the talks, the specific linguistic differences between these two genres sharing the same medium, similar goals and audiences.

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