'The Podcast is the New Blog':
Oral Communication in Global Marketing before, during and beyond Covid-19

Nicoletta Vasta

Abstract
Though less popular than in the US, podcast listening during the Covid-19 pandemic has increased in Europe. Yet, while being cooped up at home has apparently unlocked new opportunities for this innovative multimodal genre, little or no systematic investigation into podcasts' use, other than in Education, has appeared to date, especially in those professional contexts where Covid-19's impact is most significant. With these objectives in mind, the individual sequences of three marketing podcast/vodcast series were analysed multimodally using a metadiscursive approach that systematically connects basic functional units to macrolevel features characteristic of podcasts' generic structure potential. The analysis accounts for deviations from generic expectations and reveals how the sociosemiotic affordances of visual, sound and other iconographic and indexical systems permeate a predominantly oral genre and how their systematic identification helps analysts make sense of the flow of discourse. The results also open up prospects for future research which could apply this methodology to other relatively unstructured, grassroots multimodal genres.
Key-words: Podcasts/vodcasts, aural delivery, GSP, Move-step sequencing, multimodal/intersemiotic affordances, global marketing, Covid-19.

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of this study is to shed some light on the distinguishing functional and structural features[1] of the podcast as an evolving hybrid genre, especially in the marketing world where it has gained prominence as an effective global marketing tactic to help organisations position themselves, get known to, and trusted by,

---

[1] Viz. the obligatory and optional constitutive elements of the Generic Structure Potential (GSP, Hasan [1984] 1996), or Move-structure (Bhatia 1993).

stakeholders and prospective customers alike (Crognali 2020). In line
with one of the main purposes of this volume – the implementation
and improvement of good oral communication practices within
developing, critical or emerging professional and academic contexts
in the light of the Covid-19 emergency –, the main contention here
will be that a metadiscursive and metatextual knowledge of the
podcast genre's conventions and specificities will contribute to
the development of crucial communicative competences in the PR
profession, in particular as regards the ability to connect with and
persuade stakeholders.

Podcasts have been around since 2004, when Ben Hammersley
coined the term in *The Guardian* as "a neologism that combines
broadcast and *pod,* a reference to the iPod device and the widespread
practice of listening to audio podcasts on portable media players"
(Bonini 2015: 21). Podcasts really took off in 2014 with a series
called *Serial* (Berry 2015) and nowadays cover almost every field
of knowledge and entertainment[2]. As reported in a *Voxnest* survey
dated April 22, 2020[3],

global podcast listens have increased by 42% and European listens are up
by 53%. […] Italy is up by 29% and Spain is up by 25%. […] In countries
(Italy, Spain) and a continent (Europe) where podcast listening wasn't
previously as popular as it is in the US, being home has actually opened up
a new opportunity to discover this format.

That growth is unsurprising in the context of the ongoing pandemic
crisis, but, even before, massive podcast production/listening
had been posing problems associated with information overload,
conspiracy theories, and the amplification of pseudoscience (Kane,
Shuman, Patel, Olson 2019: 1777). The surprising dearth of critical
discourse studies on podcasts, except for educational contexts
(Harris and Park 2007; Merhi 2015), led directly to the systematic

---

[2] Mainstream media, like the *New York Times* and *The Guardian*, have incorporated
different types of podcast (e.g. op-eds and interviews) into their websites as a
way of communicating news and opinions on political issues, current affairs and
social events. See *The New York Times* top podcasts news, The Daily Podcasts
(PLPDetR4tlNyVNBanMxNz3UINWkUNLI-Nq).

[3] "COVID-19's Impact on Podcast Listening" (https://blog.voxnest.com/
coronavirus-impact-on-podcast-listening, last accessed 1 June 2021).

approach provided here: a detailed generic structure analysis pursuing a better critical understanding of the interplay between podcast genres and marketing, at a time when both are subject to rapid change following the current upheaval wrought by Covid-19.

2. The *what* and *why* of podcasting: towards a definition of a dynamic, hybrid genre

There is a long-standing, thriving body of research into genre analysis in professional settings and domain-specific discourses (Bhatia 1993; Bhatia 2014; Sarangi 2011; Swales 1990), with a strong focus on interdisciplinarity and genre hybridisation/evolution, often complemented by recent insights gained from the multimodal analysis of new forms of digital communication (Petroni 2011; Cambria, Arizzi, Coccetta 2012; Garzone 2012; Sindoni 2013). The lack of multimodal studies on podcasts was a stimulus for the investigation into this emerging hybrid genre. Indeed, the function of genre as "an overarching textual category, which corresponds closely to types of social practice" (Fairclough 1992: 125), is:

to enhance composing and understanding of communication by offering interpretative, recognizable and flexible frames of reference. As such, genres generate a sense of stability in modern complex societies (Lüders, Prøitz, Rasmussen 2010: 947).

No such stability can, so far, be attached to podcasting, partly as the concept of genre in podcasting has "yet to gain scholarly attention" (Drew 2017: 203) and partly as podcasts are especially subject to evolution; when new media genres meet up with the affordances of the Internet, "the lines between producer and consumer are blurred, opening up new intertextual and interactive possibilities for genre production" (Drew 2017: 204). Citing the need to help practitioners "determine the choice of genre to suit a particular context [and] utilise, modify and subvert generic conventions" (Bhatia 1997: 361), Drew argues, convincingly, that "creativity in the modification and subversion of textual conventions is a key feature of Web 2.0 media", but that genre analysis will "reveal podcasting's textual formations" (Drew 2017: 202).

In the business context, and all the more so in the PR and other communication-based professions, podcasts/vodcasts are emerging

as strategic tools and communicative practices within social and personal media that help businesses grow through greater exposure; hence attempts within the community of podcasting professionals to define the text's generic structure: as social media strategist and content creator Katie Steckley explains, the first and most important thing to do when creating a podcast is write an intro, where:

you define for a new listener *what* your podcast is *about* and what your *brand voice* is; you need to connect with them very quickly so that they do not […] stop listening once they've decided they are not interested. You want to be *quick* and *snappy*, but also *informative* and communicate *who you are as a host* (https://youtu.be/zdHENJNaydU, my emphasis).

The same applies to the outro/wrap-up, another equally crucial step: "it's important that you include all the necessary calls to action to keep people *engaged* with your *community*" (https://youtu.be/zdHENJNaydU, my emphasis). As Pat Flynn, another influential consultant in podcast marketing, puts it:

The call to action, or 'hot tip' should be to a unique url that is specific for *that* audience […], a specific landing page that allows for them to come back to your homepage and […] continue [the] conversation (https://youtu.be/Y2nUb2YJT9s).

Thus, another important feature of podcasts – besides singling-out customers and communicating brand identity through a "pitch" aimed at synthesising the podcast concept, target audience, positioning and format, as in advertising discourse proper (see Crognali 2020: 120) – is creating bonds, both interpersonally, with specific epistemic communities, and intertextually, with other people's podcasts, to get their endorsement and connect better with the audience. As Flynn repeatedly states (at https://patflynn.com/), "guest podcasting is the new guest blogging."

Against this backdrop, the first peculiarity of podcasts to emerge compared to more traditional information-cum-promotion genres is the relevance and required presence, not so much of the 'body' of the text (where the narrative/argumentative component resides), but of the intro and outro as two strategic steps fulfilling shared needs and solving common problems by engaging and connecting with the audience – a prominent intent and intrinsic feature of all

social media texts. Another unmistakable feature – especially in non-institutional, privately produced monologic and dialogic podcasts – is the extensive recourse to theatricality and special effects, not just in strictly cinematographic terms, but also in terms of deviations from, and conflation of, generic structure conventions and "Move-step sequencing" (Swales 1990; Tardy and Swales 2014), as discussed below in Sections 4.1 to 4.3. A third aspect, reflecting marketing podcasts'/vodcasts' multimodality and this volume's focus on orality, is the co-patterning of visual/verbal cues and affordances in relation to specific contextual variables (viz. the podcast series' defining features), besides the pedagogic and professional import of best practices emerging from the podcaster's experimenting with this evolving genre and literally 'tuning in' with the audience.

Many models of thematic-functional analysis (e.g. Swales 1990; Van Dijk and Kintsch 1983: 177-206 & 235-242 *et passim*) are based on an analytical and conceptual framework that identifies and organises the various semantic and pragmatic levels interwoven in texts and genres. However, combining generic structure potential analysis and phasal analysis[4] proves to be more useful when segmenting multimodal texts, with their complex orchestration of semiotic resources, into functional units that link instance with type. With its deployment of functions across different macro- and microtextual levels, phasal theory has the important property of allowing greater selectivity while conserving the desired systematic nature of the analysis. Backgrounding the formal differences that podcast series display (e.g. dialogic v. monologic) and instead identifying functional choices (e.g. attention-getter, speaker's intro, self-promotion etc.) in a podcast's various macrophases (intro, goal, outro) permits linkage

---

[4] The notion of "discoursal phase" (and "subphase") is borrowed from Thibault (2000), who in turn derives and adapts it mainly from Gregory (1995). According to Thibault (2000: 325-6), a discoursal phase is "a set of co-patterned semiotic selections that are co-deployed in a consistent way over a given stretch of text […and it therefore constitutes] the basic unit of textual sequencing and, hence, of global or 'macro' level organisation." In Gregory's terms (1995: 71), "phasal description distinguishes, at varying degrees of delicacy, stretches of discourse (continuously or discontinuously manifested) that share ideational, interpersonal, and textual consistency and congruity." Also see Vasta 2001; 2006; Gregory 2002; Baldry and Thibault [2006]2010; 2020. For the GSP of multimodal texts see Bateman 2008; Bowcher and Yameng Liang 2016.

with the predictive properties of GSP's breakdown of podcasts into sequences and helps the analyst to map out the expected and unexpected distributional functional properties of each instance of a genre. From there, it is then possible to map out the typical and atypical patterns that many instances of a genre encapsulate.

3. Corpus building and annotation criteria

For the present purposes, a selection of 30 YouTube podcasts belonging to the three subcorpora described below was investigated for their respective GSP structures, facilitated by online corpus-based annotation and concordancing of individual video sequences using the OpenMWS platform (http://mws.pa.itd.cnr.it/, see Taibi 2020a; 2020b) and undertaken stepwise by: (a) creating spreadsheet files listing the selected podcasts and multimodal transcriptions of each split up into time-based units following a three-tier model: entire podcast, macro- and microsequences; (b) uploading the files to OpenMWS for descriptor-based annotation (Coccetta in press) and searching for patterned data (Taibi 2022; Baldry and Kantz 2022).

Borrowing the text type taxonomy found in the London-Lund Corpus (Svartvik 1990), the first subcorpus, comprising all but two[5] of the first 24 episodes in The Marketing Book Podcast playlist[6] (henceforth, MBP), is made up of single-host, "public prepared orations" in the form of book reviews offered by Douglas Burdett, a former artillery officer, Madison Avenue ad man and stand-up comedian. The second subcorpus, four episodes from the Online Edge playlist[7], is "face-to-face conversation [video] recorded non-surreptitiously" between two youthful American headphone-wearing marketing consultants offering their views on post-Covid strategies and practices to regular and prospective clients while blending playfulness and marketing expertise. Finally, the third mixed subcorpus falls, in Svartvik's terminology, into the category of "public discussions and interviews"; it contains

[5] Excluded for genre-related reasons are Episode 3, a webcast for CEOs, and Episode 4, an invitation to a social event.
[6] PLp1LPp6-g7VPQLIUnK8dEoGYaCFjs6nFs.
[7] PL9g2AW4SeMYrSP4dmUKALI6mDjF8oJ74F.

podcast/vodcast series produced by financial public institutions, media, and educational bodies covering a wide subject range using the well-established format of a studio host interviewing an invited guest. For the present purposes, just two episodes from the Digital Marketing Institute's Ahead of the Game playlist[8], at the time of writing containing 156 episodes, are considered[9].

All 184 podcasts in the MBP subcorpus appear to have been recorded between 2015 and early 2020 and were thus unaffected by the Covid upheaval. Their content, style and context, however, serve as a counterfoil to the other two subcorpora, both reflecting Covid-19's impact on all businesses. Except for the first three (lasting between 3' and 11'), the 22 episodes chosen are under three minutes. The four episodes from the Online Edge subcorpus last between 8'7" and 17'45". Finally, some of the episodes in the Ahead of the Game subcorpus last a couple of hours, but most of the first 100, the two selected included, fall in the 45/55-minute range.

The next step was to annotate each podcast in terms of its GSP (or Move-structure and sequencing) made up of discoursal phases (and subphases), each instantiating a specific configuration of co-patterned selections from diverse semiotic resource systems (Gregory 2002), but viewed multisemiotically at various levels of analytical delicacy (Thibault 2000; Baldry and Thibault ([2006] 2010; 2020). Following Vasta's (2001; 2006) analysis of the GSP of Party Election Broadcasts and Party Political Broadcasts, each move was found to correspond to recurrent textual instances (or rhetorical steps taken in the realisation of the move) *vis-à-vis* the specific contextual configuration and discoursal features of each subcorpus. The main parameters adopted specifically for the annotation and analysis of aural (visual-verbal) delivery, were the interaction's monologic/dialogic nature, the sequentiality/partial overlapping of turn-taking, Call^Response and Question^Answer adjacency pairs, plus the use of: (a) phatic fillers, disfluencies, false starts, buzz words, or other markers of emotional involvement; (b) icons, gestures and facial expressions (plus other multimodal markers – e.g. clothing

---

[8] UUdWKV2YlzIxeVNDzvfbvSxg.
[9] Episode 6: "How Are Brands Coping with Covid-19", about remote working, and Episode 24: "Advice for Your 2021 Job Search", about Covid-19's impact on job hunting.

– of theatricality); (c) affective and organisational affordances of melodies/sound effects.

While listening to podcasts, one is often struck by their theatricality and the significance of overall discourse characteristics which predominate over other meaning-making affordances, such as sound (van Leeuwen 1999; Danielewicz-Betz 2000). Hence the far from secondary focus on the emergence of incongruent, but genre-defining visual-verbal components. Humorous banter, theatricality, non-conformity with discourse norms, all energise marketing podcasts and account for many deviations in expected discourse patterns exemplified in the following section.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Subcorpus A: The Marketing Book Podcast series (by Douglas Burdett) – endorsement and iconicity

FIGURE 1
Episode 8 (2'27") – Strategic Moves and visual-verbal interplay

	MOVE STRUCTURE/ GSP/TYPE	RHETORICAL STEPS/ TEXTUAL REALISATIONS/ INSTANCE	ICONICITY AND REGULAR-ITY OF VISUAL CUES
PHASE 1: INTRO/PITCH (A)^(B)^**C**	(A. ATTENTION GETTER) (embedding general *Problem* for the podcast series' community)	Are you completely *overwhelmed by modern marketing* and don't even know how to get started?	
	(B. STATEMENT OF PODCAST'S OVERALL FUNCTION) (presenting general *Solution*)	*I've got your book*!	
	C. SPEAKER'S INTRO (*identity and discoursal role function*)	Hi. *I'm* Douglas Burdett, *host of* The MBP and *I'd like to tell you about* the book Do It! Marketing […]	

FIGURE 1 (*continued from previous page*)

PHASE 2: PODCAST'S GOAL **D**^(E)	**D. DETAILED EXPLANATION OF SPECIFIC GOAL** (*selecting and prioritising info.* mainly through visual cues)	…some of the book's *big ideas* that particularly resonated *with me. One:* asking when your marketing will lead to a sale […]	
	(E. SOLUTION) (usually through deictics – Show & Tell)	*This* book *will help you navigate* the overwhelming number of options available to companies […]	
PHASE 3: OUTRO/ WRAP-UP **F**^**G**^(H)	**F. OUTRO WRAP-UP: INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCE** to *external source/author* and/or to *other sections of one's own podcast* (cut to black screen)	*To listen to an interview with* (David Newman) *about* (Do it! Marketing) *visit* marketingbook-podcast.com	
	G. SELF-PROMOTION (no soundtrack/ no speaker/fade to black)	*PODCAST NAME & LOGO*	

With its analysis of Episode 8, Figure 1 highlights a prototypical example of the recurrent GSP, with its congruent phase-transition pattern, in Subcorpus A: the insertion of a multimodal element (the advertised book cover and author's picture) marks the shift from Phase 1 Subphase (or Microsequence) 3 (obligatory Move C. Speaker's Intro, in bold) – entextualised as "Hi, I'm Douglas Burdett, host of the MBP and I'd like to tell you about the book (title)" – to the adjacent Subphase (or Microsequence) 1 of Phase 2, providing a detailed presentation of the book and, ultimately, the episode's specific goal. Likewise, the insertion of the MBP's name and logo, immediately after a fade to black in Phase 3 Subphase 1 (obligatory Move F. outro/wrap-up), marks the transition to, and multimodally enacts, the obligatory concluding, self-promotional

Move G, by cross-referencing ("visit marketingbookpodcast.com") to other sources of information (typically, an interview with the author on the MBP website).

TABLE 1

Deviant GSP/Move sequencing in the MBP subcorpus

	PHASE 1: INTRO/PITCH			PHASE 2: GOAL		PHASE 3: OUTRO/WRAP-UP		
	(A)*(B)***C**			**D**^(E)		**F**^**G**^(H)		
PXA01	[C<G^F>]	B	[C<G>]$^\circlearrowleft$	D	E	F	G$^\circlearrowleft$	----
PXA02	C	A	B	G$^\circlearrowleft$	D	F	G$^\circlearrowleft$	----
PXA03	D	E	A	B	[C^D]$^\circlearrowleft$	F	G	----
PXA10	A	C	B	D	E	F	G	----
PXA16	A	C	B	D	E	F	G	----

Legend: The ^ sign indicates a sequence of moves. The * sign indicates sequence reversibility. *Top part:* bold indicates obligatory moves, round brackets optional moves. *Bottom part:* An iterated move/sequence is followed by the sign$^\circlearrowleft$. The co-occurrence of two adjacent moves is indicated by square brackets. An embedded (sequence of) move(s) is marked by angle brackets. Highlighting indicates deviant sequencing.

Table 1 shows the GSP findings for macro- and microsequences in Subcorpus A, the former annotated in terms of macrophase analysis (Baldry and Thibault 2020: 171), the latter in relation to function type (Vasta 2001; 2006). All the episodes respect the three-phase/macrosequence model indicated in the heading (first row) but not the default A-to-G GSP microsequence model (second row). The 17 podcasts (4-9; 11-15; 17-22) that *do* comply with the default GSP (PXA08 included) are omitted.

Figure 2, referred to PXA08, shows one such deviation from default sequencing in the GSP, i.e. an optional Phase 3 Move H, absent elsewhere, in which verbal ("resonated") and aural (sound of siren wailing) cues co-pattern to produce humour. This was the first take of Move D, ruined by ambient noise, whence the iconic picture and humorous sound of a test card. Production costs may have dictated the need to incorporate, and make even more salient, the humorous effect of the verbal-auditory mismatch in the original recording, rather than reshooting the entire episode.

FIGURE 2
Move D (first take) is recontextualised as an "extra" Move H

(H. TRANSITION + CODA) (test card + director's cuts)	…. ideas that particularly *resonated* with me (background *siren wailing*)	

A further two podcasts (PXA10 and 16) instantiate the default model but invert Moves B (optional) and C (obligatory) in Phase 1, thus 'left-dislocating' the Speaker's Intro which atypically precedes, rather than follows, the statement of the podcast's overall function.

The pervasiveness of the obligatory self-promotional Move G is an obvious deviation from the default pattern of instantiation: Phase 1 in the first episode begins congruently with Move C (Speaker's Intro with a visual representation of the podcast series' name and logo), but has no attention-getting Move A, thus underscoring the series' generally sober and highly professional style. A self-promotional move G is anticipated and embedded in Phase 1 as an intertextual reference to external 'authoritative' sources, Forbes and Linkedin, respectively rating the MBP as "one in eleven podcasts that will keep you in the know" and as "one of ten podcasts that will make you a better marketer", thus 'niche-marketing' the series. Such deviant GSP sequencing is justifiable when starting any new series, since experimenting with the genre before finding one's own brand voice is only natural. Indeed, only from Episode 4 does the attention-getting Move A become the recurrent foregrounded move in the intro (Phase 1).

Additionally, in PXA02, besides backgrounding the Attention-getter in favour of the Speaker's Intro, the self-promotional Move G left-dislocates from its congruent position in Phase 3 to Phase 2, while the optional Move E of Phase 2 shifts to Phase 3. Interestingly enough, obligatory Move D in the same episode is a detailed explanation for prospective interviewees of how to carry out a successful podcast interview, which primarily depends on the quality of the audio equipment: Burdett resorts to a range of pseudo-dialogic/oral discourse strategies (Question^(simulated) Answer, free direct speech and quick stories/anecdotes) to create a rapport with listeners

and hold their attention so as to make this "fussy" (in his own words) single-host explanation of the audio quality a central feature in the success of podcasting. As Craig Nolden remarks, "listening to podcasts feels like a one-on-one experience for many consumers"; while vital for podcasting, a captive audience is even more so for the podcast monitoring services that detect market trends, so that already before the advent of Covid-19 we see the tell-tale signs of efforts to construct "[t]his truly authentic relationship that a podcast has with its audience."[10] Efforts to captivate an audience constantly resurface thanks to the theatrical deployment of special effects – for example, in the outro's obligatory Move G, the use of captions, heart icon for *love*, prolonged vowel sounds, slow rhythm and the pleas "please let me know/just let me know."

All this leads to one-off experimentation that is otherwise hard to understand and helps explain why, as stated above, the first three podcasts are longer than the others. PXA03, for example, is incongruous as it partially reverses Phases 1 and 2, dislocating the Phase 2 obligatory Move D (Detailed Explanation of Specific Goal) and optional Move E (Solution) to the marked GSP sequence-initial position, followed by an attention-getter anecdote, and postponing the obligatory Move C (Speaker's Intro) to a later position in the GSP sequence.

[10] "Why Podcasting has survived (and thrived) during COVID-19" https://burrelles.com/why-podcasting-has-survived-and-thrived-during-covid-19, last accessed 1 June 2021.

4.2. Subcorpus B: Online Edge Podcast series (by Lee Shelton and Luke Truetken) – theatricality and buoyancy

FIGURE 3
Episode 9 (17'21") – Strategic Moves and conversationalism

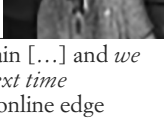|	MOVE STRUCTURE/ GSP/TYPE	RHETORICAL STEPS/ TEXTUAL REALISATIONS/INSTANCE	
PHASE 1: INTRO/PITCH **[A^G]**^(B)^(C)	**A. ATTENTION-GETTER** podcast musical jingle and joke (*setting the entertaining tone*) Conflated with **G. SELF-PROMOTION** (brand voice: *Online Edge* positioning against competitors)	Lee: All right, welcome everybody. […] Thank you, guys, so much for joining us today […] live or […] after this is recorded. *Just kidding we're not live on YouTube. That freaky I don't know* […]. Lee: Well, hey everybody, thank you so much for joining us at the Online Edge podcast, *the only podcast that promises to make 680 quotes 80 quotes over the course of the next six minutes.*	
	(B. STATEMENT OF PODCAST'S OVERALL FUNCTION) (presenting general *Solution*)	Lee: I want to *talk* today *about when retails should start marketing again* and kind of *developing a bit of a strategy about that.*	
	(C. SPEAKERS' INTRO.) (respective discoursal roles/functions)	Lee: *So, walk me through as you put yourself in the mind of somebody* [the business owner]	

FIGURE 3 (*continued from previous page*)

PHASE 2: GOAL **[D^E]**ↄ dialogic	**D. DETAILED EX-PLANATION OF SPECIFIC GOAL** (selecting and pri-oritising *useful info.* through managing Call^Response sequences)	Lee: *Talk to me about some of the stuff* that you would think through before you were to reopen.	
	E. SOLUTION (through involvement strategy – e.g. solidarity 'we'= podcaster/expert + business owner)	Luke: *we should be do*-ing everything possible […] so that as soon as this thing opens up we're *hitting the ground running from day one* Lee: Be listening and the second thing is actually developing a plan	
PHASE 3: OUTRO/ WRAP-UP **F^G^**(H)	**F. OUTRO/WRAP-UP** (thanks & greetings)	(Lee & Luke [over-lapping]: same role/ status) Lee: Hey, *thank you guys* so much for watching this podcast. *Business owners we're pulling [for you]* Luke: [100%]. *You can reach Lee, myself or anybody on the team [24/7]* Lee: [Absolutely].	
	G. SELF-PROMO-TION (embedding Online Edge's mission statement)	Lee: *We are here for you.* […] I think a lot of consumers are gonna be ready to support retail when this takes place and *we want to be part of that success story.*	
	(H. TRANSITION + CODA) podcast musical jingle + credits (logo + related podcasts in the series) + INTERTEXTUAL REF. to contact details	Lee: *So,* thank you again […] and *we will see you next time* Instagram: @youronline edge Facebook: Online Edge LLC	

The case study analysed here is Episode 9 ("Post COVID Marketing Strategies", running time 17'21") in a series featuring two US business partners in their early thirties who run Online Edge LLC, a marketing company that specialises in social media. Committed to "empower[ing] [their] clients to engage their customers at the highest level", they broadcast from an iconic studio whose creative atmosphere is evocative of Mark Zuckerberg's dormitory room. All the episodes offer consultancy on marketing issues "from the perspective of the [business] owner", but are, in the final analysis, a buoyantly theatrical, "synthetically" (i.e. artificially, in Fairclough's 1992 terms) non-specialised performance, which in actual fact vulgarises marketing expertise.

All the episodes are lively face-to-face conversations, made up, as Figure 3 suggests, of seemingly impromptu Call^Response sequences ("walk me through…", "talk to me…") with Lee and Luke acting more like sparring partners (with replies like "100%", "absolutely", etc.) than questioner and respondent. Lee, the initiator and manager of nearly all the conversational exchanges, tends to interpret and reformulate technically ("So you are saying […]") what Luke verbalises in an easy-going, witty and highly entertaining style. Both make extensive use of colloquialisms and phatic fillers ("I was like 'hey'…", "wow", "yeah", "stuff", "I'm like 'oh my gosh'"), buzz words ("freaky") and simulated dialogue ("I called a couple of [clients] just saying 'hey, I think we're getting semi-closed here'"). False starts, disfluencies, and reformulations (mostly uttered by Lee, given his greater contribution) abound ("Yeah so, I mean, here's the good news and the bad news […]"). Because of the primacy of the entertainment component, in itself clearly a form of self-promotion, fast-paced speech delivery at climactic moments is the norm, often combined with giggles and witty retorts by the 'sparring partner' who backs the other up.

Tellingly, in contrast to Subcorpus A where the self-promotional Move G is enacted (in all episodes except the first two) in the outro (Phase 3), in the Online Edge series Move G is foregrounded in the intro (Phase 1) in the form of a Unique Selling Proposition/pitch ("*the only* podcast that promises to…"), entextualising the brand voice. Move G, as reiterated in the outro, has the further function of embodying the company's mission statement ("we want to be part of that [i.e. retailers'] success when they reopen [i.e. after the Covid lockdown]"). Another major difference is that, instead of presenting a common concern/problem which the podcast proposes

to address/solve, the Attention-getter (Move A) in Subcorpus B serves to set the entertaining tone and is almost invariably the *locus* of jokes and witty remarks reinforcing the iconic visual identity and consequent typification (van Leeuwen 2001) of the two podcasters; unlike Burdett, they do not introduce themselves, with typification achieved via cultural attributes (viz. dress and headwear), whose counterpart in the MBP series is Burdett's striped bowtie.

In Subcorpus B, the Problem^Solution sequence (D^E) is instantiated dialogically and reiterated with every new question/topic raised/introduced; thus, unlike Subcorpus A, Move E becomes obligatory, as it realises the response in the Call^Response sequence. Moreover, given the collaborative, carefully studied turn-taking by the two partners in addressing problems and suggesting post-Covid strategies, it is only natural for listeners to witness Call^Response sequences in which the two swap conversational roles.

Yet, as the thumbnails in Figure 3 show, Lee and Luke are visually disconnected, never appearing in the same shot and looking more into the camera than at each other, especially when offering suggestions and illustrating marketing strategies and tactics (Phase 2), or when eliciting viewers' feedback in the outro ("You can reach [us] 24/7", Episode 9; "Drop us a comment", Episode 8; "Give us a shout", Episode 12). They thus show full awareness of the low-cost communicative affordances of the webcam, whose use allows them to promote the podcast series on YouTube and visual social media such as Instagram and Facebook (Crognoli 2020: 158-162).

Unlike Subcorpus A, where they were part of Move F, social media contact details are enacted in Move H, which functions congruently as a coda. Overlapping speech (signalled by square brackets in Figure 3) occurs almost exclusively in the wrap-up Phase of thanking and greeting the audience, when Luke enacts a "change of footing" (Goffman 1981: 128) and aligns himself with Lee's discoursal role as (co-)host. Only in Episode 12 does Luke take on the leading role as primary host and questioner (possibly because Lee might prove a more expert respondent). However, that episode is unique in many respects: for the first and only time Lee wears no cap or T-shirt; there is the only occurrence in the series of a lively musical intermezzo (other than the podcast jingle) signposting the comic transition from Move A to Move G in Phase 1; Lee and Luke are occasionally shot together, though probably only to draw the

viewers' attention to their sponsor, as Revolver Brewery's Blood and Honey American ale beer bottles stand invitingly on the desk.

The GSP structure and sequence identified in Figure 3 for Episode 9 is also the default order (see Table 2 heading, second row) in Episode 12, whereas some minor changes occur in the two deviant episodes indicated in Table 2: in Episode 21, for instance, – which Lee and Luke label "this little bonus clip" –, Move A comes in the form of a wink and a double tongue click, rather than a verbal joke, and Luke's Move C (Speakers' Intro) is idiosyncratically packed with personal anecdotes:

TABLE 2
Deviant GSP/Move sequencing in the Online Edge subcorpus

	PHASE 1: INTRO/PITCH			PHASE 2: GOAL		PHASE 3: OUTRO/WRAP-UP		
	[A^G]^(B)^(C)			[D^E]⌣		F^G^(H)		
PXB08	[G^A]	B	----	D	E	F	G	H
PXB21	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H

Legend: as in Table 1.

4.3. Subcorpus C: Ahead of the Game series (by The Digital Marketing Institute) – segmentation and indexicality

FIGURE 4
Episode 6 (45'45") – Semi-structured audio interview with Chapters

The two episodes selected for the present discussion, produced by the Dublin-based Digital Marketing Institute (DMI), are part of the informative, educationally-oriented Ahead of the Game series, consisting of traditional audio interviews, with a number of regular hosts in a studio interviewing one (or more) invited guest(s). For instance, in Episode 6 (Figure 4), Will Francis interviews Jørgen Helland of Norwegian marketing agency Los & Co., "providing an interesting perspective from Scandinavia and lessons that apply to anyone" about multinational brands' success during Covid-19. The self-promoting (Move G) and educational components are rolled into a written call to action, in the left-hand section of all the episode covers (also exemplified in Figure 4), reading "Get a taste of the real-life digital marketing game and supercharge your skills with incisive insights from industry experts", preceding an oral request to "sign up for free membership at digitalmarketinginstitute.com/aheadofthegame."

Using basic metalanguage ("introduction" and "wrap-up"), labelled visually as the podcast progresses and rendered verbally (e.g., in this episode, through "welcome to…" at 00'15" and "before we go" at 42'22"), the series reveals metadiscursive awareness of the canonical podcast (viz. "public interview" subgenre) conventions and structure schematised in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Congruent GSP/Move sequencing in the Ahead of the Game subcorpus (recurring in all episodes)

PHASE 1: INTRO/PITCH	PHASE 2: GOAL	PHASE 3: OUTRO/WRAP-UP
[(A)<**G** >]^(B)^**C**	[**D^E**]ᵒ	**F^G**

Legend: as in Table 1.

No detailed analysis of this or other episodes need be given, since, with some minor exceptions, the series complies with the GSP illustrated in Table 3, with its recursive Question^Answer/Call^Response sequence (D^E), obligatory Move G typically in Phase 1 and Move B (Podcast's Overall Function) becoming redundant (and hence optional) given its visual salience in the

episode title displayed throughout the podcast. What *is* 'deviant' – though capturing the latent needs of society, at a specific juncture in its history, which drive the emergence of new genres (Miller and Shepherd 2004) – is the fact that all the sequences are visually indexed on a segmented Video Progress Bar, changing from blue to red as the podcast progresses; the sequences correspond to Chapters (a.k.a. "Timestamps") dynamically labelled for content for easier/faster consultation. Made available "during the pandemic when YouTube's traffic was so heavy they were forced to reduce video quality in order to keep streaming to everyone who wanted to watch"[11], this labelling/indexing/sequence-skipping feature is indicative of the tension between the purely aural aspects of podcasts and the extensions introduced by vodcasts; compatible with mobiles, with breaks indicated by haptic buzzes, this feature ought to help marketers produce more user-friendly podcasts, but so far appears to be underused. Conversely, its use throughout the Ahead of the Game and other DMI series exemplifies podcasting/vodcasting adjustments to the needs of genre hybridity and cross-platform adaptability and might have interesting pedagogical applications when it comes to training students in identifying the gist of information in a given Chapter – what in writing one might call "conceptual paragraph" (Trimble 1985: 14-18) –, irrespective of the interviewer's managing and monitoring of the flow of discourse with "satellite" questions and prompts in a given [D^E] sequence.

Besides appearing on the segmented Video Progress Bar, Chapters are also accessible directly from links provided by the Google search engine. Oral communication is thus no longer construed culturally as a once-only form of communication: listeners need not listen to an hour-long podcast in a single instalment but, like an audiobook, can resume listening thus adapting podcasting to personal needs. This is one reason why 'institutional' newspapers and magazines are currently boosting multi-platform mobile podcasting, as epitomised by *The Economist's* The Jab (www.economist.com/podcasts/the-jab-a-new-podcast-from-the-economist), a new podcast introduced for an initial 12-week period in March 2021 and reporting from

---

[11] "Here's How YouTube's New Chapters Feature Will Impact You – For DIY Digital Marketers" https://technologytherapy.com/heres-how-youtubes-new-chapters-feature-will-impact-you-for-diy-digital-marketers/, last accessed 1 June 2021.

the 'sharp end' of the vaccination race. Unlike The Ahead of the Game series, which typically uses visually-indexed Chapters, The Jab instead resorts to traditional music-and-jingle signposting to indicate transitions between discourse phases/macrosequences.

Only time will tell whether the Chapter structure, defining the Ahead of the Game GSP and representing a clear innovation to traditional audiopodcast conventions, will be extended to other DIY-marketing series like those in Subcorpora A and B, or other institutional, media and educational series, like those in Subcorpus C, as a permanent multimodal affordance of the genre.

5. Conclusion

Genres help us fix communication in relation to media and social organisation, and identify changes as new media appear in everyday life (Lüders, Prøitz, Rasmussen 2010: 961).

The present paper cannot claim to have addressed all the multi-faceted issues raised by podcasting as a socio-discursive practice, but it has shown that, form-wise and content-wise, podcasting has been highly sensitive to Covid-19 for sociocultural, technological, and financial reasons. The examples analysed in the corpus have suggested that, although "it is impossible to define the exact point at which a new genre emerges from the old one" (Crowston and Williams 1997: 3), Covid-19 may have triggered such emergence, foreshadowing the birth of a new hybrid genre – the "videopodcast" – characterised, unlike a documentary or narrative, by a restricted number of images, where the visual mode, far from being a mere ancillary embellishment, fulfils a constitutive function providing the buoyancy that enlivens the oral discourse. This is part of a visual-verbal rapport with clients and stakeholders that becomes all the more vital in marketing during crises such as Covid-19, and that must be taken into due account when equipping PR students with an 'armoury' of soft metadiscursive skills to analyse professional discourse and communicate multimodally on the web.

Above and beyond this, a model of analysis has been illustrated which is predictive and repeatable across other subcorpora. The analyses undertaken above show that, as well as identifying typical patternings, systematic sequence-by-sequence analysis identifies irregularities and deviations in these patterns. Both are significant

and, taken together, provide sound evidence about how genres adapt to specific and general social and interactional contexts. In this respect, recent sociological studies on communication during the Covid-19 pandemic show that

in such a strongly participatory environment as the web, the contribution of users [to verify information and remove fake or obsolete news] is essential and […] independent debunking websites have proved much quicker and more effective than public bodies and institutions (Centorrino 2020: 7, my translation),

thus prioritising innovation over conformity. In recent genre-oriented studies investigating Covid-19 communication modes, conversely, there still seems to be an emphasis on forms of discourse "presenting a certain kind of professional identity through […] texts" (Hafner 2021: 14) and thus highlighting generic integrity even when conveying what Bhatia (1995: 1) calls "private intentions within the socially recognized communicative purposes." In keeping with this perspective, Hafner (2021: 14) states that:

genre analysis therefore seeks to draw connections between the formal features of the genres that experts make use of and the ways of thinking and being that underlie them. […] Using particular discursive forms, the scientific experts […] align themselves with the valued ways of thinking and being of their professional discourse communities, even as they write for a lay, public audience.

While the regularities of staged, goal-oriented social processes (Swales 1990) and the consistency of communicative purposes (Bhatia 1993) undeniably remain the primary object of investigation in genre analysis, many scholars (e.g. Fairclough 1992; Sarangi 2011) have long underscored the mixing and colonisation of different "genres [as] inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to conditions of use" (Berkenkotter and Huckin [1995] 2016: 3) and that, "in order to evolve, […] must also allow for the incorporation of novelty, the accommodation of changed constraints, the tweaking of ideology" (Miller and Shepherd 2004: 2-3).

Since podcasting is inherently a relatively unstructured and evolving grassroots phenomenon, the model presented here paves the way for a perspective on Covid discourse that transcends that

of expert discourse or even expert-led vulgarisation of scientific discourse and focuses instead on lay-mediated expert discourse. Future applications of this model might include other grassroots genres, such as focus groups, a common strategy in social marketing practice and health crisis communication well before Covid-19 (e.g. Heinrich and Holmes 2011), but heavily modified by it (Dodds and Hess 2021). It is hoped that, in the new scenario generated by Covid-19, the model presented here, with its capacity to pinpoint deviation, and the propensity of genres in general for innovation and hybridisation, can fruitfully be integrated into a CDA-oriented framework to investigate lay discourse for the ideological bias, intrusion of 'fake news' and manipulative stances that currently pervade and distort scientific information.

References

BALDRY, ANTHONY and KANTZ, DEIRDRE, 2022, "Corpus-assisted Approaches to Online Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Videos", in V. Bonsignori, B. Crawford Camiciottoli and D. Filmer (eds), *Analysing Multimodality in Specialized Discourse*, Vernon Press, Delaware, pp. 1-22.

BALDRY, ANTHONY and THIBAULT, PAUL, [2006] 2010, *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis*, Equinox, London.

BALDRY, ANTHONY and THIBAULT, PAUL, 2020, "Analysis A: A model for multimodal corpus construction of video genres: Phasal analysis and resource integration using OpenMWS", in N. Vasta and A. Baldry (eds), *Multiliteracy Advances and Multimodal Challenges in ELT Environments*, Forum, Udine, pp. 159-173.

BATEMAN, JOHN A., 2008, *Multimodality and Genre*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills.

BERKENKOTTER, CAROL and HUCKIN THOMAS N., [1995] 2016, *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication-Cognition/Culture/Power*, Routledge, London.

BERRY, RICHARD, 2015, "*Serial* and Ten Years of Podcasting", in M. Oliveira and F. Ribeiro (eds), *Radio, Sound and Internet,* University of Minho Press, Braga, pp. 299-309.

BHATIA, VIJAI K., 1993, *Analysing Genre,* Longman, London-New York.

BHATIA, VIJAI K., 1995, "Genre-mixing and in professional communication: The case of 'private intentions' v. 'socially recognised purposes'", in P. Bruthiaux, T. Boswood and B. Bertha (eds), *Explorations in English for Professional Communication*, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, pp. 1-19.

BHATIA, VIJAI K., 1997, "The Power and Politics of Genre", *World Englishes* 16 (3), pp. 359-371.

BHATIA, VIJAI K., 2014, "Analysing Discourse Variation in Professional Contexts", in V.K. Bhatia and S. Bremner (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Professional Communication*, Routledge, New York, pp. 3-12.

BONINI, TIZIANO, 2015, "The 'Second Age' of Podcasting: Reframing podcasting as a new digital mass medium", *Quaderns del CAC* 41 (18), pp. 21-30.

BOWCHER, WENDY L. and YAMENG LIANG, JENNIFER, 2016, "GSP and Multimodal Texts", in W.L. Bowcher and J. Yameng Liang (eds), *Society in Language, Language in Society,* Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 251-274.

CAMBRIA, MARIA VITA, ARIZZI, CRISTINA and COCCETTA, FRANCESCA (eds), 2012, *Web Genres and Web Tools*, Ibis, Pavia.

CENTORRINO, MARCO, 2020, "*Infodemia* e *comdemia*: la comunicazione istituzionale e la sfida del Covid-19", *Humanities*, IX (18), pp. 1-18.

COCCETTA, FRANCESCA, in press, "Multimodal Corpora and Concordancing in Data-driven Learning", in R. Jablonkai and E. Csomai (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Corpora in English Language Teaching and Learning*, Routledge, London.

CROGNALI, DAMIANO, 2020, *Podcast*, ROI Edizioni, Macerata.

CROWSTON, KEVIN and WILLIAMS, MARIE, 1997, "Reproduced and Emergent Genres of Communication on the World-Wide Web", https://genres.syr.edu/sites/crowston.syr.edu/files/7734060030-1.pdf

DANIELEWICZ-BETZ, ANNA, 2000, "Variation in (Silent) Discourse and Music", in E. Ventola (ed.), *Discourse and Community,* Gunther Narr Verlag, Tübingen, pp. 223- 243.

DODDS, SARAH and HESS, ALEXANDRA C., 2021, "Adapting Research Methodology during COVID-19: Lessons for transformative service research", *Journal of Service Management*, 32 (2), pp. 203-217.

DREW, CHRISTOPHER, 2017, "Educational Podcasts: A genre analysis", *E-Learning and Digital Media* 14 (4), pp. 201-211.

FAIRCLOUGH, NORMAN, 1992, *Discourse and Social Change*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

GARZONE, GIULIANA, 2012, "Where Do Web Genres Come from? The Case of Blogs", in S. Campagna, G. Garzone, C. Ilie and E. Rowley-Jolivet (eds), *Evolving Genres in Web-mediated Communication*, Peter Lang, Bern, pp. 217-242.

GOFFMAN, ERVING, 1981, *Forms of Talk*, Blackwell, Oxford.

GREGORY, MICHAEL, 1995, "Generic Expectancies and Discoursal Sur-prise: John Donne's The Good Morrow", in P.H. Fries and M. Gregory

(eds), *Discourse in Society: Systemic Functional Perspectives. Meaning and Choice in Language,* Ablex Publishing Corp., Norwood (NJ), pp. 67-84.

GREGORY, MICHAEL, 2002, "Phasal Analysis within Communication Linguistics", in P. Fries, M. Cummings, D. Lockwood and W. Sprueill (eds), *Relations and Functions in Language and Discourse*, Continuum, London, pp. 316-345.

HAFNER, CHRISTOPH, 2021, "Communicating Expertise in the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Genre Analytical Perspective", in R. Jones (ed.), *Viral Discourse*, C.U.P., Cambridge, pp. 13-18.

HARRIS, HOWARD and PARK, SUNGMIN, 2007, "Educational Usages of Podcasting", *British Journal of Educational Technology* 39, pp. 548-551.

HASAN, RUQAIYA, [1984] 1996, "The Nursery Tale as a Genre", in C. Cloran, D. Butt and G. Williams (eds), *Ways of Saying: Ways of Meaning*, Cassell, London, pp. 51-72.

HEINRICH, NATALIE and HOLMES, BEV, 2011, "Communicating During a Pandemic: Information the Public Wants About the Disease and New Vaccines and Drugs", *Health Promotion Practice* 12 (4), pp. 610-619.

KANE, SEAN P. SHUMAN, MICHAEL, PATEL, KHYATI, OLSON MARGARET, 2019, "Characteristics of Drug-Related Podcasts and This Medium's Potential as a Pharmacy Education Tool", *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 83 (8), pp. 1777-1781.

LÜDERS, MARIKA, PRØITZ, LIN and RASMUSSEN, TERJE, 2010, "Emerging Personal Media Genres", *New Media & Society* 12(6), pp. 947-963.

MERHI, MOHAMMAD I., 2015, "Factors Influencing Higher Education Students to Adopt Podcast", *Computers & Education* 83, pp. 32-43.

MILLER, CAROLYN and SHEPHERD, DAWN, 2004, "Blogging as Social Action", in L. Gurak *et al.* (eds), *Into the Blogosphere,* https://hdl.handle.net/11299/172818, last accessed 9 January 2022.

PETRONI, SANDRA, 2011, *Language in the Multimodal Web Domain*, Legas, New York/Aracne, Roma.

SARANGI, SRIKANT, 2011, "Role Hybridity in Professional Practice", in S. Sarangi, V. Polese and G. Caliendo (eds), *Genre(s) on the Move*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli, pp. 271-296.

SINDONI, MARIA GRAZIA, 2013, *Spoken and Written Discourse in Online Environments: A multimodal approach*, Routledge & CRC Press, London.

SVARTVIK, JAN (ed.), 1990, *The London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English*, L.U.P., Lund.

SWALES, JOHN M., 1990, *Genre Analysis*, C.U.P., Cambridge.

TAIBI, DAVIDE, 2020a, "Analysis D: Shaping Digital Identities through Group Study", in N. Vasta and A. Baldry (eds), *Multiliteracy Advances and Multimodal Challenges in ELT Environments*, Forum, Udine, pp. 190-195.

TAIBI, DAVIDE, 2020b, "Section 7. OpenMWS", in A. Baldry *et al.* (eds), "The MWSWeb Project", *Lingue e Linguaggi* 40, pp. 433-472.

TAIBI, DAVIDE, 2022, "Learning Analytics in Support of Video Corpus Construction and Exploration.", ECEL 2021, pp. 450-459.

TARDY, CHRISTINE and SWALES, JOHN M., 2014, "Genre Analysis", in K. P. Schneider and A. Barron (eds), *Pragmatics of Discourse*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin, pp. 165-187.

THIBAULT, PAUL, 2000, "The Multimodal Transcription of a Television Advertisement", in A. Baldry (ed.), *Multimodality and Multimediality in the Distance Learning Age*, Palladino, Campobasso, pp. 311-384.

TRIMBLE, LOUIS, 1985, *EST. A Discourse Approach*, C.U.P., Cambridge.

VAN DIJK, TEUN A. and KINTSCH, WALTER, 1983, *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension*, Academic Press, New York.

VAN LEEUWEN, THEO, 1999, *Speech, Music, Sound*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

VAN LEEUWEN, THEO, 2001, "Semiotics and Iconography", in T. Van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt (eds), *Handbook of Visual Analysis,* Sage, London, pp. 92-118.

VASTA NICOLETTA, 2001, *Rallying Voters*, Cedam, Padova.

VASTA NICOLETTA (ed.), 2006, *Forms of Promotion*, Pàtron, Bologna.