Borders without Boundaries: Research and Pedagogy in Writing and Discourse

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More than Just Ambulance Drivers: A Genre Struggle for Professional Recognition

Saira Fitzgerald

Abstract
This paper examines the complex application process for self-regulation in Ontario’s system of self-regulated health professions through the lens of rhetorical genre theory, in terms of how this process acts to construct professional status and thus professional identity. The study aims to make visible the struggle that occurs in the genre system that constitutes this application process, as different texts interact and one discourse works to dominate another. Analyzing the particular process undergone by Ontario’s paramedics from the perspective of the application they submitted brings to light hidden values and assumptions embedded in the genres that, together, shape the status and identity of their profession.

Introduction

. . . where you have genuine essential services, for example, in emergency services, I mean, no one wants ambulance drivers or firefighters going out on strike... (NDP MP Peggy Nash, CBC 2013)

This study employs rhetorical genre theory to examine aspects of the construction of professional identity in the discourse of the Ontario system of self-regulated health professions. Drawing on the work of Schryer and Spoel (2005) and Spoel and James (2006), the aim is to bring to light how genres interact in the contested site of the meaning of professionalism as one discourse works to dominate another (Popham, 2005). The site of this struggle is the complex application process health practitioners in Ontario must go through to be granted professional status and thereby become part of the professional health care system. Recently, the Ontario Paramedic Association (OPA) submitted an application to Ontario’s Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC) for regulation under the

* Saira Fitzgerald is a PhD student, School of Linguistics and Language Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario
Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA). This paper focuses on the interaction between texts in the context of the application process, to show the roles these play in the way a health occupation achieves professional legitimacy and thus establishes its professional identity (Spoel & James, 2006).

A number of studies have examined the role of writing and texts in the formation of professional identity. For example, Winsor (1990) examined how writing played a central role in the way engineers created their public image in the texts they produced. Myers (1985) and Tardy (2003) showed how researchers applying for funding shaped their personae according to audience expectations of what is considered appropriate in high-stakes genres such as grant proposals. Other studies have focused on the formation of identity in the health care field, such as that of Spoel and James (2005), which examined the tensions revealed as a newly formed health profession (Ontario’s midwives) tried to reconcile its philosophy with the broader mainstream health care field. In their study of two students in optometry and medicine, Schryer, Lingard and Spafford (2007) showed how the strict formats of institutional genres such students have to learn “embody professional values and are essential to the process of professional identity formation central to health-care professions” (p. 23). Detweiler and Peyton (1999) described the challenges faced by “the so-called ‘allied health’ professions” (p. 413), e.g., nursing, pharmacy, occupational therapy and physical therapy, in seeking to define their professions as distinct from medicine, which has “dominated both socio-political ...and epistemological-discursive...aspects of practice in these fields” (p. 414).

Although these studies provide insight into the way texts shape professional identity in different disciplines, they focus primarily on how identity is constructed or developed within already established professions. What has not been examined to date is the process of obtaining professional status, and how the genre system involved in this process constrains the way professional status can be presented, yet also makes available a site for negotiation over the professional identity constructed in response. The impact of such a genre system is revealed in the way that the OPA application for regulation under the RHPA differs from, and thus works to challenge, the expectations of that system.

By examining how the HPRAC application process for Ontario health professions is coordinated and controlled by the interaction of different genres that
constitute its genre system, this study aims to make visible certain aspects of health care professional identity and status in Ontario in terms of the way the genre system determines the construction of these but, in turn, is itself determined in the process. The interaction of the genres in this system constrains and shapes the way an occupation attempts to establish its professional identity. Analyzing an example that challenges the standard process, due to the current status of the occupation involved, helps to reveal some of the values, beliefs and assumptions embedded in this genre system.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the different types of genres that constitute the system of regulatory applications for health care professions in Ontario, and what functions do they perform?
2. How do these genres interact to determine the process of obtaining professional status for these health professions, and for paramedics in particular?
3. What beliefs, attitudes and values can be discovered by examining the rhetorical moves, and their interaction, in the texts themselves?

Based on the findings of this study, I argue that the interaction between different genres, and the values, beliefs and assumptions these encompass, work together to constrain the way that a health profession constructs its identity in the process of applying for self-regulation. In its response to HPRAC’s requirements, the OPA application reveals the embedded assumptions, yet at the same time presents a construction of “paramedics as professionals” that challenges some of these assumptions.

This paper is divided into five sections. In the first section, I explain the meaning of professional identity in the present context, and provide some background information on the system of regulated health professions in Ontario. In the second section, I present the analytic framework and discuss the theoretical concepts I employed in analyzing my data. In the third section, I describe the methodology, the data collected, and the procedure for doing the analysis. In the fourth section, I discuss my findings. Finally, I suggest some implications of this study and how it might contribute to future research in this area.
What is professional identity?

Although the way practitioners of an occupation view themselves and are viewed by others is an important aspect of the sense of professional identity, this paper focuses on the legal or regulatory sense of “professionalism,” where the onus is on the profession to regulate itself through a formalized structure that governs entrance requirements, specific qualifications, licensing, establishing and maintaining levels of competency and codes of conduct, as well as disciplinary mechanisms and accountability (Schultze, 2007, p. 45-46). In Canada, the earliest self-regulating professions were the military, church, legal, civil service, and medical professions, which “all reflect[ed] a common trait of placing duty above self-interest” (Schultze, 2007, p. 41). Over time, this trait evolved into the notion of “protection of the public”—the primary reason for self-regulation today—based on the idea that, if performed “in a negligent or fraudulent way” (p. 42), certain types of work could be dangerous to the public and therefore require regulation and requirements that are codified in statute. In Ontario, such regulation is seen as a way to make “health professions more publicly accountable, more cost-effective, and more ‘equal’ in their interprofessional standing” (Spoel & James, 2006, p. 171). Professions regulated in this way include doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, and real estate and insurance brokers, among others (Schultze, 2007, p. 41). For these groups, self-regulation through a professional body is considered to be the most effective method of regulation; practitioners are viewed as being in the best position to regulate themselves because they have expert knowledge in their field and are therefore best equipped to determine what constitutes best practice.

The regulatory organization, which for health professions in Ontario is called a “regulatory college,” acts as both gatekeeper to the profession and overseer of its members. Furthermore, tied to this notion of “professionalism” is the idea of title protection, which entails that only those who belong to the professional regulatory organization are allowed to call themselves “lawyers,” “engineers,” “architects,” “doctors,” etc. In applying for self-regulation, then, practitioners are seeking the right to be recognized as, and granted the responsibilities of, a profession. The focus of the present study is on this statutory notion of “professional” rather than on the idea of “professional” as identity and a personal sense of performance. This paper examines how one occupation, the Ontario paramedics, has sought to
achieve this codified, legal status through the necessary process of submitting an application to HPRAC for regulation under the RHPA.

In Ontario, professional identity and legitimacy for health practitioners is determined by regulation under the RHPA (referred to as “supervised self-regulation” by Lahey & Currie, 2005, p. 220). Only through such regulation can a health care “practitioner” become a health care “professional,” permitted to use the protected title of the profession. According to the Federation of Health Regulatory Colleges of Ontario (FHRCO),

The public has the confidence of knowing that only members of the colleges – regulated, highly trained health professionals – can use protected titles such as pharmacist, nurse, physician, massage therapist and dietitian. Only these and other regulated health care professionals are accountable to a regulatory body for the quality of care they provide. (FHRCO, 2013, n.p.)

Once a health care occupation achieves self-regulation, a regulatory college is established whose legal mandate is to protect the public by setting standards for entry to practice and continuing competency, and by ensuring accountability. To date, there are 26 health regulatory colleges in Ontario for nurses, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, physicians, midwives, opticians, dieticians, massage therapists, and Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners and acupuncturists, among others. Each of these professions is legally established by a specific Act of the Ontario Legislature. Obtaining such status allows practitioners to perform on a par with other health care professionals. For example, in the case of the midwives, who had been “virtually excluded as a legally recognized form of healthcare since the late 19th century,” regulation under the RHPA allowed them to become “self-regulated health professionals licensed to provide primary care to women both at home and in institutional contexts” (Spoel & James, 2006, p. 168).

Although paramedics in Ontario are currently highly regulated under the Ambulance Act, 1990 (see Appendix), this does not confer professional status on them. They are not legally or technically considered to be a profession because, unlike the professions mentioned above, they are not regulated under the RHPA. Under their current regulatory system, paramedics act in this role only insofar as they are in the employ of a municipal or regional ambulance service, and are
practising under the authority of the Ontario Base Hospital Group (OBHG), a publicly-funded organization that acts as a regulatory body for Ontario’s paramedics. In this framework, Base Hospital physicians delegate their authority to perform invasive medical procedures (called “controlled acts”) to paramedics:

According to the Federation of Health Regulatory Colleges of Ontario, delegation refers to the process whereby regulated health professional (sic) authorized to perform a controlled procedure under a health professions Act confers that authority to someone – regulated or unregulated – who is not so authorized. (Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council [HPRAC], 2012a, p. 5)

This means that paramedic practitioners are only able to act as paramedics during periods when they are authorized by the Base Hospital physicians, i.e., on-shift with their particular paramedic or ambulance service. Unlike the regulated health professionals, and also lawyers, engineers and architects in Ontario (and other jurisdictions), then, Ontario’s paramedics cease to have status as practitioners when they are off duty. The lack of professional status continues to undermine paramedics’ position in the larger context of Ontario’s health care system, since they remain relegated to the role of a “companion profession to medicine” and are seen more as “technical semiprofessions or medical support services” (Detweiler & Peyto, 1999, p. 413). This state of affairs, combined with the fact that the Ambulance Act also regulates the vehicles that paramedics use (i.e., the ambulances), helps to explain the deeply engrained view of paramedics as simply “ambulance drivers.”

The OPA has been “seek[ing] professional status and protection of the title of ‘paramedic’ for paramedics since 1995” (Ontario Paramedic Association [OPA], 2013, p. 70) because the current regulatory system under the Ambulance Act is seen as limited in terms of patient safety in Ontario in that it “fails to recognize the evolution of paramedics as a unique entity outside the scope of that document” (OPA, 2008, p. 2). Achieving self-regulation under the RHPA and forming a new regulatory College of Paramedics is seen as “the next step in establishing credibility in the health care system and in the public eye” (OPA, 2013, p. 70).
Analytical framework

Applying for something in an institutional context (e.g., university admission, research grant, driver’s licence) often involves completing or filling out an “application form,” which is perceived to be a standard, neutral instrument because it is a single genre used by anyone who wishes to apply, regardless of gender, status, etc. In such institutional domains, an applicant provides the required information with the idea that the application will be judged fairly, impartially, and equitably. However, a broader view of an application form that situates it within the larger genre system of which it is a part (Bazerman, 1994), and thus as more than simply a static individual text, reveals how different genres that interact with one another (Devitt, 1991) are involved in an application process which shapes and is shaped by the communication practices of professional organizations (e.g., Paré & Smart, 1994; Smart, 2003; Yates & Orlikowski, 2002).

In the case of application for regulation under the RHPA, it is important to note that there is no “application form” per se, but rather a set of criteria to which the applicant must respond. Thus, the application itself comes into being in the interaction of the genres in the process, exemplifying the notion that “[g]enre and situation are so linked as to be inseparable…it is genre that determines situation as well as situation that determines genre” (Devitt, 1993, p. 578). What might appear to be a recognizably stable genre is thus revealed to be fluid and dynamic.

In analyzing the relationship between the texts and the multi-stage HPRAC application process, in addition to Miller’s (1984) key concept of genres as social action, I employed Bazerman’s (1994) concept of genre system to interpret the application process as a whole, and Devitt’s (1991) concept of genre set as a way to understand the application package produced by one participant in the system, namely, HPRAC. Under these concepts, texts cannot be understood in isolation but only in relation to the other texts with which they interact. As described by Bazerman (1994), such texts form a genre system, which involves interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings. Only a limited range of genres may appropriately follow upon another in particular settings, because the success conditions of the actions of each require various states of affairs to exist….The intervention of each of the follow-up genres…will have consequences for other genres…to follow. (p. 82)
Combining Bazerman's and Devitt's concepts of genre system and genre set suggests that genres tend to be sequenced in a hierarchical order, depend on the actions of the previous text(s), and have consequences for the texts that follow, all of which is evident in the OPA application, as will be shown below.

Another important element of this analysis was Giltrow's (2002) concept of metagenre, which she uses to describe a genre such as institutional guidelines: “a kind of pre-emptive feedback, guidelines are written regulations for the production of a genre, ruling out some kinds of expression, endorsing others” (p. 190). Within the genre set of HPRAC’s application package is a key text, the Criteria and Process guide, which controls both the submitted application and the process as a whole. In doing so, it acts as a metagenre in the way it “implicate[s] writers in the struggles and conflicts of institutional systems” (Giltrow, 2002, p. 191).

A further concept used in the present analysis comes from Paré’s (2002) discussion of the ideology that often gets hidden by the way institutional genre systems work. In their “automatic, ritual unfolding” (p. 59), such systems appear “normal” and “inevitable” and, by obscuring the values and attitudes embedded within them, the genres present a “common sense” view that is rarely questioned. The hierarchical nature of texts is hidden, as is the struggle that takes place when one discourse works to dominate another. The interaction between HPRAC’s “normal” application requirements and the OPA’s response to these brings to light this struggle for dominance.

This combination of concepts provides a valuable lens through which to understand how such an application process involves a much more complex network of interaction than might be understood from the notion of an application text generated by a single, static application form.

**Methodology**

The texts I selected for this study form the key texts of the application process for self-regulation as set out by HPRAC. These texts evince the expected sequence of events in that each text performs an important function that makes it possible for the next stage in the process to take place. At the same time, these texts interact with one another and control the kind of information that is expected and considered acceptable. Another reason I chose these texts was that each is
referred to on the HPRAC website in its delineation of the application process; several are posted there in the interest of transparency. Thus, access to most of the data posed no difficulty. However, four texts (the Minister’s letter to HPRAC, HPRAC’s letter to the OPA, the HPRAC Application Guide, and the Timeline document) are not available on HPRAC’s website; copies of these were obtained from a specialist informant, with the approval of the OPA.

**Data collected for analysis (as listed on the HPRAC website)**

The data collected for this study consisted of several documents. I divided these texts into four groups (A-D, as shown in Table 1) according to the actor involved. The four groups of texts that formed my data set were then analyzed to determine the functions they performed in the application process, how they interacted and shaped the responses of other texts, and what values and assumptions could be uncovered through a close examination of the rhetorical moves embedded in the texts themselves. In addition to the analysis of these documents, I obtained important supporting information from oral interviews with a specialist informant who had played a key role in developing the OPA application. These conversations helped me to navigate through unfamiliar terminology, and also guided me through the extremely complex process of Ontario health profession regulation in general, and the paramedics’ process in particular.

**Table 1: Documents collected for this study**

| A. Minister’s letter to HPRAC |
| B. HPRAC application package, consisting of the following: |
| (i) HPRAC letter to OPA; |
| (ii) HPRAC Criteria and Process Guide; |
| (iii) HPRAC Application Guide; |
| (iv) HPRAC Timeline document; |
| (v) HPRAC Literature review part I & part II; |
| (vi) HPRAC Jurisdictional review; |
| (vii) HPRAC Jurisprudence review; |
| (viii) HPRAC Backgrounder |
| C. OPA Application |
| D. HPRAC Stakeholder feedback: Part I (survey); Part II (non-survey) |
Findings

The results of this study show how the genres that enact the application process for Ontario health professions are closely intertwined, such that no individual text can stand on its own. Each text makes sense only in relation to other texts in the genre system. In the way these texts work together in this complex network of interaction, the impact this genre system has on Ontario paramedics becomes evident as they attempt to define their place as a distinct health care profession in the genre for which they are responsible, namely, the OPA application. An analysis of the controlling metagenre discourse, as found in the *Criteria and Process* document, reveals the values and assumptions embedded in the application process that present another layer of discourse the OPA has to navigate in order to present its case in an accurate light. This study makes visible the contest over professional identity for paramedics through the analysis of (i) the genre system that constitutes the process of professionalization; (ii) the interaction of genres in shaping paramedic professional identity; and (iii) the values, beliefs and attitudes made evident by (i) and (ii).

Application process as genre system

According to the HPRAC website, “[t]he Minister of Health and Long-Term Care relies on recommendations from HPRAC as an independent source of evidence-informed advice in the formulation of policy in relation to health professional regulation in Ontario” (HPRAC, 2013a, n.p.). The multi-stage application process is initiated when HPRAC receives a directive in the form of a letter from the Minister (*Data set A*). This letter instructs HPRAC to conduct a review of a particular health care occupation with a view to advising the Minister on whether it should be regulated under the RHPA. In the next stage of the process, HPRAC sends an application package consisting of eight items to the potential applicant (*Data set B*). The applicant then develops an application that seeks to respond to all the requirements stipulated by HPRAC, and submits the completed application according to the timeline stipulated by HPRAC (*Data set C*), based on a deadline issued by the Minister. Upon receipt of the completed application, HPRAC gathers information and views from all stakeholder groups, such as “key health care practitioners, other affected health care professionals, clients and patients, advocates and regulators” (HPRAC, 2013b, n.p.) (*Data set D*). Once all the information has
been gathered according to the timeline, HPRAC “carefully consider[s] all evidence gathered to develop recommendations...[which] are advisory only. The Minister is not bound to accept HPRAC's advice” (HPRAC, 2013a, n.p.). The texts listed above (A-D) thus represent the sequence of steps that is expected to occur once the application process is triggered by the Minister’s letter to HPRAC. HPRAC’s website presentation of the application process, one applicable to any occupation applying for self-regulation, presents a simple linear sequence that helps to emphasize the impartial, equitable and fair nature of the advisory body.

However, as described by Bazerman (1994) and Tardy (2003) with reference to patents and grant proposals, since genre systems involve multiple actors, a great deal of interaction may have taken place before an applicant even gets to the stage of submitting an application. Similarly, Spoel and James (2006) note that although legislation regulating midwifery in Ontario was passed in 1991, this “occurred following nearly a decade of arduous lobbying and intense public debate on the issue” (p. 169). In the case of the paramedics, the Minister’s letter that ostensibly began the application process was sent to HPRAC on March 26, 2010, but the resulting application package was sent to the OPA more than two years later, on November 2, 2012. And, as mentioned previously, self-regulation of the paramedics under the RHPA has been an issue for the OPA since 1995. These events provide a very different view of the timeline, one that emerges when the texts of all the actors are considered in relation to one another.

In his study of the communication strategy at a large bank, Smart (2003) questioned the term “transparency” and argued that its use in political and corporate discourse has made it somewhat suspect (p. 30). Similarly, although HPRAC posts documents on its website to “ensure transparency,” the neat, linear and dateless version this presents is different from the way events actually transpired in the case of the OPA application. One example of this dissonance is that the HPRAC website states that the application package is sent when a referral is received from the Minister, which suggests almost immediate action rather than something that might occur more than two years later. It also states that the application package sent consisted of the eight items listed above (Data set B). In fact, only four of the listed items were sent; HPRAC’s letter instructed the OPA to begin its application without waiting for HPRAC to complete and provide the remaining
items (HPRAC, 2012b). Understanding how the genre system coordinates the interaction through “expectations, content, form, participants, time and place” (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002, p. 104) is only possible through analysis of the interaction of the different texts that make up the genre system of the application process. When the remaining documents of the application package did not arrive, the OPA had to send a letter to HPRAC (M. Fitzgerald, personal communication, October, 2013). This delay resulted in a change to the timeframe contained in one of the primary documents in the genre set of the HPRAC application package, which shows one aspect of the fluid and dynamic nature of the application process.

Hierarchy of texts

As set out in HPRAC’s letter to the OPA, three documents were included in the application package: (i) Application form (sic); (ii) Criteria and Process for Regulation of a New Health Profession under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 and (iii) Timelines. The remaining items (i.e., the literature reviews, jurisdictional review, and jurisprudence review – the backgrounder is not mentioned), this letter indicated, would be posted on the HPRAC website when completed and the OPA would be notified. This suggests a clear hierarchy of texts (Beaufort, 2000) within this genre set, although no such distinction is evident from HPRAC’s website. The initial documents sent to the OPA so that it could begin work on its application are clearly more important to the process than the supplementary research documents. Within this group of three texts, the Criteria and Process document is the most important, and is referred to in the Application Guide in a way that indicates its importance:

A profession requesting regulation under the RHPA will be assessed according to the process outlined in the accompanying Criteria and Process document. As such, professions seeking regulation are strongly encouraged to address the questions and follow the format of the Criteria and Process document when preparing a submission to Council. (HPRAC, 2012c, p. 1)

The Criteria and Process document is the metagenre (Giltrow, 2002) of the application process, authoritatively directing and framing the writing of the application by controlling the kind of information required and the types of evidence considered valid, and setting out all of the conditions that must be met in
order for an application to be assessed. This contrasts with the Application Guide, which simply sets out the requirements for the format of the application, e.g., maximum length of 80 pages, main body not to exceed 40 pages, no more than 40 pages of appendices, arial font, 12 point, single-spaced. The various criteria specified in the Criteria and Process document determine and shape the substance of the application. Its authority is evidenced in the table of contents of the OPA application, which mirrors the sequence of topics found in the Criteria and Process document. By responding to and replicating this “normal, even inevitable” (Paré, 2002, p. 59) procedure, the power and authority of the metagenre is reinforced. It is important to note that although the Criteria and Process document appears to be stable in its position of authority, it is “continuously updated to keep pace with the evolving health professions regulatory and health system landscape in Ontario” (HPRAC, 2012c, p. 2), an aspect that adds yet another level of fluidity to the application process.

When such institutional genres are presented as objective and neutral, in being equally applicable to all, their ideology is masked by convention, i.e., the acceptable and expected way of proceeding. Yet, as Paré (2002) argues, a “genre’s illusion of normalcy may be cracked or exposed at certain moments: when an event occurs that does not match the anticipated, socially constructed exigence to which the genre responds” (p. 61). In the case of the OPA application, such cracks became evident in the way the presuppositions and discourse of the HPRAC criteria collided with the existing structure of paramedic practice in Ontario. By controlling the kind of information considered permissible, the application process ensured that other information which did not fit the framework was disallowed. In other words, there was no room in this discourse for other possibilities to be presented, such as the unique case of the paramedics in Ontario. This is particularly evident in the way the HPRAC criteria frame the requirements, which presuppose that an occupation applying for regulation under the RHPA is new and, therefore, as yet unregulated.

**HPRAC’s Criteria and Process document**

The Criteria and Process document (referred to as a “Guide” on the HPRAC website) is the key document which controls the entire application process. It is a highly prescriptive document that consists of 17 pages of text to detail a 40-page
application. It is a generic text, not one produced specifically for the OPA application (as is evident from the title page), and is the standard text sent to all organizations applying for self-regulation under the RHPA. In contrast, the title of the Application Guide is specific (Regulation of Paramedics and Emergency Medical Attendants under the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA), 1991: Application Guide), although its contents are equally generic. The Criteria and Process document outlines HPRAC’s mandate at the beginning of the document, where it states that HPRAC’s advice to the Minister includes the following: “Whether unregulated health professions should be regulated; whether regulated health professions should no longer be regulated” (p. 1). In this context, “regulated” means (self-) regulated under the RHPA. For paramedics, however, neither of these two categories applies; although regulated under the Ambulance Act, 1990, they are not considered regulated in the sense HPRAC intends. Yet they cannot properly be considered as “unregulated” either.

A look at the HPRAC website shows a uniform process, incorporating the same values regardless of the occupation under consideration (e.g., dental assistants, paramedics, or diagnostic sonographers). The sense of objectivity and neutrality is further reiterated on the HPRAC website, and in the Criteria and Process document itself:

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care relies on recommendations from HPRAC as an independent source of evidence-informed advice in the formulation of policy in relation to health professional regulation in Ontario. In providing its advice and preparing its recommendations, HPRAC is independent of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the regulated health colleges, regulated health professional and provider associations, and stakeholders who have an interest in issues on which it provides advice. This ensures that HPRAC is free from constraining alliances and conflict of interest, and is able to carry out its activities in a fair and unbiased manner. (HPRAC, 2012d, p. 1)

This explicit and repeated affirmation becomes a bit less firm when the paramedics enter the picture because, in the way they fail to fit into the prescribed categories, and thus in the way the OPA application fails to accord with the assumptions of the genre system, the presuppositions of HPRAC’s documents...
and process are brought to light. In trying to present its case within this very restrictive framework, the OPA application works to subvert the requirements of the HPRAC *Criteria and Process* document by making those assumptions and presuppositions visible.

The assumption that the applicant is an unregulated occupation is further exemplified in the methodology HPRAC uses to determine whether or not to recommend a health occupation for regulation. Although in this process there is no application “form” such as one might expect with a grant proposal or a driver’s licence, the *Criteria and Process* document lays out in specific terms how and with what kind of information the applicant must respond. Again, the generic nature of this process is reiterated: “All proposals for regulating new professions under the RHPA will be assessed against the following criteria” (p. 2). These criteria are presented hierarchically: (i) the Primary Criterion (risk of harm), which has 13 points and subpoints that need to be addressed; and (ii) seven Secondary Criteria, each with no less than five subsections further divided into discrete points. Although both parts are given equal weight, the Primary Criterion must be met in order for the Secondary Criteria to be considered. To move forward in the process, the application must satisfy both parts. I will discuss the metagenre functions of each in turn.

**Metagenre function: Primary criterion**

The criteria that arise from the presupposition that the new profession is as yet unregulated require the applicant to frame its response accordingly. This posed a problem for the OPA application from the outset since paramedics in Ontario are not unregulated. The Primary Criterion requires that the “applicant must demonstrate with evidence that there is a risk of harm to the public” (HPRAC, 2012c, p. 2). Only by meeting the “risk of harm threshold” will the applicant be considered in terms of the Secondary Criteria. Point 5 states: “Explain the extent to which public safety is at risk because the profession remains unregulated” and Point 6 states: “Explain the anticipated effect of regulation on the current risk of harm presented by the profession” (p. 5). Again, the assumption here is that the applicant is an unregulated health occupation that needs to demonstrate the risk of harm in its practice which would justify regulation under the RHPA to protect the public. However, for the paramedics, presenting evidence that would satisfy the...
Primary Criterion was problematic, as the current system of regulation in fact works to minimize such risk of harm. In their response to this requirement, then, they were forced to employ hypothetical arguments: “Licensed paramedics in Ontario are not unregulated, but are regulated under the Ambulance Act, precisely because the medical care they provide poses a risk of harm to patients” (OPA, 2013, p. 12). As stated, there appears to be no room within the discourse of the application, as defined by the metagenre, to present a nuanced response to the Primary Criterion.

Furthermore, there is a problem in terms of providing evidence to support the risk of harm criterion. Since it is not a professional regulatory body, the “OPA has no jurisdiction to receive or act on complaints” (OPA, 2013, p. 13), which is the responsibility of other parties in the complex system that regulates the paramedics at present. So in trying to satisfy the requirements stipulated by the Criteria and Process document, the OPA faces a continual struggle with the dominant discourse of the metagenre, which imposes categories that do not apply to paramedics. Throughout the application, the OPA’s struggle to discursively establish paramedics as professionals against the assumptions that the occupation applying for regulation is, as yet, unregulated is evident. The interaction between the OPA application and the Criteria and Process document reveals an interesting aspect of the HPRAC process which is not visible under normal circumstances.

A struggle for dominance is revealed between the two discourses. On the one hand, the HPRAC metagenre defines the terms of engagement, in terms of not only the content, but also the form. On the other, the OPA attempts to shape its response within these confines. In the limited space it has, the OPA strives to reposition paramedics by redefining the intent of the application as a “transformation of the existing regulatory system for paramedics, rather than the introduction of such a system” (OPA, 2013, p. 2). As Smart (2003) points out in his discussion of organizational genres, there is room for “individual agency and collective innovation” within the “discursive recurrence and stability associated with genres” (p. 15). In its response, then, the OPA reformulates the discourse to present its position in a more accurate light than HPRAC’s criteria allow for, in order to get its message across within the strict boundaries of the application, while at the same time fulfilling the expectations of the reader (Paré & Smart, 1994).
Metagenre function: Secondary criteria

If the application moves to the next stage, it is then assessed against seven Secondary Criteria: (i) professional autonomy (6 questions); (ii) educational requirements for entry (5 questions with multiple parts); (iii) body of knowledge and scope of practice (8 questions with #8 having 7 parts); (iv) economic impact of regulation (5 multi-part questions); (v) regulatory mechanisms (6 questions); (vi) leadership (10 questions); and (vii) health system impact (5 subtopics, each with multiple part questions). All of these “have equal weight” and “are not intended to provide a barrier for a profession that meets the primary criteria (sic) to prevent regulation under the RHPA” (HPRAC, 2012c, p. 3). Each answer must be supported by evidence, as defined in the appendix under “What is Evidence?”, in terms of three categories: (i) research (empirical evidence, analytic studies, case control studies, time series analyses, anecdotal, qualitative studies, before and after studies, surveys); (ii) knowledge and information (expert knowledge, grey literature); and (iii) economics (financial stability), with further explanations about each. All this information must be presented in no more than 40 pages.

Although the criteria detailed in the Criteria and Process document are presented as fair and impartial in that they apply to all applicants, and the hierarchy is presented as being strictly between the Primary Criterion and the Secondary Criteria, the paramedics’ unique position as an already regulated occupation highlights a possible hidden hierarchy embedded in HPRAC’s questions. The key point for the OPA application has to do with “regulatory mechanisms” (the fifth of the Secondary Criteria). Keeping in mind the gatekeeping function of the Primary Criterion, and the number of questions in the Secondary Criteria, it would appear that HPRAC accords this issue a low position on the list despite adverting to “equal weight” for all Secondary Criteria. This seems to be reflected in the OPA application, in which 17 out of 45 pages (38%) are devoted to the Primary Criterion and only two pages to “regulatory mechanisms.” However, to bring their main point to the forefront within the strictures of the HPRAC requirements, the OPA application in fact focuses right from the start on the regulatory system: “it is essential to recognize that ‘licensed’ paramedics…in Ontario are not currently unregulated” (OPA Application, p. 1), and includes a diagram of the “Current Regulatory System” (p. 15) in the Primary Criterion section (see Appendix). Arguably, this shows how
the OPA application, while appearing to conform strictly to HPRAC’s requirements, in fact seeks to subvert the control of the metagenre.

**Vested interests**

An important part of the HPRAC application process is the stakeholder consultation that takes place after an application has been submitted. According to its website,

HPRAC attempts to understand all perspectives on an issue including those of key health care practitioners, other affected health care professionals, clients and patients, advocates and regulators. Each issue proceeds through a multi-stage process where information and responses are requested from and shared with stakeholders. (HPRAC, 2013b)

HPRAC further states that to ensure transparency, stakeholder comments are posted on their website. Again, this process appears to be fair and unbiased in pertaining to all applicants and in seeking to gather as much information as possible from as many perspectives as possible, in order to arrive at a truly well-informed recommendation. However, what is not evident from the stakeholder submissions with respect to the paramedics, and only comes to light in relation to the OPA application, is the vested interest of some of these stakeholders.

The Ontario Base Hospital Group (OBHG) and affiliated organizations\(^1\) provided six out of the twelve organizational non-survey submissions (one survey submission was also provided by one of the OBHG members), all of which recommended against regulation of paramedics under the RHPA. In their feedback, the OBHG states that they “fundamentally disagree with much of the OPA application” and “cannot support the OPA application in its current form” (HPRAC, 2013c, pp. 27-30), although it also claims that the “Ontario Base Hospital Group supports the concept of self-regulation for paramedics” and that they “are very willing to nurture this process” (p. 30). However, nowhere in the HPRAC process or in the collection of stakeholder submissions is it made clear that the Ontario Base

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\(^1\) College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, Health Sciences North, Northeastern Ontario Prehospital Care Program, LHIN Leads for Emergency Medicine of Ontario, Ontario Hospital Association, Ontario Medical Association.
Hospital Group is one of the current regulatory bodies overseeing the paramedics, and as such may be resistant to a reduction in its authority.2

The power of physicians over other health care fields has been discussed by a number of researchers. Detweiler and Peyton (1999) note that “history makes plain how difficult...self-constitution can be for those fields whose practice is in any way affiliated with that of physicians” (p. 414). Spoel and James (2006) state that while the “[Ontario Medical Association]...acknowledges that the existing health-care system does not adequately meet 'the changing needs of women,'...it vehemently disagrees with the view that introducing the midwifery profession is the way to solve this problem” (p. 176). The response of the OBHG to the OPA application seems to echo such sentiments, but in this case the difference is that, when understood as part of the current regulatory system for paramedics, their bias appears much more explicit. But this is only made visible through the OPA application itself; there is no room in the HPRAC process for any indication of such status. This vested interest is further revealed in the January 28, 2012 letter from the OBHG to the OPA, included in the OPA application, which states that they were unable to provide the information required for the OPA to complete its application—information, it is notable, highly relevant to meeting the Primary Criterion (OPA, 2013, p. 78). Nevertheless, according to the stakeholder submission under its own title, the OBHG communicated with HPRAC six times from March 12 to July 7, 2013. Once again, because of paramedics’ unique position, the OPA application allows us to see hidden values, assumptions, and in this case, vested interest in a process that is presented as being open, impartial and fair.

**Conclusion**

This paper has examined particular aspects of the complex process of Ontario’s system of self-regulated health professions through the lens of rhetorical genre theory, to bring to light how professional identity is constructed in the discourse of the application process. The study aimed to make visible the struggle that occurs in the genre system, as different texts interact and one discourse works to dominate another. This struggle also highlights hidden values and assumptions embedded in the different genres, which together shape the identity

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2 The other is the MOHLTC Emergency Health Services Branch, which did not provide a stakeholder submission.
of a health profession. Although the HPRAC process is presented as standard and neutral, applicable to any health occupation, the unique position of Ontario paramedics and the OPA’s resultant response to the standard requirements bring into relief the values and assumptions hidden in the process. By analyzing the interaction of the genre system as a whole, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the impact this complex network of interaction has on a group of health practitioners in Ontario.

A number of professional writing scholars whose research has involved analysis of health care discourse have commented on the value of such interdisciplinary collaboration, and have called for more such studies (e.g., Popham, 2005; Schryer & Spoel, 2005; Spoel & James, 2006). Specifically, they have discussed the benefit of genre theory in understanding and highlighting “larger institutional and ideological dimensions of health professions” (Schryer & Spoel, 2005, p. 270) through a study of the discourse and genre systems involved. In each case, the emphasis has revolved around issues of “professionalization and professional identity [which] hold central importance in health-care domains” (Schryer & Spoel, 2005, p. 270). Spoel and James’s (2006) study on the challenges faced by the midwives in Ontario proved to be of great use to this new profession in formulating its policy documents to take into account discrepancies and tensions highlighted in the research.

Although the present study is limited in scope, and focusses on just a few aspects of a complex process, it contributes to this ongoing body of research by highlighting issues around values and assumptions embedded in this process. There are many other aspects that could benefit from future research. For example, a close textual analysis of the language used in the documents would provide greater insight into issues of power in discourse. This study might also prove to be useful for the paramedics in Ontario. Although in its final report to the Minister, HPRAC recommended that Ontario paramedics “not be regulated under the RHPA because the application did not meet our primary criterion threshold for risk of harm” (HPRAC, 2014, p. 2), to date, no decision has been made by the Minister. Instead, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care [MOHLTC] has offered stakeholders an opportunity to comment on HPRAC’s recommendation (MOHLTC, 2014, n.p.). Furthermore, this research may be helpful to paramedics in
other jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere who are likely to embark on their own process toward self-regulation in the future. Finally, agencies such as HPRAC might find the analysis reported in this study useful in terms of understanding the limitations of their own processes.

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References


Obesity, Responsibility and Knowledge Translation: A Multimodal, Genre-Based Analysis of *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*

Christen Rachul

**Abstract**

*Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide* (CFG) serves as Canada’s official nutrition guidelines that are, in part, intended to address rising rates of obesity and chronic diseases. This study investigates the rhetorical and multimodal (e.g., text, graphics, charts) presentation of nutrition information in the CFG, how the CFG either enables or constrains health-related choices and actions made by Canadians, and whether the CFG addresses the needs of a diverse Canadian population. Rhetorical Genre Studies (e.g., Schryer & Spoel, 2005) and Multimodal Analysis (e.g., Norris, 2012) provide a theoretical framework for this study that includes a thematic and readability analysis of the 2007 version of the CFG and a survey of 80 university students. Results show that the CFG draws on readers’ prior knowledge of scientific genres and inconsistencies in the readability of the CFG call the intended audience for the CFG into question.

This paper presents the results of a pilot study that takes a writing studies perspective on the topic of obesity, knowledge translation and health policy and promotion. Specifically, the study looks at Canada’s official nutrition guidelines, *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide* (CFG) (Health Canada, 2007a), and explores how the translation of scientific knowledge about nutrition in the CFG either helps or hinders Canadians’ abilities to make healthier choices. It also addresses how the writing and reading process might also contribute to Canadians’ abilities to act on nutrition guidelines. Recently, writing scholars have explored the ways in which writing functions in healthcare and medical contexts (e.g., Schryer, McDougall, Tait, & Lingard, 2012; Schryer & Spoel, 2005; Spoel,

* Christen Rachul is a PhD candidate in the School of Linguistics and Language Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa.
Mckenzie, James & Hobberlin, 2013) by taking a socio-rhetorical approach to studying written discourse. This approach views written discourses as enabling and constraining actions that both writers and readers can make. Structured social contexts, from this perspective, provide writers with certain rhetorical choices, and these rhetorical choices affect how readers respond to written text and the ways in which readers understand and take up the text. Building on previous research on written discourses in health and medical contexts, the study is a pilot project for a large-scale examination of a public health context where health policy and health promotion initiatives play important roles.

**Background**

Obesity has been labeled an “epidemic” in Canada (e.g., Starky, 2005). The prevalence of obesity raises concern mostly because obesity is considered a factor in the development of many chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and even some forms of cancer (Janssen, 2013). The causes of obesity are complex and include biological and genetic factors, but there are also social, environmental, and psychological factors as well (Vandenbroeck, Goossens, & Clemens, 2007). This so-called epidemic has a significant impact on not just the lives of people who are living with obesity and chronic disease, but also the healthcare system and the economy (Anis et al., 2010).

While there has been a long debate in Canada about who is responsible for addressing the rising rates of obesity and chronic disease (see, e.g., Freedhoff et al., 2012), it is becoming more widely recognized that the solution to these problems involves individuals making healthier lifestyle choices but also that there are more systemic issues, such as food insecurity (Papan & Clow, 2012) and the built environment (Pouliou & Elliott, 2010), that all levels of government, the food industry, and the healthcare and education systems also need to address. The federal government appears to view part of its role in addressing the problem as one of creating policies and health promotion initiatives that enable Canadians to make healthier choices (e.g., PHAC, 2010). The CFG is one of the federal government’s initiatives intended to help individuals make healthier lifestyle choices.

The CFG has a history dating back to 1942, but in its current form, which was revised in 2007 along with the development of an interactive companion website, takes an “evidence-based” approach to presenting recommendations for a
complete diet for Canadians with a focus on the prevention of chronic disease, including obesity (Health Canada, 2007b). The official name of the nutrition guidelines has changed several times throughout the CFG’s history, and the 2007 revision was named *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*. As of the 2007 revision, the nutrition guidelines also now include recommendations based on age and sex.

The CFG has garnered considerable attention from scientists, health professionals, the media, and the Canadian public since the publication of the 2007 revised version. Given the significant role that the CFG plays in Canadian society, it is important to understand its efficacy in promoting the nutritional health of Canadians. The pilot study presented here investigates how a healthy diet is presented in the CFG, how the CFG either enables or constrains health-related choices and actions made by Canadians, and whether the CFG addresses the needs of a diverse Canadian population.

**Theoretical Framework**

The pilot study was conducted within the theoretical framework provided by Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) and Multimodal Analysis. Drawing on concepts from RGS, the CFG is viewed as a text-mediated social action (e.g., Miller, 1984). RGS scholars view writing as having a dialectical relationship between text and context, where the form and function of a text is influenced by the social context, and at the same time, the social context is created or reproduced through the writing, reading, and use of this text. It is within this dialectical relationship that texts become typified, exhibiting similar features and structures, as they respond to socially constructed situations or needs. In RGS, these typified texts, called genres, are defined as typified actions and recurrent situations that are both shaped by and shape or reproduce social contexts (e.g., Bawarshi, 2000; Paré & Smart, 1994). Genres are “stabilized-for-now” (Schryer, 1993, p. 208) sites of ideological actions and rhetorical strategies, and a genre’s meaning lies within the context and the exigence, or a community’s perceived need, from which it arose (Miller, 1984).

The study draws on several important concepts from RGS. The first concept is Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of addressivity. Bakhtin asserted that an utterance is always a response to previous utterances and directed towards a future response. According to Bakhtin, utterances form relatively stable forms, or genres, within
particular social situations and it is through perceived similar situations that meaning is created and a listener, or reader, is capable of understanding an utterance. The second concept is antecedent genre knowledge, or prior experience with or knowledge of genres (e.g., Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Jamieson, 1975; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011). Writers and readers alike bring antecedent genre knowledge to new situations, which can influence the production and uptake of a genre. This concept can help explain how readers can (or cannot) interpret, understand, and make use of the CFG. Finally, the notion of uptake elucidates how readers respond to the CFG and whether or not they know how to act on (Freadman, 1994, 2002) the nutrition information presented in the CFG. For the purposes of this study, uptake refers to subsequent actions and responses and is not limited to uptake through other written genres.

In addition to RGS, Multimodal Analysis (e.g., Jewitt, 2009; Norris, 2012) is also included in the theoretical framework. Like RGS, Multimodal Analysis views discourse as situated, but accounts for the multiple modes of communication in a given situation that contribute to meaning-making, as well as the relationships among these communicative modes, not just the text. A multimodal analysis of the CFG is appropriate since the document includes pictures and diagrams in addition to text. An analysis of only text in the CFG would not yield any comprehensible or useful results, and the same goes with an analysis that would only consider the pictures without the text, since both modes can only be fully understood if analyzed together (Norris, 2009).

Pilot Study

The study includes data from exploratory, thematic coding (Saldaña, 2013) of the 2007 version of the CFG (Health Canada, 2007a), a readability analysis, and a pilot survey. The study results are from an analysis of only the CFG and do not include analysis of any elements of the companion website. The CFG can be viewed online, downloaded and printed off as a pdf from the website, or it is available as a paper version. All of these formats are the same.
Multimodal Analysis

The text, graphics, and the layout of the CFG were thematically coded and six preliminary themes were developed from emerging patterns in the codes (Saldaña, 2013). One of these themes was chosen for further analysis: scientistic representation. This theme is defined as using typical scientific ways of data representation and presenting them to non-scientific audiences, or in non-scientific situations. I have borrowed the term “scientistic representation” from Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), who uses the term to describe the ways that sociologists use typical scientific ways of representing data when this way of presenting data actually obscures, oversimplifies, censors, or detracts from information that may be vitally important to the work of a sociologist.

The theme of scientistic representation consists of three categories. The first category is the use of numbers and charts that resemble common ways of visualizing data in the sciences. An example of this category is the chart in the CFG that indicates how many servings individuals should eat of each food group each day (Figure 1). There are rows, which are divided up by food groups, and columns, which are divided by age and sex. This representation has been classified as scientistic, and not scientific, because it oversimplifies complex nutritional information in a non-scientific situation, that is, the everyday food practices of real Canadians.

Figure 1. Servings chart on CFG.  

Figure 2. Nutrition Facts table on CFG.
There is also an example of a Nutrition Facts table in the CFG (Figure 2), which is a requirement for food packaging under Canadian nutrition labeling laws that are connected to the CFG. The CFG includes an example to show readers how to read the chart so that they can make “wise” food choices. It is another scientific-looking chart that explains the percentage of different nutritional elements present in a food product. The example only includes 0s, which does not provide useful information and may be confusing to the reader.

The next category of scientistic representation is the use of specific measurements. An example of this category in the CFG is the size of a serving of meat, which includes a few different ways to measure a serving, mostly with numbers (e.g., 75 g), but also by using pictures (e.g., a measuring cup) (Figure 3). However, it is not common practice to measure meat with measuring cups, which are usually used to measure liquids. So while this information may appear useful and specific, it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of real food practices, and the information is also very hard to follow in practice.

![Cooked fish, shellfish, poultry, lean meat](image)

*Figure 3. Serving size examples in the CFG.*

The third category comprising the theme of scientistic representation is the use of specialized terminology. This includes terms such as unsaturated fats, folic acid, and minerals, which require a fairly sophisticated knowledge of nutrition, chemistry, and so on, to understand. In some sections of the CFG, the specialized terms are highlighted, presumably to demonstrate their importance. One section of the CFG directs readers to “[c]ompare the Nutrition Facts table on food labels to choose products that contain less fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and sodium” (Health Canada, 2007a, p. 6). These terms may be helpful at the grocery store.
when they are the same terms located on a food label, but in this statement, it is not entirely clear what “less” means if the reader is not already familiar with this information and does not have any point of reference. The sample Nutrition Facts table that only contains 0s is also not helpful for understanding (Figure 2).

**Readability Analysis**

As part of this study, the CFG was also run through an online readability calculator (Added Bytes, 2014). This calculator provided the Flesch-Kincaid reading ease score and grade level. The reading ease score measures the comprehensibility of a text by formulas that utilize the number of syllables per word and the length of sentences. The reading ease score goes from 1-100 and the higher the score, the easier the text is to comprehend. These scores correlate with U.S. grade levels. The readability analyses were used to account for discoursal inconsistencies (cf. Schryer, 2000) observed in the CFG, for example, sections that include paragraphs with long sentences and sections with short sentences in point form. On their own, these readability tests provide limited information for research, but they provide useful information when used to triangulate data.

First, the readability score for the whole CFG was calculated and then each section was calculated separately in order to gain a better understanding of some of the textual differences observed in different sections of the CFG. Overall, the CFG received a reading ease score of 70.7, which corresponds with a grade level of 6.6. However, the scores for each segment of the CFG text ranged from 34.3 to 87.9, which correspond with grade levels that range from 2.5 to 19.7. The wide range of readability demonstrates that readers with a grade 2 education may easily understand some sections of the CFG, but other sections appear to be better suited to readers with graduate degrees. This wide spread in the level of readability of the CFG accounts for some of the discoursal inconsistencies and raises questions regarding the accessibility of the CFG to Canadians.

**Survey**

Finally, a pilot survey was conducted with 80 university students, at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The survey questionnaire included three samples from the CFG that contain information about vegetables and fruits; these
were the recommended servings per day (Figure 1), examples of a serving size, and some textual descriptions of how to choose which vegetables and fruits to eat. Survey questions queried respondents’ previous knowledge of and experience with the CFG and their ability to comprehend the samples.

Results from the qualitative analysis of written survey responses provide further insight into how the CFG may help or hinder readers’ comprehension of and ability to act on nutrition guidelines. One survey question asked participants to describe in their own words what they noticed most about the provided samples. These responses were coded thematically (Saldaña, 2013). Three themes emerged from the analysis of the written responses that further clarified results of the multimodal and readability analyses:

1. Too simple or too complicated

   Example responses:
   - “How much goddamn broccoli trees am I supposed to eat!? 3? 20? 136? Beats me!”
   - “1 + 2 have info that is condensed + shortened, but in the process important info and details have been lost”
   - “I think Fig 1 is incomprehensible.”

2. Impractical information

   Example responses:
   - “The measurements are informative, but since I don’t measure my veggies the measurement isn’t that helpful (ex. how many cups is a baked potato?)”
   - “Somewhat accurate info regarding portions. However the amount that fits in the measure depends on whether it is whole, sliced, chopped or pureed.”
   - “It is difficult to visualize portion sizes that are described in abstract terms (like ½ cup)”
3. Multimodal design

*Example responses:*

- “Neither [figure] makes sense without the other”
- “Figure 1 answers how many servings I should have per day, but that means nothing to me until I see figure 2 and understand how much a serving is.”

While respondents’ claims that the CFG is too simplified or too complicated may be on opposite ends of the spectrum, in many ways these responses mean the same thing, which is that even when respondents felt confident that they understood the guidelines, they were not entirely sure what they should do with this information. This speaks to a possible disconnect between the CFG, everyday food practices of Canadians. Finally, responses demonstrate that each section of the CFG by itself may be confusing or does not provide enough information to be useful to the reader. These statements also support a need for a multimodal analysis of the CFG.

**Discussion**

In summary, the results of the pilot study highlight several important points. It appears that the CFG has taken a scientistic approach to conveying nutrition information, which implicitly draws on readers’ scientific literacy; in other words, readers will need to be able to draw on their antecedent knowledge of scientific genres in order to interpret and understand the information (e.g., Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Jamieson, 1975; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011). Results from the survey may in part be explained by whether or not readers bring prior knowledge of these kinds of genres to the task of reading the CFG. This may be a fruitful area to explore in future research.

The inconsistencies observed in the scientistic representations of nutrition information and in the wide range of readability might limit accessibility of the CFG and readers’ understanding of the provided information. As well, when readers do feel confident that they understand the information in the CFG, as the written responses on the survey indicate, they do not necessarily understand what *to do* with the information. The CFG appears to constrain the actions of readers, despite
its intent to enable better food choices (e.g., Paré & Smart, 1994). As Freadman (1994, 2002) notes, comprehension does not translate into uptake, and written discourse as a social action is more than just conveying a message. In order for health promotion materials such as the CFG to inspire and assist in Canadians’ lifestyle changes, the Canadian public must be able to comprehend as well as know how to incorporate nutrition information into their everyday food practices.

All of these things call into question who exactly the intended audience of the CFG is. To draw on Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of addressivity, it is unclear whom the CFG is addressing. As mentioned earlier, Bakhtin asserts that the listeners, or in this case the readers, are able to understand an utterance by their recognition of a perceived social situation in which utterances develop relatively stable forms. The inconsistencies in scientistic representations and readability of the CFG may be contributing to a breakdown in readers’ understanding or uptake of the CFG.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the study. Primarily, this was only a pilot study and fairly narrow in scope. It considered only the current version of the CFG, and did not include the companion website, neither did it consider the genre system (Bazerman, 1994) in which the CFG is situated. Also, the survey sample was small and only included participants with university-level literacy.

Conclusion

Overall, given the inconsistencies in scientistic representation and readability in the 2007 version of the CFG, it does not appear that the document addresses the needs of the whole Canadian population, and this may be especially true for vulnerable populations, such as low-income populations, who tend to have less opportunities to access education, may have lower levels of literacy, and also tend to have higher rates of obesity and chronic disease than the overall general population (e.g., Tjepkema & Shields, 2005; Willows, Hanley, & Delormier, 2012). These concerns will be explored in more depth in a large-scale research study.

The results of the pilot study add to an understanding and study of writing and genres. The results lend weight to the argument that genre knowledge plays an important role in written communication and in reader comprehension and uptake. As Artemeva and Fox (2010) pointed out in their study of engineering
students, being able to recognize and comprehend a genre does not automatically guarantee the ability to produce the genre, and in the case of the CFG, recognizing and comprehending the genre does not ensure the ability to take up and act on the knowledge presented in the CFG.

References


The Rhetoric of Website Design Professionals’ Online Portfolios

Tania S. Smith

Abstract
How do professional website designers construct and perform their professional ethos, and present their past projects and skills in today’s online marketplace? This case study analyzed a selection of 28 public online professional portfolios. The study drew on rhetoric, genre theory, and cultural studies to examine how this genre is evolving and how professional identity, technological environments, and cultural factors shape how web designers present themselves and their work. The findings have relevance to scholars studying online rhetoric and online identity construction, and may be informative to those who provide formal instruction in web design and online professional portfolio design.

Introduction
The portfolio has long been used by freelancers and employees in creative industries as a way of showcasing their creative works and design skills. The portfolio genre is rapidly shifting due to changes in our media environment and the expectations of the job market, especially in media industries. In the past, portfolios were in physical (print) format, carried by the job candidate or freelancer into a private meeting or interview with a prospective employer or client. The portfolio genre has migrated across a wide variety of digital media. Baron (2010), in her book Designing a Digital Portfolio, explained that the portfolio is “a collection of material we’ve created” (p. xv), and it “can be a PDF, CD or DVD demo reels, a slideshow on a laptop, or, most frequently, a web address,” and “there is no longer a standard format for a portfolio” (p. xvi). A portfolio no longer merely supplements a résumé; it may often be a website that includes a link to a résumé in PDF form (Baron, 2010, p. 43).

* Tania Smith is an Associate Professor, Department of Communication & Culture, University of Calgary (tania.smith@ucalgary.ca)
Since Baron published the first edition of *Designing a Digital Portfolio* in 2004, a strong shift toward an “online,” not merely “digital,” portfolio has taken place, primarily affecting the creative design industries. In early 2014, an informal search on Google for the phrase “must have an online portfolio” provided 3,180,000 results. Skimming the first few pages of result summaries, most pages explain that for work in design and IT industries, an online portfolio is expected. In contrast, substituting the word “online” for “digital” discovered only 14 results, and using the word “print” yielded only 5 results.

As shown in this small study, the online environment has affected the macro-level generic and structural features of the web designer’s portfolio. Evolving genre expectations and online media environments have also changed the opportunities and constraints for web portfolio users’ rhetorical strategies of self-presentation at the micro-level, such as their choice of words, arguments, and design features. This study examines how website designers used the resources of online genre and rhetoric to perform their professional identity in their online public portfolios.

**Who are “web designers”?**

The role of “web designer” currently includes the design of graphics, illustrations, animations, fonts, layout, the visual identity of websites, ergonomics or interface design, usability, and the application of design principles to a website (IT Jobs, n.d.; Kyrnin, n.d.). The role encompasses the traditional function of a print graphic designer and added additional layers of expertise required for website design.

The role of web designer is sometimes contrasted with that of the “web developer,” a role which focuses more on the back-end programming involved in websites (Kyrnin, n.d.), rather than its front-end appearance. However, web design and web development expertise arguably overlap or require a partnership, since some programming and back-end structural knowledge is often required for advanced design features to work properly, and both fields evolve in tandem.

Web designers are also distinguished from “copywriters” or “web content developers,” who focus more on developing textual and graphical content for websites, as a web designers take a more holistic approach to the visual and verbal structure and navigation of a website. The web designer's aesthetic and functional
design approach requires the union of technical and design expertise, and relies on good content development and copywriting to fulfill the vision of the design.

**Why study web designers’ online portfolios?**

Web designers' portfolios were selected because the online portfolio is a mainstay of web designers' economic and professional life, making it important for practitioners, instructors, and theorists to assess the current state of the genre and its rhetorical strategies. Rita Armstrong, a recruiter of design professionals, has stated that “Every candidate we represent must have a digital snapshot of their work accompanying their résumé. A digital portfolio introduction has become the industry standard” (as cited in Baron, 2010, p. xvii). Baron (2010) went even further to say that having only one online portfolio may be insufficient for professions like the web designer: “An interactive designer will definitely need a sophisticated presentation on a personal site and will likely have at least one other outlet” (p. xvii).

By continual updating and adaptation to various platforms, web designers' portfolios are likely to function as indicators of online portfolio development trends and challenges. Since web designers are often fully or partly self-employed,

> If you're a freelancer, . . . you don't need just any digital portfolio. You need one filled with recent work and wrapped in a current approach. . . . When you're trying to remain competitive, owning only a vintage portfolio is as useful as having none at all. (Baron, 2010, p. xvi)

Web designers' online portfolios must make good use of the evolving features of Internet genres, such as the emphasis on visual communication, interactivity, and non-linear navigational structure. They must demonstrate through their own portfolio's design that they are able to master cutting-edge technologies that enhance web design. This demand poses challenges whether an online portfolio is self-hosted or hosted on a standardized portfolio-sharing site.

This study considers the genre of website designer portfolios in the context of the web designer community. The focus on the web designer community is appropriate since Giltrow and Stein (2009) caution that genres evolve within “discourse communities”: “community is the source of genre: one person cannot make a genre by herself” (p. 7). In their 2009 book, *Genres in the Internet*, Giltrow
and Stein posit that some genres may be specific to “Internet communities” (2009, p. 10), and it could be imagined that the Internet medium and web designers’ online presence through their portfolios have created an international “Internet community” of web designers that influence the development of the genre. Giltrow and Stein’s theoretical framework is that of “rhetorical genre theory,” which emphasizes that elements of the social context impact a genre’s function, such as one’s professional role and identity within the technology and media industries. Operating within this framework, this study did not aim to make universal generalizations about the genre of the online portfolio from its formal features and online medium, but aimed to make observations about the genre’s current rhetorical contexts and strategies by examining actual genre use among a small sample from what Giltrow and Stein call an “open set” of language users within a specific professional community (2009, p. 5).

**Method**

The persuasive aims of the portfolio make rhetoric a logical choice for an analytical framework. As defined by Aristotle, rhetoric is the “ability . . . to see the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, trans. Kennedy, 1991, p. 36). The persuasive functions of the portfolio are clearly acknowledged by industry commentators such as David Heasty, who writes that “A good portfolio can make bad work palatable, mediocre work good, and good work breathtaking” (as cited in Baron, 2010, p. xvi). Furthermore, DiMarco’s (2006) book on *Web Portfolio Design and Applications* emphasizes that “the concepts, images, and messages within the Web portfolio are centered on persuasion,” and states that its “communication should be persuasive with the goal of getting the visitor to act favorably towards the author, whether consciously or subconsciously” (Preface, “Rationale” section).

As DiMarco (2006) intimated in the passage above, a portfolio’s rhetorical appeals function primarily to strengthen the “ethos” of the author. Aristotle theorized that persuasion is primarily achieved through the selection and design of arguments that can be classified into three types: appeals to *logos* (the logic or reasoning of propositions and evidence), *pathos* (the emotions of the audience) and *ethos* (the character of the speaker). Although a selection of one’s works may seem to focus on the *logos* of the data—the samples of products one has produced—the primary
argument is to reflect on the portfolio designer’s aims, processes, skills and accomplishments, and thus build up his or her ethos or character, and ultimately obtain desirable contracts with clients or employers.

The data set consisted of a selection of English-language public online professional portfolios. The initial selection was made on the portfolio-hosting site Carbonmade, since I wanted to see how an established, well-reputed hosting platform that was specifically designed for portfolios provided freedom within a standardized interface that did not require much skill or time to use. Carbonmade, a site conceived in late 2005, was positively reviewed in several online reviews, and boasted having over 700,000 online portfolios, 6,296 of which were of “Web Designers” as of June 2014 (See Table 1). A simple, popular portfolio hosting site can attract an audience of clients and a community of professional users who may use its internal search function to discover sites, and websites on popular hosting sites often rank well in search engine results. In addition, a host offering a free basic account and simple interface would potentially be useful for newcomers entering the field, and portfolios already posted there could act as a model for imitation within the genre.

**Table 1. Number of Carbonmade (n.d.) Portfolios by Industry as of June 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Portfolios (total)</th>
<th>Illustrators</th>
<th>graphic designers</th>
<th>Artists</th>
<th>web designers</th>
<th>art directors</th>
<th>Copywriters</th>
<th>web developers</th>
<th>graphic artists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>772 554</td>
<td>Portfolios (total)</td>
<td>26 699</td>
<td>11 154</td>
<td>10 685</td>
<td>6 296</td>
<td>1 445</td>
<td>1 385</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On Carbonmade, I searched the site’s “favorites” and “web designers” sections and randomly sampled portfolios that were listed first in the results and web designers who seemed to be experienced, committed designers with five or more portfolio
items, aiming for a balance of male and female designers. In 2014, a free Carbonmade account was limited to featuring five “projects” (works) including a total of 35 images.

Several factors expanded my data set beyond my initial search on Carbonmade to include multiple portfolios by individuals, portfolios hosted on other platforms, and portfolios by design collaboratives. Seven of the 14 designers selected on Carbonmade had two or three separate portfolios within the data set. To examine the differences influenced by the hosting platform, I aimed for a data set with a relatively even balance between portfolios on Carbonmade and those on other platforms and included some designers who did not have a Carbonmade portfolio at all. Online exploration found self-hosted portfolios to be more frequently owned by web design companies. Therefore, while the majority of portfolios selected were by individuals, six portfolios featured companies of two to five designers (Brian Hoff Design, Amber Creative, Paone Creative, Hyphen) or a larger unspecified number (Degordian, Brightbyte).

Eventually, the total data set consisted of 30 portfolios by 22 web designers (individuals or companies). Of the 30 portfolios, 14 portfolios were hosted on Carbonmade, 12 were self-hosted websites, and 4 were on other hosted sites (Behance, Deviantart, Tumblr, and Dribbble). Based on designers’ names, pronouns (she/he), and images of themselves, nine were identifiable as female, eight as male, and five were groups of two or more designers. Most designers or companies were based in the United States or Canada, but some were based in other countries (Great Britain, Poland, Philippines, Spain), but country of origin was not a factor in selection and did not seem to influence the rhetorical strategies. Only portfolios with English language “about” information and portfolio commentary were selected. The main limitation on the sample size was the time required to analyze the data.

All data was freely accessible to the public, and no interviews or surveys were conducted. Therefore, there was no need for the sample to be anonymous, and no need for research ethics board approval. Screenshots are reproduced here within the Canadian Copyright Act’s “Fair Dealing Guidelines” (Government of Canada,
Method of analysis

The study examined three “sources” of ethos appeals within each portfolio: 1) its about page(s) and any other text/images about the designer, 2) the Portfolio Items page or section, which involved analyzing only the first five featured portfolio items, and 3) the portfolio’s design features.

Genre features. Although rhetorical genre studies eschews formalistic analysis, some structural and content analysis was conducted in order to reveal the most common conventions of the genre. I looked for patterns in page layout and navigation, the use of pronouns and profile images, and characteristic design features (images, interactivity, mouse-over animation), and quantified the content features (total number of portfolio items, number of words “about” the designers themselves and their process). Even if these features did not correspond with ethos appeals, they could provide insight into genre expectations.

Rhetorical strategies (ethos appeals). A set of ethos categories, with three to six unique ethos appeals within each category, was developed to weigh the portfolios’ emphasis on various ethos strategies. In crafting the framework, I was inspired by Jørgensen and Isaksson (2010), who developed a system for analyzing the ethos of corporate websites based on Aristotle’s identification of three components of ethos. These three components—phronesis, arete, and eunoia—have been translated respectively as practical wisdom, virtue, and good will (Aristotle, trans. Kennedy, 1991, p. 121). I renamed “practical wisdom” as expertise; the “virtue” necessary for good web design can be considered one’s character; and “good will” can be seen in the designer’s disposition toward serving the interests and aims of one’s clients and their website users. Just as Jørgensen and Isaksson identified unique ethos appeals expected and often performed on corporation websites, I developed a list of unique ethos appeals expected and performed on web designers’ portfolios. Each of these appeals was defined more specifically as outlined in Table 2.
### Table 2. Ethos Categories and Appeals Used in Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Experience&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>years of work, qualifications, reputation, awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>variety of clients among first 5 samples, website types, designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical skill &amp;</td>
<td>up-to-date with various programs, applications, languages, features, hardware, search engine optimization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design skill &amp;</td>
<td>creativity, visual artistry, web-specific design skills such as logo design, typography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>knowledge&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligence and</td>
<td>critical thinking, discernment, research on audience, alternative designs and technologies, awareness of client's competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research skills&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>as shown in samples: client reputation, size, project challenge level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>high standards for product, rigorous process, thoroughness, attention to detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>desire for excellence, enjoyment of design, hard work, focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical integrity</td>
<td>honesty, trustworthiness, legality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social aptitudes</td>
<td>teamwork, consultation, openness, flexibility, client communication, sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unique identity</td>
<td>Branding, personality, virtual presence of voice and body, innovative approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>Usability</td>
<td>making websites that are informative, functional, interactive, navigable, easy for clients and their users to use and understand, accessible to diverse users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Client empathy</td>
<td>increasing efficiency, attracting customers to websites, catering to client-specific needs and values, i.e. time &amp; monetary constraints, industry-specific requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>building designs that are interesting and enjoyable to use, being fun for clients and coworkers to work with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1. “Experience” and “intelligence and research skills” were used for “About” pages analysis only. 2. “Significance” was used for Portfolio Item analysis only.

Rhetoricians advise that when analyzing online media, one ought to consider all methods by which arguments are delivered, not just through language (text). Online means of delivery are outlined by Porter (2009) as encompassing...
“body/identity,” “distribution/circulation,” “access/accessibility,” and “interaction” (208). Accordingly, these aspects were all included in my analysis. However, since Porter’s aspects of online delivery are often simultaneous and are not genre-specific, analysis was facilitated by identifying three “dimensions” or structural “sources” of ethos arguments that corresponded to the portfolio’s major structural features and rhetorical aims:

1) *About page(s)*, including all text and designer images/logos describing the designer(s) and their identity, process, and values (including any design commentary on portfolio items), whether found on a page called “About” or on other pages of the portfolio.

2) *Portfolio items*, focusing on product visuals (the sample screenshots provided of web design products) and any captions describing the origin of the visual, but not describing the designer or their approach.

3) *Portfolio design*, including the navigation and user interface (the way the portfolio itself communicated ethos through its web design features).

When analyzing a given structural “source” of ethos appeals within a portfolio, instead of merely counting the number of instances of ethos appeals by word, sentence, image, or interactive feature, which would have biased results toward portfolios with more content and interactivity, I gave qualitative ratings for the relative “emphasis” of ethos appeal within the subset of data. Ratings were 0 (zero) for no information provided that could make this appeal, 1 for minimal use of appeals, 2 for moderate use of appeals, or 3 for a heavy emphasis on a given appeal. Ratings were then added and averaged across portfolios, across ethos appeals, and across the ethos appeal sources within the data set in order to bring to light areas of emphasis.

When rating the emphasis on ethos in the portfolios’ “about page(s),” I looked for ethos claims made through language and images about the web designer. These claims did not need to be proven through “about pages” arguments and evidence. Indeed, many of the ethos appeals, especially “character” appeals, could not be demonstrated within the scope of the data analyzed on “about pages,” nor even through portfolio items or portfolio design. For example, claims about “passion”
(desire for excellence, sincere enjoyment of design, hard work) could be made in “about page” text, but need not be proven anywhere in the portfolio.

However, ethos emphasis ratings for “portfolio items” and “portfolio design” components involved a qualitative evaluation of the potential effectiveness of ethos appeals as well. This is because the ethos appeals in “portfolio items” and “portfolio design” categories were often made by way of enthymemes (incomplete arguments often used in rhetoric) consisting largely of data in the form of visual and verbal content of screenshots and interactivity features on the online portfolio, combined with presuppositions about what kind of ethos the designer wished to convey (shown in Table 2). I attended to ethos-relevant data within portfolio items and portfolio design features and weighed the degree to which they were likely to support web designers’ ethos appeals, whether or not the ethos claims were explicitly made anywhere in the portfolio. These evaluations were made not from a potential client’s perspective, but in the role of a near-peer to the web designer. (I have gained web design and usability knowledge through teaching courses in professional communication involving guiding students in the critique and construction of real websites, in addition to personal web design experience while serving as a volunteer web designer for more than five organizations since 2011.)

Findings and Discussion

Common generic features
The rudimentary genre analysis showed image-heavy content, first-person pronouns, visual representations of the designer, and a significant number of portfolio items (works). Web designers provided an average of 170 words “about” themselves and their projects on each portfolio, ranging between 0 (zero) words and 870 words. Twenty-six portfolios referred to their designers using first person pronouns (I/we), three used the third person “she,” and one did not have any “about” text. Slightly more than half of the portfolios (17) portrayed the designer’s face, whether via a photograph or a stylized artwork including a representation of a face. Other portfolios provided alternative visual forms of self-representation such as a logo, another type of image or artwork, and/or their name in a stylized font. Each portfolio featured an average of 22.3 portfolio items. One portfolio had only two items, while another had 150 items. Removing from the calculation two
portfolios with more than 100 items, the average was 13.5 items. Often a single “portfolio item” included several screenshots and some commentary text once the reader clicked on an initial introductory image.

**Ethos strategies**

Throughout the findings, quantitative ethos ratings represent the degree to which the portfolio *emphasized* rhetorical appeals to ethos, not the degree to which such appeals were *effective* for target audiences. The complete data set and ratings have been uploaded to a publicly accessible spreadsheet at [http://tinyurl.com/casdw-2014-proceedings-smith](http://tinyurl.com/casdw-2014-proceedings-smith). In Table 3, average ratings are displayed according to the intersection of two dimensions: the ethos “appeals” are listed in each row, while the three “sources” of the ethos appeals, “about page(s),” “portfolio items,” and “portfolio design,” are listed in three columns. Ratings of “N/A” appear where the ethos appeal was determined to be “not applicable” to a given data source within portfolios. (Refer to Table 2 for definitions of each ethos appeal and the type of data analyzed within each communicative component of the portfolio.)

**Table 3. Average ratings for relative emphasis on ethos appeals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>About Page(s)</th>
<th>Portfolio Items</th>
<th>Portfolio Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical skill &amp; knowledge</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design skill &amp; knowledge</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligence &amp; research skills</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical integrity</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social aptitudes</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unique identity</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>Usability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Client empathy</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ratings ranged from 0 (no information provided) to 3 (heavy emphasis on this ethos appeal within this dimension of the portfolio). “N/A” is used where ethos appeals were not considered relevant to a given data dimension/source.
Unsurprisingly, most of the ethos appeals shown in Table 3 were found in the “about page(s)” dimension, which focused on making explicit claims about the web designer’s ethos and portraying their character. Despite other limitations of the Carbonmade portfolio platform, it encouraged web designers to provide explicit claims about themselves on an “About” page, as shown in Brian Hoff’s portfolio in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Brian Hoff Designs, About page on Carbonmade.com**

Several subtle nuances of the “about page” rhetoric can be seen in examining this qualitative sample by Brian Hoff. Despite the image of one man’s face, this portfolio used the “we” pronoun to refer to the designers, and the Carbonmade portfolio includes in its footer “© 2011 Brian Hoff Design, Inc.” Searching online for Brian Hoff Design led to his design team’s self-hosted portfolio, also included in the data set, which introduced the two-man team. The self-hosted site expanded upon this “about” statement but repeated many of its components. One of the striking features of Brian Hoff’s “about” text was the strong expression of “passion” for web design, evinced by claims to “charm” the web, “love” the web, and “have a
lot of fun” doing their work. Such expressions of passion for design and joy through design activity was found in 23 portfolios’ about pages, and this was a relatively very strong ethos appeal, which I rated “3” (the average rating for passion appeals was 1.53 out of 3). Interestingly, Brian Hoff Design’s “passion” and dedication to the value of “quality” (“great design and successful solutions”) were communicated through an arguably risky statement about the kinds of clients they were unwilling to work with, namely those who did not have patience for their meticulous approach. This willingness to risk turning away clients conveyed an ethos of exclusivity and played “hard to get,” which may have been attractive to some clients seeking an elite designer.

In contrast with “about page(s)” data, “portfolio items” and “portfolio design” dimensions conveyed fewer of the ethos appeals shown in Table 3. Portfolio items did not function to reveal the designer’s character (their intentions, values, habits), since their primary purpose was to communicate the website client’s ethos or identity instead. Yet portfolio items served to demonstrate expertise as well as user-focused ethos dispositions. The portfolio design was also able to communicate some aspects of the web designer’s expertise and disposition and was able to convey some aspects of the web designer’s character in terms of “unique identity.”

Regardless of the limited number of ethos appeals covered by “portfolio items,” Table 3 shows that they provided the most emphatic ethos appeals, and that two ethos appeals were rarely made, especially in “about page(s)” content. Based on the ethos emphasis in portfolio items, it is appropriate that the “Works” page was the entry point for all Carbonmade-hosted portfolios. This finding is to some degree to be expected, since the name of the Portfolio genre implies that it makes its argument by way of featuring the designer’s works, and web designers preferred to show more often than tell us about their work and character.

It is noteworthy that explicit claims to “ethical integrity” were rarely made in the “about” data in this sample of portfolios (an average rating of 0.3 out of 3), likely because designers who explicitly claim they are honest, trustworthy, or legal may be met with suspicion in many cultures. Further research could prove whether this notable de-emphasis is common across portfolios as a genre.
Likewise, a very low rating average of 0.2 out of 3 was found for “about” pages’ explicit claims that designers provide “entertainment” (by building designs that are enjoyable to use, or being fun for clients and coworkers to work with). Perhaps this finding related to designers’ greater emphasis on aligning themselves with clients’ business goals, as shown in the average rating of 1.43 for “client empathy,” the highest rating in the “disposition” category of ethos. However, “entertainment” was still a significant ethos appeal within portfolio items (average 2.53) and portfolio design (average 1.13). As with “ethical integrity,” being entertaining is something more easily demonstrated than claimed, but unlike ethical character, a disposition to entertain was demonstrable through portfolio items and portfolio design.

Analysis of the quantitative data also provided some insight into the relative emphasis on the three major ethos appeals as defined by Aristotle. This sample of web designers’ portfolios emphasized “expertise” most of all, secondly “disposition,” and thirdly “character.” Ethos appeals were more emphatic in “portfolio items” and “portfolio design” than in explicit claims made on “about page(s)” data.

As shown in Table 4, a fair comparison of emphasis across the three ethos appeals required the conversion of ratings into percentages, since significantly fewer ethos emphasis points were possible in the “character” and “disposition” categories. For example, Table 3 shows that 30 points were possible in the “expertise” ethos appeal category across all data sources within the data set. Therefore, in Table 4, the average rating for “expertise” on the 14 Carbonmade portfolios was 61% because the total average score was 18.2 out of 30 possible points. A similar calculation was made for Table 5.

Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate the degree to which the hosting platform constrained or provided opportunities for the expression of ethos appeals. Unsurprisingly, self-hosted portfolios provided the best platform for almost all ethos appeals. The contrast was most extreme in terms of self-hosted sites’ greater emphasis on expressing “character” claims, and their greater freedom to convey ethos through “portfolio design” features.
Table 4. Portfolios’ relative emphasis on 3 ethos appeals, depending on host platform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host</th>
<th>Expertise</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>All ethos appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carbonmade (14)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other host (4)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-hosted (12)</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All portfolios (30)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Major sources of portfolios’ ethos appeals, depending on host platform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host</th>
<th>About pages</th>
<th>Portfolio Items</th>
<th>PortfolioDesign</th>
<th>All ethos appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carbonmade (14)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other host (4)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-hosted (12)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All portfolios (30)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown by column 3 (“Portfolio Items”) in Table 5, all hosting platforms, whether Carbonmade, “other host,” or “self-hosted,” seemed to provide ample opportunity to display ethos through portfolio items, since this was easily done by uploading static screenshots of web designs. “Hosted” portfolios were similar in terms of providing a standard template with room for the designer’s images within a clickable grid of images portraying portfolio items; some self-hosted portfolios also used this clickable grid convention.

Although “other host” portfolios rated highest (92%) in conveying ethos through their “portfolio items,” this data was based on a small subset of four portfolios, and it may have been caused by compensating for being more constrained in expressing ethos through “about” pages on “other host” portfolio platforms (18%). The one portfolio on Tumblr was completely image-based with no “about” text or commentary other than brief captions under images. The other three hosted portfolios (on Dribbble, Deviantart, and Behance) had additional social media features such as tools for other logged-in users to provide comments on portfolio items. They provided the ability for others to follow a portfolio or like individual portfolio items, and they provided statistics on portfolio views. However, these social media features were largely responses from peers (other designers) rather than testimonials from clients, and were not analyzed as sources of ethos appeals because they existed on only four of the 30 portfolios.
The Carbonmade and other-hosted portfolios were relatively standardized and limited, but provided some room for customization, as shown in Figure 2's black background, the logo and font in the upper left corner, and width of “tiles.” It appeared that three or four templates were offered to designers: the number of columns appearing on the “Works” page varied, as did the layout of the “About” page.

Figure 2. Yaron Schoen (2010), Work page on Carbonmade.com.

When analyzing Carbonmade “portfolio designs,” I gave a rating of 1 (out of 3) for ethos appeal if the designer had utilized the hosted platform’s basic opportunities for a given ethos appeal (and zero if they did not), and a rating higher than 1 if they made efforts to demonstrate further ethos through customization. Ratings for ethos expressed through “portfolio design” ranged from 27% to 47% (average 33%) among Carbonmade portfolios and 27% to 100% (average 80%) for self-hosted portfolios, which demonstrated the significant technological impact of the Carbonmade platform on web designers’ ethos appeals. In terms of its ethos expressed through “portfolio design,” Yaron Schoen’s Carbonmade portfolio earned 33% of points possible, an average score for Carbonmade-hosted portfolios.
Some web designers further customized the hosting platform provided by Carbonmade. A few designers used the “grid” of image tiles on the “Works” page creatively by spreading a single image or infographic across a number of tiles, as shown in Figure 3, or by using portfolio tiles as category headings such as “Web design” and “Logo design.”

![Image of Karen Santiago's portfolio on Carbonmade.com: Works page.](image)

**Figure 3. Karen Santiago’s (2013) Portfolio on Carbonmade.com: Works page.**

In “Portfolio design” ethos emphasis ratings, this portfolio earned 47% of possible ethos points, the highest rating for “Portfolio design” ethos among Carbonmade portfolios.

Untrammeled by the Carbonmade “About” page template shown in Figure 1, some self-hosted portfolios creatively presented “about page” information in infographic form, as shown in Anusha Agrawal’s portfolio in Figure 4, which portrays her design and technical expertise in bar graph form, followed by a testimonial.
Every few seconds, the quotation changes, subtly scrolling through five brief testimonials, making good use of space and attracting the user’s eyes with a degree of motion that does not detract from viewing other areas of the page.

![AN INFORMATIVE INFOGRAPHIC OF MY SKILLS](image)

**Figure 4. “About” information from the self-hosted portfolio of Anusha Agrawal (N.D.)**

Self-hosted portfolios provided room for delivery of “about page” ethos arguments in alternative formats, and by doing so, simultaneously strengthened ethos appeals through design. The most striking example was found in Yaron Schoen’s self-hosted site, which opened with a series of nine welcome screens of virtual dialogue with a hypothetical user, showcasing the skills of this “human interface designer” (see Figure 5).

Yaron Schoen’s portfolio’s welcome sequence demonstrated the web designer’s technical expertise and awareness of usability principles. The page content altered when the browser window was resized to a smaller size, or when viewed through a smartphone, as shown in Figure 6. In a large browser window, the font increased
slightly, but the white space surrounding the text also expanded, focusing the eyes on the text dialogue in the center. Upon mouseover, the “ys” icon in the upper right corner turned red on a black background, and if clicked, would take a user to the portfolio’s “Table of contents” page. When viewed in a smaller window, the text line width decreased, lines wrapped, the “ys” icon disappeared, and a standard 3-bar icon appeared in the upper right corner to enable site navigation. This design also demonstrated knowledge of current web genre conventions: in 2013, the 3-bar navigation icon emerged as a trend in mobile web design, and advisors cautioned that it should not compete with the company logo in the upper left (Get Elastic, 2013).

In addition to demonstrating ethos through technical expertise and usability features, the subsequent eight screens in Yaron Schoen’s “welcome” sequence articulated his design philosophy by demonstration and explicit...
claims, entertained users through humor, and portrayed his unique identity through his personal hobbies and other creative talents.

Many self-hosted sites avoided the frequently-used “clickable grid” convention for portfolio items and used alternative design structures for navigating among and within items. These alternative structures opened up opportunities for further design commentary. Designers surrounded or interspersed their portfolio item screenshots and descriptions with narratives of the process of web design research, their development decisions, and consultation with clients. This was why explicit arguments about the designer’s ethos were analyzed as “about page(s)” data, regardless of where on the portfolio site they were found. These narratives made many ethos appeals simultaneously, as shown in Figure 7, where one may see appeals to design expertise, client empathy, quality, social skills, and intelligence. This strategy enabled the ethos arguments to be placed near visual proof.

**Figure 7. Paone Creative (2014) – Commentary from the bottom of the Scandilicious portfolio item page**

On average, self-hosted sites encouraged web designers to take more advantage of opportunities for various types of ethos arguments. The total averages of ethos
ratings were 69% among self-hosted sites, 46% for Carbonmade sites, and 41% for other hosted sites. Greater emphasis on ethos appeals may have been partly due to a larger word count: the 12 self-hosted portfolios had an average of 264 words of “About” text while other portfolios averaged 108 words. Unsurprisingly, given their greater resources to develop and maintain self-hosted portfolios, all six of the collaboratives or firms in the data set had self-hosted portfolio sites, and most of them placed ethos appeals wherever they could. Among the five portfolios with the highest ethos appeal emphasis ratings, all five were self-hosted; four of these were by design firms or collaboratives (Brian Hoff Designs, Brightbyte, Paone Creative, and Degordian), and one was by an individual designer (Jano Garcia). However, the range of ethos ratings for self-hosted sites was 22% to 94%, showing that despite the flexibility of the medium, designers varied in their ability or choice to develop the rhetorical potential of their self-hosted site. Among the five designers who had both hosted portfolios and self-hosted portfolios, only three designers had significantly higher ethos emphasis ratings on their self-hosted portfolios (the total ethos ratings were 14, 17, and 22% higher than their hosted portfolios). The other two designers had lower total ethos ratings for their self-hosted portfolios (5 and 17% lower).

**Conclusion**

This study has carefully examined the rhetorical appeals to ethos in web designers’ portfolios within a framework adapted from Aristotle and applied to three major communicative dimensions of this genre. Although the findings represent a snapshot in time and were based on a small sample, the study yielded insight into how the web designer’s online portfolio genre deployed ethos strategies in mid-2014, which may be enlightening in comparison to similar future studies.

Motivated by their role and employment market, web designers’ portfolios provide many examples of ethos appeals through various modes of online delivery. Results showed that the largest number of ethos appeals were made through creative writing and imagery in a portfolio’s “About” content, yet the most emphatic appeals were made by demonstration through portfolio items, and many appeals were enhanced by creative use of portfolio web design—especially through visual, structural, and technological features. In contrast, de-emphasis of some explicit
ethos appeals was likely caused by limitations and conventions of the genre. Analysis by hosting platform confirmed that technological and social structures influenced rhetorical appeals, encouraging web designers to overcome the structural limitations of hosted sites like Carbonmade as well as enabling larger design firms to take advantage of opportunities of self-hosted sites. Nevertheless, ethos emphasis results varied widely, showing that some designers did not take advantage of the apparent rhetorical potential of the hosted or the self-hosted portfolio medium.

As the web portfolio genre evolves, each portfolio will influence future portfolio designs both by imitation and by the designer’s need to avoid imitation by standing out as a unique, cutting-edge designer. Portfolio hosting applications may further proliferate and evolve to accommodate some of the design features now demonstrated by self-hosted portfolios.

Finally, this study has demonstrated that classical rhetorical concepts can be productively used for both quantitative and qualitative analysis within an overall framework of rhetorical genre theory, but that it is helpful to customize the language and details of the rhetorical framework to the language, appeals, media, and structures of a genre.

References


Abstract
Required by many graduate programs for evaluating applicants, Personal Statements (PSs) play an important role in graduate schools' admission decisions. From a genre perspective, PSs present an interesting research subject as this genre combines features of both academic and professional genres in terms of its academic and self-promotional purposes. Nevertheless, the discourse characteristics of PSs have rarely been studied. This paper reports on an exploratory study of politeness strategies used in PSs written by English-as-a-First-Language (EL1) and Chinese English-as-an-Additional-Language (CEAL) writers. Based on a total of 20 PSs (10 EL1 samples and 10 CEAL ones), this study explored differences in the politeness strategies used in PS writing by EL1 and CEAL writers, following the positive/negative politeness model by Brown and Levinson (1987). The data analysis revealed that both CEAL and EL1 writers employed a number of politeness strategies in their PSs. However, the CEAL writers demonstrated a preference for positive politeness strategies whereas the EL1 writers demonstrated more flexibility in their PSs by adopting positive and negative politeness strategies equally. These findings are noteworthy since they contradict predictions made by previous intercultural communication models, especially with reference to how and when Chinese EAL writers use politeness strategies in their academic writing. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research.

1. Introduction
In recent years, the higher education systems in English-speaking countries have witnessed a dramatic increase of international students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The enrolments of international students in Canadian universities, for instance, increased from 4% to 8% between 1992 and 2008, and in 2008, international students accounted for about one-third of all students at the graduate level in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). Such inter-

* Sibo Chen is a Doctoral student at School of Communication, Simon Fraser University (siboc@sfu.ca), and Hossein Nassaji is a Professor in the Department of Linguistics, University of Victoria (nassaji@uvic.ca).
nationalization has led to dramatic demographic changes in academic genre users in universities with English as the language of instruction. Many academic writers at the graduate level in English-speaking countries are non-native English speakers with various cultural backgrounds. Compared with native English speakers, these writers often face additional challenges in academic writing. Besides having to deal with cultural differences, many of them need to learn new academic genres since genre features in academic writing are not universal across the world (Atkinson, 1999; Upton & Connor, 2001).

One academic genre of interest is the Personal Statement (PS). PSs are self-promotional essays written by graduate school applicants for admission purposes. While PSs play an important role in graduate schools’ admission decisions, this particular genre has rarely been taught in Asian universities. Although in recent years universities in Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore have adopted North American or British graduate school systems and embedded PSs into their graduate school admission process, academic training in PSs is still neglected to a large extent for two major reasons. First, undergraduate admissions in many Asian countries rely heavily on entrance exams due to the high volume of high school graduates; second, the relatively conservative cultural values in many Asian countries, especially China, South Korea, and Japan, tend to encourage humility, regarding self-promotion as a form of arrogance.

From the perspective of genre research, PSs present an interesting research subject as they tend to combine features of both academic and professional genres in terms of their academic and self-promotional purposes, yet the genre features of PSs have rarely been studied (Samraj & Monk, 2008).

Given the rhetorical features and instrumental purposes of PSs, one genre feature that warrants particular attention is the use of politeness strategies. The use of politeness strategies, as a significant part of communicative actions in academic writing, is based on the author’s assumptions about his/her audience’s cultural backgrounds and the relational orientations between his/her audience and himself/herself (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As such, the use of politeness strategies in academic writing is deeply influenced by authors’ genre knowledge and cultural backgrounds.
The present paper presents an exploratory study on politeness strategies used in PSs written by native and non-native writers. Following the positive/negative model of politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), a total of 20 PSs were collected and compared in the reported study. This paper will take the following form. First, the paper surveys the emerging literature on the PS genre and previous studies of politeness strategies in other self-promotional genres. After a brief overview of the research data and data analysis methods, the paper describes the research findings on the use of positive and negative politeness strategies in PS writing by native and non-native English speakers. Finally, the paper discusses the study’s theoretical implications as well as areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Intercultural Variations in Applied Linguistics Research

Since the 1980s, the intercultural variations of genres have become an indispensable part of genre research, primarily for pedagogical considerations. According to the interlanguage hypothesis (Selinker, 1972), English texts by non-native writers tend to be influenced not only by the writers’ first languages, but also by their cultural backgrounds. As a result, although genre-based instruction is generally regarded as an effective approach for ESL/EAL writers to learn the linguistic conventions of English genres for their academic and professional purposes, the success of ESL/EAL instruction still largely depends on these writers’ awareness of intercultural variations and how successfully they handle these intercultural conflicts.

Although previous EAP/ESP studies have extensively addressed the topic of intercultural variations, the concept of “culture” in applied linguistics has received many critiques for its vagueness and complexity. Many early studies on intercultural communication in applied linguistics (e.g. Hall, 1977; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1960) adopted a relatively static view of “culture,” defining it as consistent values and beliefs shared by people with similar geographic and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, such studies focused on finding patterns or models of different cultures. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1960), for instance, argued that people from different cultures can be distinguished by their differences in five
fundamental orientations, including people’s relationship with each other (authoritarian, collective, or individual). Similarly, Hall (1977) categorized cultures as either high-context or low-context cultures. According to Hall, high-context cultures (e.g. Japan and China) prefer indirect communication styles whereas low-context cultures (e.g. Germany and the United States) favour direct communication styles. Perhaps the most prominent cultural taxonomy comes from Hofstede’s “Value Dimensions” (2001), which, based on questionnaire inquiries across forty cultures, offers a comprehensive map of the world's cultures on the basis of five dichotomies: (1) individualism versus collectivism, (2) high uncertainty avoidance versus low uncertainty avoidance, (3) high power distance versus low power distance, (4) masculinity versus femininity, and (5) long-term orientation versus short-term orientation.

One commonality among the above theories is the assumption that cultural values are consistent and stable among members of a culture. This view, however, has been criticized in recent research in applied linguistics for its over-generalization tendency. As Atkinson (1999) argued, individual differences, along with the dynamic changes of cultures, are often neglected when applying these “cultural models” in the analysis of small groups, especially students in various language classroom contexts. Based on a comprehensive review of theoretical discussions regarding the concept of “culture” in applied linguistics, Atkinson (1999) argued that the static view of culture is a potential threat for language classrooms since teachers are facing students with individual variances instead of stereotyped cultural images. According to Atkinson (1999), applied linguistics research needs to adopt a more flexible view of the concept of “culture,” emphasizing the diversity of each individual’s cultural views (Table 1).

In line with Atkinson (1999), Scollon and Scollon (2001), based on their analysis of discourse systems (or genres in general) in various contexts, proposed that a particular community’s culture is shaped by its history and communicative practices. The culture of a particular community can only be approached by in-depth analyses of intra-group communications since the community’s communicative practices are always changing. Overall, in contrast to early “cultural models,” the current applied linguistics research tends to adopt more dynamic and heterogeneous views on “culture.” Such views are also applicable to genre research and
suggest that the assumption that intercultural variations are universal across various genres might be problematic and requires further research.

Table 1

*Principles of dealing with intercultural issues in TESOL research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All humans are individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Individuality is also cultural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social group membership and identity are multiple, contradictory, and dynamic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social group membership is consequential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Methods of studying cultural knowledge and behavior are unlikely to fit a positivist paradigm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Language and culture are mutually implicated, but culture is multiple and complex.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Atkinson (1999)

**2.2. Previous Studies on Personal Statements**

Genre research, as an interdisciplinary field, has been conducted from various perspectives, such as discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and classroom research (Hyon, 1996). According to Swales (1990), a genre is “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” (p. 58). Texts belonging to the same genre can be identified by their similar objectives, structures, and content.

According to previous studies, PSs can be defined as an academic genre with self-promotional and semi-occluded features (Brown, 2004; Ding, 2007; Samraj & Monk, 2008). In other words, the PS genre has three essential features: academic, promotional, and occluded. It is an academic genre since it is used primarily for academic purposes; it is a promotional genre since PSs in essence are persuasive documents highlighting their authors’ credentials for graduate admission purposes; and it is a semi-occluded genre (Swales, 1996) as most PSs submitted to graduate schools cannot be easily accessed by the public due to privacy regulations. In short, PSs are complex from a genre perspective, which may account for the fact that very few studies on this genre have been conducted.
In the past decade, only three studies on the genre features of PSs have been published by major applied linguistics journals: Brown (2004), Ding (2007), and Samraj and Monk (2008). These studies have unanimously focused on the discursive structure of the PS genre, aiming at establishing a universal model accounting for the functional moves of PSs. Brown (2004), in the first study of the genre features of PSs appearing in a major applied linguistics journal (*Written Communication*), found that PSs written by successful applicants tended to contain more T-units describing the authors’ research interests and relevant experience than those written by unsuccessful applicants. Brown (2004) argues that the primary task for PS writers is to prove their familiarization with their target discourse communities.

Following Brown’s finding, Ding (2007) explored the functional move structure of PSs. Based on an analysis of 30 PSs, Ding suggested that PSs written for medical school applications tend to follow a five-step model: (1) providing reasons for application, (2) establishing credentials, (3) highlighting relevant life experiences, (4) outlining future career goals, and (5) describing personal traits. However, as admitted by Ding herself, the above model was based on samples written for only one discipline and thus cannot account for PSs written for other graduate programs.

Based on Ding’s five-step model, Samraj and Monk (2008) tried to establish a universal model for functional moves of PSs. They analysed 35 PSs across three disciplines (engineering, linguistics, and business administration) and revised Ding’s model as follows: (1) introduction, (2) background, (3) reasons for application, (4) extra-curricular information, and (5) conclusion.

Overall, although the above-mentioned studies have offered valuable insights into the discursive features of PSs, they are limited by their narrow research focus. Other aspects of PSs as a genre have not yet been studied. For example, the strategies used by applicants to enhance their chances of being selected are crucial for understanding how PSs’ primary communicative purpose (i.e. self-promotion) is realized. One group of such strategies are politeness strategies. This dimension of the PS genre has received little attention from past research and thus the present study set out to address this issue.
2.3. Previous Studies on Politeness Strategies in Self-Promotional Genres

Despite the lack of studies of politeness strategies in the PS genre, this issue has been addressed in research on job application letters. Overall, the findings suggest that politeness strategies used in job application letters vary from culture to culture and these distinctions can be attributed to cultural variations. One of the first studies of this kind was done by Bhatia (1989), who provided a comprehensive genre analysis of job application letters by South Asian writers. Bhatia (1989) identified three types of politeness strategies used by job applicants: self-glorification, self-degradation, and adversary glorification. These strategies were further refined as general functional moves of job application letters in Bhatia (1993), as shown in Table 2. One general implication of Bhatia’s studies is that although the domination of direct writing styles in promotional genres is primarily determined by these genres’ underlying communicative purposes (i.e. quick persuasion) and length restrictions, minor intercultural differences still exist in promotional genres. For instance, the comparison between job application letters by South Asian applicants and those by Anglo-American applicants suggests that South Asian applicants tend to use more self-degradation strategies than their Anglo-American peers and fail to use self-promotional sections, as a result of the introversion of South Asian cultures (Bhatia, 1989, 1993). Similar intercultural distinctions have also been found between Arabic and Anglo-American cultures (Al-Ali, 2004, 2006). According to Maier (1992), the distinctions between Eastern and Western cultures are due to different politeness strategy preferences among writers with different cultural backgrounds. This conclusion, however, has been questioned by Khan and Tin’s (2012) recent study on job application letters by Pakistani applicants, which found that over time, job applicants began to use less self-degradation moves. This study was designed to test whether the self-degradation moves as noted by Bhatia (1989) are still valid in today’s globalized job markets and it was found that although job applicants still regard “glorifying the employer” as an essential move in job application letters, applicants no longer use self-degradation as a way of expressing politeness.
Meanwhile, even within Western cultures, some interesting cultural differences of politeness strategy preferences have been observed. Based on a corpus-driven analysis of job application letters written by professionals from Finland, Belgium, and the United States, Upton and Connor (2001) found that Americans tend to be much more patterned, even formulaic, in their politeness strategies; the Belgians demonstrate more individuality in their letters; and the Finns exhibit both traits to a less extent.

Overall, previous studies on intercultural differences of politeness strategies in job application letters seem to indicate that such distinctions might be observed in the PS genre as well since PSs are basically “job application letters written for graduate schools” (Ding, 2007; Samraj & Monk, 2008). Nonetheless, this prediction should not be taken for granted without further research since PSs, like other genres, are dynamic and socially constructed. Khan and Tin’s (2012) study on Pakistani job applicants mentioned earlier has provided a valid case showing how temporal and social changes may alter the politeness strategy preferences of particular discourse communities.

2.4. Previous Studies on Contrastive Rhetoric between Chinese and English

The differences between Chinese and Anglo-American cultures have been extensively discussed in early studies on “cultural patterns” and these studies have suggested three key distinctions between the two cultures (Hall, 1977; Hofstede, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1960). First, the Chinese culture essentially favours collectivism while the Anglo-American culture prefers individualism; second, the

| Table 2 |
| A Model of Textual (Move) Structure for Job Application Letters |
| 1. Establishing credentials |
| 2. Introducing the candidate |
| 3. Offering incentives |
| 4. Enclosing documents |
| 5. Soliciting response |
| 6. Using pressure tactics |
| 7. Ending politely |

Adapted from Bhatia (1993)
Chinese culture emphasizes the significance of history whereas the Anglo-American culture tends to be future-oriented; third, the Chinese culture is high-context oriented with communications characterized by indirect and implicit features whereas the Anglo-American culture is low-context oriented with a preference for direct and explicit communications.

Furthermore, early studies on contrastive rhetoric between Chinese and English made several interesting observations regarding the preferences of politeness strategies between the two cultures. In one of the influential studies in the early stage of this research topic, Kaplan (1966) argued that due to cultural differences, Chinese writing is “indirect” and follows a circular rhetorical structure whereas English writing is “direct” and follows a linear rhetorical structure. Based on Kaplan’s seminal work, some follow-up studies have supported his conclusion while others have criticized his overgeneralization of the Chinese argumentation structure. Matalene (1985) observed a standard circular pattern in China’s English learners’ essays and in articles in China Daily (the English newspaper published by China’s official news agency). Liu (1990) conducted a text analysis on articles of Chinese literary criticism from Guangming Daily (a major daily newspaper in Shanghai) and found that modern Chinese writing is heavily influenced by traditional indirect Chinese writing styles. By comparison, several studies have criticized Kaplan’s overgeneralization of the “circular rhetorical style” in Chinese culture. Zhu (1997), in her study of Chinese sales letters, found that the language style in these letters was linear and direct, as the result of promotional purposes. Based on an analysis of five Chinese textbooks, Kirkpatrick (1997) suggested that contemporary Chinese texts reflect a more direct Anglo-American style than a traditional Chinese style.

In sum, although rhetorical differences between English and Chinese texts have been extensively studied, it is unknown whether English learners from China would transfer their politeness preferences into their English writing and if such transactions occur, how these preferences would interact with the primary communicative purposes of different genres, as we see in Zhu’s (1997) study of sales letters.

Meanwhile, as mentioned in the beginning of the paper, international students comprise a considerable proportion of university enrolments across
universities with English as the language of instruction and it is predictable that
g毕业 school in these universities will receive more and more PSs written by
non-native English writers. Therefore, the exploration of politeness strategies and
their intercultural differences in PS writing presents a valuable research topic for its
significant theoretical and pedagogical implications.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

The present study was a comparative analysis of politeness strategy
preferences in PSs between native and non-native writers. The non-native English
writers in this study were advanced English learners in China who had been
successfully admitted by various PhD programs in North American universities.
The study investigated three research questions:

1. What types of politeness strategies are used by native and non-native
   English writers in the collected PS samples?
2. Is there any difference in politeness strategy usage between native and non-
   native English writers in the collected PS samples?
3. If differences between native and non-native English writers exist, what
   factors may explain these differences?

3.2 Data Collection

For the present study, 20 PS samples in total were collected, including 10
PSs written by non-native English writers from China (CEAL-PSs) and 10 PSs
written by native English writers (EL1-PSs). The 10 CEAL-PSs were randomly
selected from a set of 30 CEAL-PS samples collected from CEAL writers currently
enrolled in various graduate programs in North America. These PSs were written
for various disciplines (e.g. biology, engineering, linguistics, etc.), and their authors
were all advanced EAL writers as indicated by their TOEFL or IELTS test results. By
comparison, the 10 EL1-PSs were collected from a different source: websites of
professional editing services. These PSs were posted online by professional
editing services for attracting potential clients. According to previous studies, such
PSs are carefully edited and thus can be regarded as a reliable source of data
(Brown, 2004; Ding, 2007). The 10 EL1-PSs were also randomly selected from a set
of 30 EL1-PS samples written for various disciplines, making them comparable to
the selected CEAL-PS samples. Following the solicitation of the PS samples, two corpora, the CEAL-PS corpus (9,888 tokens) and the EL1-PS corpus (8,628 tokens), were compiled for further data analysis.

It should be emphasized that the current analysis is exploratory in nature. Although the data set may seem relatively small, each of the collected PS samples provided multiple instances for in-depth analyses and comparisons. To our knowledge, the present study is the first of its kind on the PS genre and thus may have some interesting theoretical and pedagogical implications.

3.3. Data Analysis

The study adopted the positive/negative politeness model (Brown & Levinson, 1987) for data analysis. Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed an interjectional politeness model including two dimensions of “face”: one positive and one negative. The “positive face” reflects the need to be accepted and the sense of “belongingness” whereas the “negative face” reflects the desire for independence and freedom. To be specific, positive politeness strategies, often marked by direct expressions, emphasize the shared goals and common ground between the speaker and the addressee (e.g. using direct imperative phrases and optimistic expressions). By contrast, negative politeness strategies, often marked by indirect expressions, reinforce the speaker’s respect for the addressee (e.g. using modal words and formulaic expressions).

Based on the above model, the current study explored four types of politeness strategies used in the collected PS samples: two positive ones and two negative ones (Table 3). The positive politeness strategies explored in the solicited PSs were as follows: (1) expressions using first-person and second-person pronouns and (2) expressions showing optimism. As Upton and Connor argue (2001), expressions using first-person and second-person pronouns often deliver a sense of “polite command.” In particular, the use of the first-person pronoun “I,” though inevitable in self-promotional genres, may be taken as offensive if it is used at the beginning of sentences excessively. For instance, in the following sample sentences drawn from our CEAL corpus, sentences (2) and (3) are more direct than sentence (1) due to the use of first and second-person pronouns at the beginning of the sentences:
1. Thus pursuing a master degree becomes necessary and urgent for me.
2. I would like to seek employment in the academic circle if possible.
3. You may find me qualified enough for advanced studies in this field and areas other than integrated circuits.

Optimism is also considered a positive politeness strategy because “it connects with the addressee’s desire to have his or her needs met and shows the common goals between the addresser and the addressee” (Upton & Connor, 2001, p.324). In the case of self-promotional genres, optimism is most commonly expressed through the phrase “look forward to” and “would like” as well as the words “hope” and “wish,” as shown in the following examples drawn from our CEAL corpus:

4. I am looking forward to discussing the interesting economic topics with my preeminent and patient professors.
5. I hope I will have the opportunity to make quick progress in your program.

The negative politeness strategies explored in the solicited PSs were as follows: (1) the use of modal verbs and (2) the use of formulaic expressions. The use of modal verbs can be regarded as a negative politeness strategy as they generally soften the expression of directness by indicating a degree of uncertainty (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Formulaic expressions, by contrast, tend to indicate the addresser’s awareness of conventions preferred by the addressee, showing the writer’s respect for the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive politeness strategies</th>
<th>Negative politeness strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• First-person and second-person expressions</td>
<td>• Expressions using modal verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Optimistic expressions</td>
<td>• Formulaic expressions showing appreciation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Upton and Connor (2001)

The current study adopted a mixed-method for data analysis. The corpus analysis program WordSmith Tools (Scott, 2008) was used to locate specific “lexical indicators” of the targeted politeness strategies across the solicited PS
samples. Then, qualitative textual analysis was conducted to identify potential patterns of politeness strategy usage.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis Results

Positive politeness strategies emphasize shared goals and common ground between the addressee and the addressee, thereby narrowing the conceptual “distance” between the two groups. WordSmith Tools was used to locate expressions using first-person and second-person pronouns in the research data. As shown in Table 4, the first-person pronoun “I” and its possessive adjective “my” were frequently used in the collected PS samples, with 7.24/100 tokens in the CEAL-PS corpus and 5.49/100 tokens in the EL1-PS corpus. By contrast, the second-person pronoun “you” and its possessive adjective “your” were rarely used in the collected PS samples, with only 0.31/100 tokens in the CEAL-PS corpus and 0.22/100 tokens in the EL1-PS corpus. It can be observed that the CEAL-PSs tended to use more first-person expressions than the EL1-PSs (7.24 vs. 5.49 per 100 tokens). This finding, however, could be considered a result of the CEAL writers’ limited ability to use diversified syntactic structures in self-expressions instead of their particular preference for positive politeness strategies. Such an interpretation was supported by further qualitative analysis of the solicited PSs.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency per 100 tokens (CEAL-PS)</th>
<th>Frequency per 100 tokens (EL1-PS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I”</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My”</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.24</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.49</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You”</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Your”</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.31</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 provides information on the use of optimistic expressions in the PS samples. In general, optimistic expressions were found in each PS sample. They
appeared approximately 1.6 per PS in the CEAL-PS corpus and 1.9 per PS in the EL1-PS corpus. The higher frequency of optimistic expressions in the EL1-PS corpus was a clear indicator that the native English writers had a better command of the PS genre.

**Table 5**

*Optimistic Expressions in the Collected PS Samples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency (CEAL-PS)</th>
<th>Frequency (EL1-PS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I would like...”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I look forward...”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I hope...”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I wish...”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies show the addresser’s respect for the addressee, thereby maintaining the conceptual “distance” between the two groups. Table 6 shows the frequencies of modal verbs in the PS samples. Overall, both the CEAL-PS corpus and the EL1-PS corpus had low frequencies of modal verbs (0.60 per 100 tokens vs. 0.62 per 100 tokens). There was, however, a substantial structural difference between the two corpora in terms of modal verb usage: the CEAL-PSs excessively used the modal verb “can” to mark modality (32 out of 53 occurrences) whereas EL1-PSs demonstrated more flexibility.

**Table 6**

*Expressions Using Modal Verbs in the Collected PS Samples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency (CEAL-PS)</th>
<th>Frequency (EL1-PS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Can”</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Could”</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“May”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Might”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Would”</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Should”</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency per 100 tokens</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.60</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four types of expressions of appreciation\textsuperscript{1} were located in the PS samples. Table 7 shows the frequencies of these expressions. The collected PS samples achieved very low frequencies of these phrases, with a total of 5 in the samples. To some extent, this result is unexpected since such expressions tend to have high occurrences in job application letters (Maier, 1992; Upton & Connor, 2001).

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formulaic Expressions Showing Appreciation in the Collected PS samples</th>
<th>Frequency (CEAL-PS)</th>
<th>Frequency (EL1-PS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I appreciate...”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Thank you for...consideration”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s my honour...”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s my pleasure...”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The quantitative results above map the general patterns of politeness strategies in the PS samples. A follow-up textual analysis was conducted to provide further details regarding the actual usage of politeness strategies in these PSs.

According to previous studies on job application letters (Khan & Tin, 2012; Maier, 1992; Upton & Connor, 2001), the expression of politeness is primarily realized in the opening and the ending paragraphs in self-promotional genres since the first paragraph usually constructs the narrative stance of the entire text whereas the last paragraph brings the narrative to an end. In the present study, politeness strategies in the opening and the ending of the PSs were identified and analysed. For each PS sample, its opening and ending paragraphs were coded as “indirect” or “direct.” Table 8 shows the politeness strategy patterns in the opening and ending paragraphs of the PS samples. Both CEAL-PSs and EL1-PSs achieved the same result with “indirect-direct” as the dominant politeness structure (70% of the PS samples).

\textsuperscript{1} Admittedly, optimistic expressions can be formulaic as well. However, these expressions of appreciation are defined as “negative politeness strategies” since their primary communicative purpose is to maintain a conceptual distance between the addresser and the addressee, rather than narrowing such distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987).
Table 8  
*Politeness Strategy in the Opening and Ending Paragraphs of the Collected PS-Samples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency (CEAL-PS)</th>
<th>Frequency (EL1-PS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect-direct</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect-indirect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct-indirect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct-direct</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Conclusion

Overall, the results suggest that in the writing of PSs, CEAL and EL1 writers are able to use both positive and negative politeness strategies. Neither of the two types of politeness strategies was used exclusively or significantly more frequently than the other. In line with previous studies of job application letters (Khan & Tin, 2012; Maier, 1992; Upton & Conner, 2001), the current study shows that the notion of “indirectness versus directness” developed in early contrastive rhetoric research (e.g. Kaplan, 1966) is not able to account for genre variations. Similarly, CEAL writers’ effective self-reference shown in PS writing also contradicts the prediction of “collectivism” in Chinese culture by previous cultural pattern research (e.g. Hofstede, 2001). These results provide further empirical evidence for the argument that genre is dynamic and socially constructed (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). In the current case, the communicative purpose of PSs (i.e. quick persuasion) determines “directness” as their primary communication style, overcoming the impacts of Chinese culture.

However, the results also revealed minor differences between the CEAL and EL1 writers. To be specific, the EL1 writers demonstrated more flexibility in the use of politeness strategies in their PS writing whereas the CEAL group tended to be more patterned or even formulaic. The results in Table 4 and Table 6 indicate that compared with their CEAL peers, the EL1 writers were able to adopt various discourse strategies by using fewer expressions in the first-person as well as more diversified expressions of modality. One possible explanation for this finding is the difference of English proficiency between the two groups. Maier (1992) also argues that EL1 writers are equipped with more pragmatics knowledge than CEAL
writers. In the current study, despite the fact that the CEAL writers were all advanced English learners with years of English learning experience, they still demonstrated disadvantages in terms of pragmatic and discursive knowledge of English.

Furthermore, the “indirect-direct” pattern found in the textual analysis highlights the notion of “power imbalance” in self-promotional genres. The imbalance of power between the addresser and the addressee is a common feature in application letters, which ideally require negative politeness strategies. However, this desire seems to conflict with the “quick persuasion” purpose of application letters, as indicated by the results of the current study, which found that most writers adopted the “indirect-direct” structure.

Finally, the present study is not able to provide any strong conclusion in terms of cultural distinctions between CEAL and EL1 writers. Although the data analysis suggests some inter-group distinctions, there are other possible explanations rather than cultural factors for the differences, such as the influence of English proficiency, the writers' personal backgrounds, and the issue of authenticity (especially for the professionally edited samples), which require further in-depth investigation. Another limitation is that the study focused only on PSs of successful CEAL applicants. Unsuccessful applicants may have used politeness strategies differently, and that may have contributed to their lack of success.

In sum, the current exploratory study demonstrates the complexity of politeness strategies embedded in PSs and indicates the need for more research in this particular genre. Following Upton and Connor (2001), the present study adopted a mixed-method to analyze the PS genre and showed that such an approach can effectively facilitate the qualitative analysis of discourse. This corresponds with Flowerdew's (2005) call for more research using computer-facilitated methods to study texts at the discursive level. It should be noted, however, that the present study involved only a small database, which prevented us from making any strong conclusions regarding cultural distinctions between CEAL and EL1 writers. To some extent, the small database is due to the semi-occluded nature of the PS genre: PSs submitted to departments are restricted by privacy regulations and can only be accessed by a small number of readers (i.e. graduate admission committee members). Although the research ethics review of the current study allowed
that PSs could be collected for research purposes with the consent of the original authors, it turned out that many PS authors were reluctant to share their personal statements due to privacy concerns. As a result, it was difficult to include a larger number of PSs for the current study. Having said that, we still hope that future research on cultural impacts in self-promotional genres will involve larger writing samples, which would allow more detailed investigations of genre variations within and across texts.

References


Rhetoric with a Human Face: Practicing Argumentation for Emancipation

Loïc Nicolas

Abstract
This paper aims to examine the origins, foundations and critical components of the humanist rhetoric advocated by the “Brussels School of Rhetoric.” It will also open the way for a new reflection regarding the ultimate purposes and methods of education in democratic societies. First, I show why the art of rhetoric should be considered as a matter of common competence for everyone. To achieve this, I will focus on Gorgias’ approach to persuasion, and Eugene Dupréel’s perspective on practice. Secondly, I will analyze the theory and pedagogical thought of Chaim Perelman (1912-1984). In the post-war period, Perelman reaffirmed his confidence in humankind and defended rhetoric as a means to exercise and to improve our liberty through discourse. In order to better understand this, I consider an educational and humanist principle embraced by Perelman: that of libre examen.

Introduction
In this paper, I intend to put into context the work undertaken by Victor Ferry and Benoit Sans on rhetorical exercises in the spirit of the “Brussels School of Rhetoric.” In other words, I hope to show that their work seeks to concretely apply, and even to continue, the project initiated by Eugene Dupréel and taken up by Chaim Perelman in the late 1940s. Conceived at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), this brilliant intellectual enterprise became a humanist rereading of the classical tradition, and in particular, the work of the Sophists. It emerged indirectly,
because the enterprise did not contain any concrete programme of studies. At the same time, and in a gradual manner, this enterprise opened the way for a new reflection regarding the ultimate purposes and methods of education in democratic societies. Thus, the work of Ferry and Sans aims to deepen, nourish, and put to the test the insights of Dupréel and Perelman. These insights can be summed up in four main points: (1) Rhetoric is not a verbal expertise, but a practice of everyday life, which (2) does not concern only experts in speech, but in fact (3) all citizens, who should adopt the tools of efficacious discourse, because (4) all humans should be able to become verbal craftsmen (Sennett, 2008; Sigaut, 2012), and become emancipated through the exercise of argumentation.

Indeed, as Aristotle underlines in the first book (1354a 1-2) of his “Art” of Rhetoric, “for all, up to a certain point, endeavor to criticize or uphold an argument, to defend themselves or to accuse” (Aristotle, 1947, 3). In this regard, one can recall the remarkable effort carried out by Chaim Perelman at the ULB, where he had chosen to teach rhetoric and argumentation in all faculties of the university. This enterprise, which touched the lives of thousands of students, over several decades, remains unequalled. For Perelman, rhetoric could not be attached to one discipline only; rather, it had a relationship with all disciplines, indiscriminately.

My paper will examine this in two phases: (1) I will attempt to show why the art of rhetoric should be considered as a matter of common competence for everyone; following this, (2) I will return to consider Perelman's enterprise and intellectual journey. During the latter, Perelman found it relevant, even crucial, for democracy, to plead for an education in the art of argumentation, notably by publishing with Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation (1958; trans. 1969). This book is considered a founding (or even re-founding) act of the discipline, to which the members of the GRAL (our research team at the ULB) have devoted their research.

**Rhetoric: a discipline at the crossroads of disciplines**

To start this first section, it would seem interesting to consider a long extract from Plato's Gorgias, which touches to the abilities of the orator and the doctor:

Socrates: Yes, that's what amazes me [that the rhetors are those who give advice, and who prevail with their opinions], Gorgias, and, that's why I've
been asking you all this time just what the power of rhetoric is. For it seems to be some superhumanly great power when I look at it like this.

Gorgias: Yes, and if only you knew the whole of it, Socrates – that it practically captures all powers and keeps them under its control. And I’ll give you a strong proof of this. I have often in the past gone with my brother and the other doctors to some sick man refusing to drink a medicine or let the doctor cut or burn him; when the doctor couldn’t persuade him, I persuaded him, by no other craft than rhetoric. And I tell you, if a rhetor and a doctor went into any city you like and had to compete in speeches in the Assembly or in any other gathering about which of them should be chosen the state physician, the doctor would end up nowhere, but the man powerful at speaking would be chosen if he wanted it. And if he were competing against any other craftsman whatever, the rhetor more than anyone else would persuade them to choose him. (Plato, 1979, 23-24; 456a-c).

Socrates: And yet the non-doctor presumably has no knowledge of those things which the doctor has knowledge of. [...] Then the man who doesn’t know will be more persuasive than the man who knows among those who don’t know, when the rhetor is more persuasive than the doctor. [...] [The rhetor] doesn’t know the things themselves, what is good or bad, what is fine or shameful or just or unjust, but has devised persuasion about them so that though he doesn’t know, among those who don’t know he appears to know, rather than the man who knows. (Plato, 1979, 27; 459b-e).

Socrates in *Gorgias* admits in this extract that in front of a crowd of ignorant persons, the orator, in other words the sophist, will be more able to persuade than the doctor. At the same time, inasmuch as concerns medical affairs, the medic will be – according to Socrates – more persuasive than the simple orator. Gorgias accepts the assertions of his opponent. Socrates continues: if in front of any audience the simple orator is more able of persuading than the doctor, this would mean that he would be more persuasive than someone with medical knowledge. But the one who does not have knowledge of medicine will be, by definition, more ignorant in medical matters (459 a-c).
Two things stand out in this exchange. On the one hand, Socrates implies that the recourse to rhetoric, in other words, the techniques of persuasion, help to make up for a lack of knowledge, and this in the degree to which the “one who knows” – in this case the doctor – would not be anything other than persuasive in front of “those who know” (i.e. other doctors). This statement would still have to be proven, but the philosopher presents it as evidence. Indeed, nothing tells us that, in the midst of a gathering of doctors, a member of this profession rallying his colleagues to his cause (for instance a new remedy or a change in practice) does so only on his medical knowledge, and this, no matter what the medical competence of the doctor. In this regard, Socrates blurs the distinction between two things:

1. *the corpus of knowledge that is proper to a medic (a part of the medical art), and*

2. *the social and discursive competencies which grant the ability to make others accept or recognize a point (including by those who possess the medical art).*

We should indeed recognize, on the other hand, that the competencies in question allow one to argue “confused notions” (good health, happiness, the good, the tolerable, utility) and to orient oneself in human affairs that include an inevitable part of doubt linked to pain, illness, the meaning of existence, and so forth. In regard to these questions, the medic is not more competent than another person. In fact, Gorgias’ approach to persuasion (in 456 b-c) does not at all imply a challenge to the value of the medical competencies of the doctor, nor does it imply that the orator himself or any orator can, by his rhetorical *savoir-faire* become able to best the doctor in the domain of medical knowledge. Gorgias does not, in any way, make these points. Gorgias’ argumentation aims, on the contrary, to bring out what Socrates is in fact trying to ignore. The latter refuses to accept that one can have all possible knowledge on a certain subject, but that if one is incapable of transmitting this knowledge in practice (in the case of medicine, to argue for a course of treatment, such as a surgical operation), it is equivalent to having no knowledge at all.

In the first quotation, Gorgias does in no way admit that he has substituted rhetorical art by the medical knowledge of his brother. His aim is not to replace one remedy by another nor is it to establish a medical prescription. He would be,
quite simply, incapable of doing this. What Gorgias defends is that – by the technique of discourse – he is able to facilitate the acceptance of what medicine recommends. He has thus placed himself in the sphere of the reasonable, the preferable, the convincing; in other words, the sphere of social convention. To help convince us of the desirability or utility (or the opposite) of a certain behaviour or course of action: this is what rhetoric is for. Rhetoric only gives reasons concerning an issue that could always be argued in one direction or another: in this case, to continue a treatment, to have an amputation, to drink a potion, etc.

To be clear: Gorgias places himself on the plane of adherence. He places himself on the plane of the contingency of possible worlds. From this we can draw the conclusion that the *good doctor* should also be a man of words, a craftsman of the *logos*. As such, Eugene Dupréel, taking up and developing Gorgias’ idea, underlines, in his *Traité de Morale*, that in order to practice his art well, the doctor needs aplomb, the confidence of others, and authority. In other words, the doctor needs to develop social and linguistic competencies that are not contained in medical knowledge:

Not only good remedies are needed, but also the authority with which to impose them. A health regime does not have anything attractive about it. It is a bother or an unpleasant experience that the sick person only accepts because he has a hope. It is necessary for a persuasive ability to help this hope to emerge; and more so, to make this a sustainable hope. What’s more, the medic is not only a practitioner charged with fighting illness [...]. The doctor’s social role is not linked to the efficacy of his remedies; it is linked to the degree of confidence that we have in his enlightenment and his personal authority. (Dupréel, 1967 [1932], p. 11).

Nonetheless, we should not ignore the fact that this perspective, as defended by Eugene Dupréel, and which the Brussels School of Rhetoric has tried to bring up to date, is not popular. On the contrary, intellectual and educational traditions have concluded that rhetoric and ignorance are one and the same. These traditions have made this appear a natural link, following Plato’s lead. Based on Plato, rhetoric has become a shameful practice, used for want of anything better and for want of irrefutable evidence. However, when it comes to human affairs, neither ignorance nor knowledge is sufficient. What is relevant is prudence in action...
(phronēsis), as well as intuition, in other words practical wisdom. It is for this reason that no special science would be necessary to engage oneself in human affairs, nor in order to distinguish between those who know (the supposed experts), and those who don’t know (ordinary citizens).

The treatment of human problems, as dealt with by rhetoric, is in the domain of all human beings, the common competencies of all. These competencies need to be exercised and practiced so that they become a habit; in other words, a sort of “instinct acquired after birth” (Dupréel, 1967 [1932], p. 350). In effect, successful verbal persuasion should not be left to chance or to good luck, especially not in democracies. It would be equally dangerous to abandon these successes to mere verbal experts. Only rhetoric practiced by citizens that are conscious of this practice gives the capacity to tackle, freely, and responsibly, human affairs, accepting at the same time the risks of this freedom:

By habit, that which demands our attention, reasoning, an effort of will, tends to become automatic, and like the effect of a spontaneous impulse. This is to say that, all that which in our activity is the result of a complete habituation, resembles the effect of an instinct, at least to the degree in which the act manifests itself independently of an express deliberation and an act of particular will. A perfect habit is, to some degree, like an instinct acquired after birth, as the result of an exercise taken on through the repetition of the same actions. (Dupréel, 1967 [1932], p. 350)

Why is it so important to achieve such gymnastics of the mind: trying to seek, mobilize, select, overturn or even reinforce arguments, but also learning to recognize in the opposing argument a cause which, while not defendable, may be arguable? The reason is that in human affairs, in places where choice is not subjected to necessity, it is always possible to argue in good faith in one sense or the other, and to invoke arguments in both directions. In fact, there is no such as an argument that is sufficiently “strong” to be of universal validity, in front of all audiences and in all contexts. We cannot find any argument that cannot be replied to in some way or another. The strength of an argument is not a constant value. This strength can thus be overturned as soon as we turn our gaze towards the multiplicity of possibilities. Dupréel underlines this in the following way:
Truths [especially social truths] are relative because they are never the tracing of an absolute being, of an immutable nature that is independent of the conditions of their affirmation. Man is the one who decides, since it is he who combines the judgment in which his knowledge is formulate, with the relation that makes it a truth. (Dupréel, 1948, p. 43)

In consequence, the weakest argument, the most apparently fragile, can become the strongest of arguments and can obtain the support of even the most recalcitrant listeners. To clarify: the weakness as well as the strength of an argument is not a permanent quality inscribed in the nature of things or of the world. It constitutes a dynamic resource which the orator can make use of to move the scales in one direction or another, in order to obtain support. In this way he can invert the thrust of an opposing argument or absorb its impact for his own use. Precisely these relations and dynamics of strength need to be mastered, in order to make of them a second nature.

The humanism of Perelman: believing in humans, despite everything

Based on our earlier reflections on the prime importance of the exercise of argumentation, I would like to now consider the intellectual itinerary of Chaim Perelman, this disciple of Eugene Dupréel and leader of the Brussels School of Rhetoric. In this second section, I advance the hypothesis that there would not have been a rediscovery of rhetoric by Perelman during the 1940s if Perelman had not been open to this encounter.

In other words, Perelman would not have encountered rhetoric if he had not begun a quest, against his scientific convictions, for a means to move on intellectually and ethically from the disaster that was the Second World War. In particular, he sought a way forward that was neither nihilistic nor disenchanted. A priori, and as curious as this may seem, nothing is stranger to Perelman – the “early” Perelman – than the rhetorical tradition. The Belgian philosopher, in his early career, was a formalist logician, who sought, in logic, the salvation of decision. Despite the distance that separates formal logic from the craftsmanship of the logos (that of the Sophists), it is nonetheless towards the latter that Perelman progressively oriented himself. Indeed, in the post-war period, Perelman saw himself forced to recognize the total failure of the bloodless and disembodied system in which he had placed so much hope before the war. We can understand
Perelman’s trajectory as a conversion (like Saul on the way to Damascus, if one wants to use a caricature). Perelman had to recognize that the mathematical formulae of formal logic, designed to guide reason with firmness and rigour, had been powerless against barbarism and violence.

Perelman faced the question of what was to be done – as an intellectual, but also as a citizen – in a ruined world, with a destroyed intellectual tradition. Were intellectuals to renounce their confidence in mankind, and descend into nihilistic and total relativism? Some indeed did propose this. Perelman however refused to do so, as he understood the destructive nature of nihilism and relativism. He did not give in to the siren song of disenchantment. He wanted to continue to be optimistic despite everything. He wanted to continue to believe in humankind, all the while knowing what humankind is capable of. He sought, in the sphere of education, what would be able to aid to develop and improve that which is the most profoundly human in humankind:

The philosophical scope of humanism, which transcends the historical contingencies of its emergence, is of moral relevance: it provides a programme of education to develop that which is human in humankind. [...] The advocates of a spirit of critical thinking [which the founders of the Free University of Brussels termed libre examen] have never been as naïve to believe that humans know or will know ever the definitive solution to all their problems. They nonetheless wish that we should not be content to accept the decisions of others to establish our own convictions. Even if we are engaged in action, we should not let our thinking be recruited; we should always keep our freedom of judgment. (Perelman, 1950, pp. 38-39)

Let us be more specific – and let us consider what is at the heart of the humanist thinking of Perelman. It appears that there is in his work a firmly anchored will to restore the human being in his ability to decide for himself, and in his responsibility. Perelman denounced the earlier notion of decision-making derived from the order of things, which would have to be imposed on all as if it were self-evident. As Perelman writes in a 1949 article, when one finds oneself confronted with necessity and evidence, there can be “neither choice nor merit; a machine could very well replace human actions in such conditions” (Perelman, 1989 [1949],
p. 167). This central idea is taken up in 1977 (trans. 1982) in *The Realm of Rhetoric*, the synthesis of Perelman’s work:

Modern conceptions of demonstration, in search of increasing rigor, have come to conceive of proof as relative to a system of which all the elements are explicitly formulated and which, by that very fact, appears isolated from thought in general. It is precisely this attempt at formalization and isolation that makes the system mechanizable and allows a computer to carry out prescribed operations correctly, without the intervention of human thought. Argumentation, however, is part of a process of thought of which the diverse elements are interdependent.

People have tried to systematize and thus give more rigour to branches of nonformal disciplines such as physics or law. These endeavors have been successful, in the process of linking abstract formulas to concrete situations, to the extent that they have not come up against experiments that contradict predictions from the formulas or unforeseen situations that go beyond the pre-established abstract scheme. To adapt the system to experience, to add flexibility to the formulas used, we are obliged to have recourse to argumentation and consequently to reinsert the system within the overall framework of our knowledge and aspirations – to reestablish contact between the field we wanted to isolate and the totality of our convictions and beliefs. (Perelman, 1982 [1977], p. 33)

In other words, the rhetorical system, and the practice of argumentation, as understood by Perelman, constitutes the only occasion and means to combat, or maybe to establish a *cordon sanitaire* around, all those who defend, in the name of supposed progress, the dream of a mechanical and bloodless rigour: without humans, without passions, without beliefs, without aspirations of any sort. This is why, for Perelman, to promote rhetoric in education and in society constitutes a means to re-insert humankind and practical reasoning at the centre of the “system”. For him, the aim is to reintroduce into the system in question, subtlety and space, but also indeterminacy; in other words, liberty for those who, in conscience, need to make choices and act.
The Perelmanian enterprise is one of reaffirmed confidence in humankind. In order to better understand this, an educational principle can be considered: that of *libre examen*. This is in essence a humanist principle, in which Perelman placed his hopes in the post-war period. *A priori*, nothing seems to bring together rhetoric and this rationalist principle, an inheritance from the Enlightenment. *Libre examen*, as it is understood at the ULB since 1850, aims to combat all obscurantisms. Chaim Perelman was inspired by this principle, and devoted several articles and conference papers to it, delivered before groups of students or at academic events. His scientific oeuvre and his educational thought cannot be understood without taking into account his attachment to this principle. It is worth rereading his definition of it:

This principle, in its strictest sense, consists in the rejection of the argument from authority [appeal to authority], no matter what authority this may be, no matter in what domain in which this authority aims to impose itself on our thought. [...] *Libre examen* demands of you to consider no human being infallible, and not to reject the thought of any human being as unworthy of consideration, at least *a priori*. It requires individual responsibility and seeks to create a community of minds. (Perelman, 1950, pp. 38-39)

It is necessary to accept the idea according to which the principle of *libre examen* is a means to better understand the genesis and the orientation of the rhetorical project of Perelman, but also his concept of education. This approach allows us to answer a crucial question: how and why did Perelman come to consider rhetoric as a means to exercise and to improve liberty through discourse? Further to this, this approach also helps us to better understand how it is possible to create a “community of minds”, without renouncing the benefits of disagreement and the perspectives they offer. In other words, it allows us to better understand agreement in the midst of responsible disagreement. What's more, this approach helps us to see rhetoric as something quite distinct than a set of discursive techniques designed to obtain agreement.

By focusing on *libre examen* and its problems, and thus in making a detour, one can obtain the means to redefine rhetoric, and to enlarge its domain. In this regard, the conference paper that Perelman presented on 16 March 1945 on “Libre examen et démocratie” permits our understanding to take a step further in this
direction. Perelman considers the conditions that make possible the development and the practice of the principle in question. In particular, he underlines:

*Libre examen* cannot be developed but in a pluralist society; a society that tolerates the coexistence of several absolute values, and that does not seek to reduce them to one only system of values, and this, whatever the advantages could be of a systematization. *Libre examen* can only exist in a pluralist society that goes hand in hand with a certain amount of disorder, the inevitable price of liberty. [...] Having pluralism as a condition, and humanism as a consequence, the principle of *libre examen* is linked to a vision of life that realizes itself best in a democratic society. (Perelman, 2009 [1945], pp. 56-57).

What conclusions can we extract from this? We understand that there cannot be any exercise of *libre examen* without a pluralism that conditions a state of incertitude: a pluralism that generates disequilibrium, disagreement, and flexibility. Nonetheless, if one knows where *libre examen* can be exercised, that is to say in a democratic society, we do not necessarily know how: how can we practice *libre examen* and exercise our liberty? How can we defend democracy, this system “always under threat, always precarious” (Perelman, 2009 [1945], p. 59)? How can flexibility and authority be allied? How can we remain tolerant without falling into a destructive indifference? In the immediate post-war period, Perelman was very conscious that democrats could no longer continue to isolate themselves in their “ivory towers”. He understood as well that democrats cannot be satisfied by a purely theoretical and abstract democracy: without a body, without passion, without humans who live it and put it to the test by their words. Perelman also knew the immense danger that could emerge from embracing a lifeless and disembodied thought, and from recognizing only formal reasoning, with no grasp of the complexity of human affairs. Nonetheless, for Perelman, it was not a question of giving in to the siren songs of relativism and irrationalism. On the contrary, he desired to rediscover the old voice of practical reason, while into considering the consequences of the dramas of the twentieth century.

In fact, in the course of the years 1945-47, disappointed by his earlier ideas and beliefs, Perelman sought a means to orient oneself and to act in the real world; a means that could be employed in education and be passed on and used,
by all citizens in the real world: in other words, there where freedom of choice and argumentative rationality are put to the test and exercised. Perelman was guided by the desire to find a tool which would not be used to achieve unanimous agreement, but which could make its users capable to together tackle, explore and deepen their disagreement. The aim was thus to prepare the ground for social concord. Disagreement, at the centre of Perelman's thought on rhetoric, was precisely seen as an opportunity for society. To be clear: in 1945, some of Perelman's insights were already emerging. A feeling of urgency drove the enterprise forward; but the tool that we discuss here, had not yet been discovered. Four years later, at the end of 1949, Perelman's discourse had somewhat evolved, and had become more concrete. He appeared to have taken his first insights to their natural conclusion. Perelman was then at a turning point of his thought:

He who is inspired by *libre examen* [...] will call first of all upon his critical spirit, which marks the absolutely first beginning of any opinion that is to be well founded. Then, he will seek the reasons for and against any solution envisaged, and he will support one of these by taking himself the responsibility of his decision. In contrast to obedience to rules imposed by others, we offer adherence to a conviction formed by oneself. Finally, he will use these arguments to convince his interlocutors and to obtain their agreement. In opposition to the fascist maxim: “believe, obey, fight”, we propose: “doubt, decide, and convince.” (Perelman, 2009 [1949], pp. 145-146)

The conference paper, in this case, is “Le libre examen, hier et aujourd’hui.” The heart of Perelman’s *New Rhetoric* is there: the founding doubt, from which action can spring; the search for reasons to act, or to suspend judgment; the sense of responsibility; the persuasive enterprise; but also, and especially, the practice of the twofold arguments, which Ferry and Sans consider in their work. In consequence, and in response to our initial question: how to practice *libre examen*, the answer suggests itself: by practicing and exercising rhetoric.

**Conclusion**

Summing up – and this is the hypothesis advanced: in searching for a tool that could be used by democrats and educators, in the secondary schools or at universities, Perelman found, despite his intellectual tradition, ancient rhetoric: that
of Aristotle but also that of the sophists. As proof of this conversion, we have the letter that Perelman addressed, in January 1962, to his Australian colleague Julius Stone. The words of this letter can serve as a conclusion:

Indeed, if it is true that in 1945, I was strongly under the influence of positivism, my study on justice led me away from it. [...] The change results from my dissatisfaction in conceiving the values that serve as the basis for a juridical system as being entirely arbitrary; [this change results also] from the search for techniques that could serve as a justification for these values. You will see, incidentally, that I focus my philosophy more and more on the problem of justification. (Perelman, 1962)

References


Educating Rhetorical Consciousness in Argumentation

Victor Ferry & Benoît Sans

Abstract
In summer 2013 we initiated a project entitled “Rhetorical exercises: practical reasoning, creativity, citizenship.” Within this framework, we adapt ancient rhetorical exercises to contemporary pedagogy. This project includes a dimension of experimental archaeology: testing ancient rhetorical tools in an attempt to rediscover their purposes and their effects (in terms of targeted skills). This project also includes an educational concern: bringing rhetorical tools to future citizens. The first section presents our approach to rhetorical exercises and the general philosophy of our project. The second section is dedicated to the exercises we used to develop learners’ rhetorical consciousness and to the discussion of the initial results of our experiment.

1. Introduction
In his treatise, Aristotle defines rhetoric as an ability (dunamis) to discover, on any issue, the available means of persuasion (Rhet. I, 2, 1356a). This definition has important implications for the conception and the implementation of rhetorical training. Indeed, to be in line with Aristotle’s definition, the purpose of a rhetorical course should not primarily be to give students advice to produce persuasive speeches. Its primary purpose should rather be to educate students’ ability to cast a theoretical eye on argumentation.

Along the same line, we started, in 2013, to implement rhetorical training aiming at developing students’ argumentative consciousness. By means of rhetorical exercises, we attempt to develop their ability to perceive argumentation as a field of theoretical inquiry, as a field in which there is progress to be achieved. This training was designed for young pupils in high school and for university

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* Victor Ferry is a Wiener-Anspach postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford and a member of the research Group on Rhetoric and Linguistic Argumentation (GRAL). Benoît Sans is a FNRS postdoctoral researcher at the University of Brussels (ULB) and a member of the research Group on Rhetoric and Linguistic Argumentation (GRAL).

1 On the implications of Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as a dunamis for the theory and the practice of this discipline, see Sans (2013).
students. For different reasons, detailed further below, both categories of learners have a lot to gain from this training.

The purpose of this paper is to present our methods and our initial results. By providing details about the design of our exercises, their purposes (in terms of targeted skills), and their implementation in the classroom, we also intend to stimulate scholars and teachers’ interest in rhetorical exercises. We believe that there is a whole field of research to be developed from the observation of students’ rhetorical performances.

The first section introduces our approach to rhetorical exercises and the general philosophy of our project. The second section is dedicated to the presentation of the exercises we used to develop learners’ rhetorical *dunamis*.

2. Rhetorical exercises as tools for citizenship

The theory of rhetoric was born with the first democratic institutions in ancient Greece, to equip citizens for a new reality: a reality in which any of them might have to defend his interests in front of an audience. This is precisely the conception of rhetoric we intend to renew: a discipline specialized in the development of students’ skills for public life.

2.1. A practical approach to citizenship

Our willingness to reintroduce a genuine teaching of rhetoric originates in a conviction that education for citizenship should focus on *skills* and not only on *values*. The ancient theory and practice of rhetoric offer countless tools to implement such a practical conception of citizenship.

Since the beginning of its history, rhetoric has been taught by exercises. This teaching, which closely associated theory and practice, reminds us of craftsmanship where one learns by doing (Sennett, 2008). After the first Sophists, rhetorical teaching evolved to become, around the beginning of the Roman Empire, a comprehensive educative program delivered by specialized rhetors. At that time,

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Thanks to a new fellowship from the Belgian National Scientific Research Funds (FNRS), we initiated a partnership with a secondary school that practices an active pedagogy and that was open to new kinds of teaching. In the meantime, we had the opportunity to design a rhetorical course for third year students at university.
there was a relatively homogeneous set of exercises called *progymnasmata*.\(^3\) The word *progymnamata* is based on the verb *gymnazein* and evokes the training of an athlete. Students had to face an increasing difficulty as they moved from basic writing exercises to parts of discourses, and, finally, to complete speeches and argumentation. Exercises were supposed to prepare the students to produce deliberative and forensic declamations, the *suasoriae* and *controversiae*, and to epideictic speeches (discourses of praise or blame), which were very in vogue in the first centuries A.D. Those who had learned rhetoric were then prepared to face all situations in public life.

Rhetorical exercises continued to be practiced until the end of the nineteenth century, and many new exercises and manuals were produced. When rhetoric was excluded from school curricula, all these pedagogical tools were almost entirely forgotten.\(^4\) At the beginning of the 21st century, rhetoric is often perceived as an elitist discipline, a collection of sophisticated figures of speech. And the benefits of educating citizens’ rhetorical *dunamis* are almost entirely neglected. In Belgium (and in France as well), the only trace of rhetorical teaching is the French dissertation of the French course: an exercise of argumentation and abstract reasoning on philosophical questions. Such an exercise might not be suitable to develop transferable skills to real argumentative interactions: some kinds of proofs (*ethos, pathos, examples*) are forbidden and the structure is very strict. The focus is not on finding creative arguments, but on conforming to a specific argumentative framework. Moreover, even though this exercise requires taking an opposite point of view into account (the ‘antithesis’), the purpose is ultimately to reach a *better opinion* (the ‘synthesis’). As a consequence, such an exercise is more likely to reinforce students’ *confirmation bias* (Mercier & Sperber, 2011, pp. 63-68) than to stimulate their ability to think critically.

### 2.2. The virtues of dissoi logoi

Training students to deal peacefully with opposite points of views is probably one of the main issues of our contemporary multicultural democracies. The role public

\(^3\) We know about those exercises thanks to practical treatises or manuals, collections of declamations and papyrological evidence.

\(^4\) *Progymnasmata* nonetheless remained an object of interest for learned scholars. See for instance Webb (2001).
education has to play to face this challenge is all the more important given that humans have a natural tendency for segregation (Crisp & Meleady, 2012). We suggest that ancient rhetorical exercises might be more effective to equip citizens for this multicultural reality than most contemporary approaches to argumentation (Ferry, 2013a). In particular, dissoi logoi, an exercise invented by the Sophists, is worth mentioning. Dissoi logoi, or twofold arguments, are exercises in which a student has to argue successively for two opposite, and even contradictory, views on the same issue. Such an exercise might thus be used, on any subject, to make students think and feel from the other’s perspective.

This point was first made by Charles Kimber Pearce, in a working paper untitled “Contradictory Arguments for Contemporary Pedagogy”:

Unrestricted by the rule of non-contradiction, students are better equipped to recognize the merits of an honorable opposition. Such a consideration of multiple perceptions is an approach to invention that allows more latitude for adapting arguments to situational constraints. (1994, p. 6)

It is worth stressing that dissoi logoi challenge the most fundamental logical rule, the rule of non-contradiction. Even more: dissoi logoi challenge the whole normative project to give citizens tools to distinguish sound arguments from fallacious ones (Hamblin, 1970; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984). However, the intellectual discomfort one might feel toward dissoi logoi is precisely the price to pay for effective training in argumentation in a multicultural public sphere. Indeed, when facing opposite points of view, our spontaneous argumentative behavior, supported by most philosophical and logical traditions, urges us to find who is wrong. On the contrary, the practice of dissoi logoi habituates future citizens to perceive the honorability of both sides of any issue. This regular practice might accustom future citizens to suspend their judgment (Danblon, 2013, pp. 127-148), that is, to postpone the confirmation phase. In doing so, one learns to perceive the

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5 This discomfort might explain why dissoi logoi were seldom tried in contemporary pedagogy, even though modernity often celebrated respect for diversity. Surprisingly, even Martha Nussbaum, who dedicated several works to the relevance of ancient pedagogical tools for citizens’ education (in particular, Nussbaum, 2012) didn’t perceive the virtues of dissoi logoi. This is all the more surprising considering that Nussbaum regards empathy as a key skill in a multicultural society (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 425-433).
plurality of legitimate yet contradictory views on any question, and one begins to experience the intellectual pleasure of identifying persuasive rhetorical strategies, independently of the opinion one might have. This is the rhetorical eye of Aristotle’s treatise.

3. Ancient tools for contemporary pedagogy: reintroducing rhetorical teaching

The rhetorical training we designed consists in variations on the exercise of dissoi logoi. The following sections present the methodological choices we made to adapt those exercises to young pupils (11 to 13 years old) and to university students.

3.1. Teaching rhetoric in high school

In Belgium, the disappearance of rhetoric led to a paradoxical situation: the last year of high school is still called ‘Rhetoric’ but few teachers and pupils still know what rhetoric is. As a consequence, the reintroduction of a rhetorical teaching in high school requires finding a place in the pupils’ schedule. The best solution for us was to work with a Latin and Greek teacher who could immediately understand the philosophy of our project. For the year 2013-2014, our experiment took place in the weekly class of the pupils with their Latin teacher.

3.1.1. In the workshop: reinventing controversia

Our project, to adapt ancient rhetorical tools to contemporary pedagogy, includes a dimension of experimental archaeology. This field of study attempts to test archaeological hypotheses by replicating ancient techniques and artifacts. Similarly, by experimenting with ancient rhetorical exercises (i.e., by practicing those exercises ourselves), we can hope to better understand the way ancient rhetors designed those exercises and the skills they targeted.

Looking for an exercise based on the same principle as dissoi logoi in ancient manuals and collections of exercises, we decided to experiment with the controversia. It consisted in producing a speech of accusation or a speech of defense, or both, in an imaginary trial based on the application of a given law to a specific case. The controversia is known thanks to Seneca the Elder’s and Pseudo-Quintilian’s declamations. Here is an example that we gave to our pupils:
Cold water given to a stepson
A man had a son. When he lost the boy's mother, he married another wife. The son fell gravely ill. Doctors were called and they said that he would die if he drank cold water. The stepmother gave him cold water. The youth died. The stepmother is accused of poisoning by her husband.
(Ps-Quint., Lesser Decl., p. 350)

Such exercises were often ill conceived: they seem violent, complicated, improbable and obsolete. Controversia, however, immediately puts pupils into a concrete situation and thus stimulates them to produce arguments. In Ancient treatises, controversiae are often quoted to illustrate the theory of staseis (Lat. status; Engl. issues), probably elaborated by Hermagoras but mostly known thanks to the treatise "On Issues" of Hermogenes and later treatises. Professor Malcolm Heath, who translated Hermogenes and tried to teach Hermogenes’ treatise to his students, shows that the system of issues develops the ability to recognize the type of case and the available arguments; more than the production of the speech itself, the purpose is to train invention: finding, in each situation, various, relevant and consistent arguments (Heath, 2007).

In the above example, the accusation seems easy at first sight, because the facts are not disputed, but it has to deal with a problem of definition: no law forbids giving water to a sick person and no law defines water as poison. And these are available arguments for the defense speech. Besides, the intention of the stepmother is not clear: it is precisely an ambiguous element that can be used by both sides. Ambiguous elements (e.g., the relation between the characters, the ambiguity of the law, the expert’s advice) have to be used to ground opposite arguments; they are also means to focus creativity on specific points. By isolating these principles, we created new exercises based on contemporary matters (like everyday life at school). Here are two examples of exercises we designed on this basis:

The pupil with scissors
 Rule: it is strictly forbidden to bring weapons to school.
Before the beginning of a class, two pupils are violently arguing. One of them makes a rush at the other. Alarmed by the noise, a teacher enters in the
classroom. When the pupil who had made a rush goes back to his seat, scissors fall out of his pocket. He is accused of attempting to use a weapon. He defends himself.

**A false alarm**

*Rule:* it is strictly forbidden to leave the classroom without the teacher’s permission.

In the middle of a lesson, the fire alarm rings unexpectedly (no fire drill had been planned). By rushing out, a pupil causes uproar among his classmates. Pupils are finally gathered together, according to the procedure. It was a false alarm. Back in the classroom, the teacher punishes pupils who left without permission. Pupils defend themselves.

Let us now turn to the implementation of those exercises in the classroom.

### 3.1.2. In the classroom

Each session was divided into three phases. To begin with, pupils were given theoretical landmarks (e.g. what is rhetoric, what is an argument…) and were informed of the purpose of rhetorical exercises. Pupils were then asked to work in small groups and to find at least three arguments for each side of the controversy. Finally, pupils’ findings were discussed and evaluated in common. During the first session, all the groups worked on the same exercise. The second time, each group worked on different exercises, with a mix of new and ancient controversies.

#### 3.1.2.1. Pupils’ reactions

Most pupils were enthusiastic to do this new kind of activity and seemed to enjoy it; they had no difficulties dealing with ancient controversies. These exercises create a different atmosphere in the classroom than traditional debates: pupils were not confined in one position, but switched easily from one to another, trying to counter the arguments of their classmates as well as their own. It also appeared that as soon as pupils understood that their own opinion was not relevant they were keen
to put themselves into one or the other point of view and to find increasingly creative arguments.\(^6\)

**3.1.2.2. Discussion: exercising pupils’ empathy**

Let us now turn to the main issue of the introduction of rhetorical training in high school. Early adolescence (around 12 years old) is a key period in the development of humans’ ability to take others’ subjectivities into account when thinking, arguing, deciding and acting. As the French physiologist Alain Berthoz argued, this is precisely the period chosen by religious fundamentalists and other fanatics to lock children in one rigid view about the world (Berthoz, 2004, pp. 273-275, 2010). Berthoz thus advocated for the right to develop flexibility in points of view (2010). We believe that our exercises are especially suitable to give pupils access to this ability.

The above *controversiae* require pupils to produce arguments from various perspectives on the same issue. Most pupils were successful in this task. For instance, in the case of the false alarm, they had no difficulties in adopting the teacher’s point of view: they blamed the pupils for their selfishness because they didn’t think that their teacher might search for them in the burning school, risking his life or could even have troubles with his ‘boss.’ At this stage, it is worth distinguishing two skills: (1) the ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes (i.e., producing the arguments the teacher might produce); (2) the ability to take opposite points of view into account when arguing (i.e., making a concession to the opponent’s view when defending one’s own point of view). The former requires adopting an *heterocentric* point of view, the latter, adopting an *allocentric* one (Berthoz, 2004, p. 273): perceiving a situation from ‘above,’ perceiving the diversity of possible views on the same issue. This is precisely the *theoretical eye* on argumentation that rhetorical training aims at developing.\(^7\)

\(^6\) From time to time, we had to address the issue of the tension between creativity and relevance. For instance, in the poisoning case, several pupils charged the stepmother by arguing that she found a chance to execute the first step of an evil plan and that her aim was the money of her naïve husband. This was for us an opportunity to introduce the pupils to the concept of extrinsic proof (Aristotle, *Rhet.*, I, 2, 1356a) by asking them whether they had any evidence of the stepmother’s evil plan.

\(^7\) Here, again, it is worth noting the importance of beginning rhetorical training from early adolescence. The *rhetorical eye* on argumentation requires being able to think and to discuss *about* argumentation (“formal thinking” in Piaget’s words). In his studies on children’s mental
To stimulate this theoretical eye, we organized an evaluation phase in which pupils had to judge the arguments they had produced. We accompanied them in this task by picking some arguments and asking whether they found them interesting or worth using. In doing so, we tried to focus pupils’ attention on the technical dimension of argumentation: how arguments can be drawn from causes, consequences or circumstances, how their arguments are supported by implicit values or arouse emotions. We also asked pupils to discuss the relevancy or plausibility of some answers and to find possible improvements. Finally, we asked pupils to identify similarities between arguments they produced in different controversiae.\(^8\)

Now, if we have good reasons to believe that such rhetorical training contributes to the development of pupils’ flexibility in point of view, this does not imply that they will show more concern for others’ points of view. This raises the complex issue of the relation between empathy and morality. Rhetoric might have a role to play in this issue.\(^9\) Recent studies in neuroscience (Decety & Cowell, 2014, p. 338) show that our empathetic circle (i.e., the types of individuals we are willing to care for) is highly sensitive to our social environment. In particular, speeches we hear might have a high influence in the framing of our empathetic circle (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 306-309). Extended rhetorical training, addressing increasingly complex rhetorical phenomena, might thus make us more conscious of the factors that influence our decisions to care or not to care about someone else’s distress. Some aspects of this more sophisticated rhetorical training are addressed below.

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\(^8\) For instance, in the poisoning case, they proposed “water is no poison” as an argument to defend the stepmother. Against her, they proposed: “in that case, water had the same effect as poison.” When asked to find in the scissors’ case an argument built on the same scheme, they picked the right one: scissors are not a weapon but a part of the school supplies. They were also able to build on the basis of the first exercise a corresponding counterargument: “scissors can be used as a weapon.”

\(^9\) The relation between rhetoric and empathy will be investigated by Victor Ferry in his postdoctoral research “Exercising empathy: rhetorics of others’ points of views,” thanks to a grant awarded by the Wiener-Anspach Foundation.
3.2. Teaching rhetoric at university

While rhetorical teaching in high school consists mainly in activating pupils’ attention to argumentation, rhetorical teaching at university consists, in large part, in deconstructing clichés about reasoning and valid argumentation that students have often inherited from their education.

The absence of a proper rhetorical education in Europe since the end of the 19th century left the door wide open for philosophical speculations about argumentation. Philosophical ideals continue to have a huge impact on the way our students perceive rhetoric. For instance, Habermas’ idea that the best opinion might be found if one applies the best method or has access to relevant knowledge is widely shared (Ferry: 2012a). As a consequence, our students are convinced that good arguments are, somehow, outside of themselves. The idea that one might work on an argument, the same way one works on a piece of wood, is alien to them. We thus focussed our rhetorical teaching on the richness and the diversity of the available means to express an opinion.

3.2.1. Exercising rhetorical proofs

Even though Brussels’ University (ULB) hosted the teaching of Chaïm Perelman, there is no department of rhetoric in this institution. However, the faculty of philosophy and literature offers its members the opportunity to create, every year, a seminar for the third-year students. During the academic year 2013-2014, and under the direction of Emmanuelle Danblon, we thus designed and taught a one semester-course untitled “Theory and practice of rhetorical proof.”

In the first lesson, students were asked to choose an issue on which to produce two opposite discourses. We suggested that they should, in their choices, take into account the intellectual pleasure they might find in arguing for both sides. Students chose subjects in various domains: political (such as “is there a need for a king in Belgium?”), social (such as “do social media make us anti-social?”), moral issues (such as “is contraception a liberation for women?” or “can one be a fan of Bertrand Cantat?”10), art (such as “should we exhibit the work ‘Piss-Christ’?”) and literary issues (such as “is rap music a form of poetry?”). In their pro and against speeches, students had to use a given set of rhetorical proofs: extrinsic proofs, ethos, pathos, logos. As far as logos is concerned, we asked our students

10 A French rock singer who violently killed his mistress, the French actress Marie Trintignant.
to use three different rhetorical strategies: historical precedent (*paradeigma*),
description (*ekphrasis*) and dissociation of concepts.

Each lesson was dedicated to one of those means of proof and was divided
into three parts: a theoretical presentation of the means of proof, a reading exer-
cise in which students had to identify and discuss the means of proof in a famous
speech, and a performance exercise in which students had to use the means of
proof. At the end of the semester, students had to submit their two opposing
discourses followed by a two-page critical note. In this note, students had to justify
their rhetorical choices and to analyse them with theoretical literature.

The following sections present in more detail the exercises we designed to
help students to master the different rhetorical proofs.

### 3.2.2.1. Extrinsic proofs

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle famously distinguishes *intrinsic* proofs from *extrinsic* ones
(*Rhet.*, I, 2, 1356a). Intrinsic proofs (*logos, ethos* and *pathos*) have to be *invented* by
an orator: they originate from an appropriate use of rhetorical *technique*. On the
contrary, *extrinsic* proofs are supposed to exist independently from the speech:
they are not *invented* but *used* by the orator. Aristotle’s distinction might, however,
be confusing. Indeed, as Quintilian put it: “though these species of proof are
devoid of art in themselves, they yet require, very frequently, to be supported or
overthrown with the utmost force of eloquence” (*Instit. Orat.*, V, 1). In other words,
leaving *intrinsic* proofs outside of rhetorical art might lead to neglect of the various
means by which an orator can dissipate or strengthen the persuasiveness of
factual evidence.

By integrating extrinsic proofs into our teaching of rhetoric, our goal was
twofold: we wanted to raise our students' awareness of the importance, especially
in academic writing, of grounding assumptions on data that the reader can verify.
We also wanted to raise our students' awareness of the effectiveness of those
proofs and of the means by which this effectiveness can be increased or
dissipated. To do so, we trained our students to identify and to master formulas
that commonly precede the delivery of an extrinsic proof (such as “this is not a
matter of opinion but of facts”).
3.2.2.2. Logos

As far as *logos* is concerned, we wanted to raise students’ awareness of the variety of rhetorical strategies they might use to support their opinions. We focussed on three of them: (1) the *paradeigma*, that is, the use of an historical precedent as an example of the judgement to make on a comparable issue (Ferry, 2011, 2013b; Sans, 2011); (2) the description or *ekphrasis*, and (3) the dissociation of concepts. To introduce students to the functioning of the latter, we designed a new rhetorical exercise.

The dissociation of concepts was first described by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). Dissociation of concepts, as they put it, “is always prompted by the desire to remove an incompatibility arising out of the confrontation of one proposition with others, whether one is dealing with norms, facts or truth” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 413). For instance, the need for a judge to dissociate between the *letter* and the *spirit* of the law originates in the feeling that the strict implementation of the law would be unjust in a given case. To train students in this technique, we designed argumentative situations in which they would have to dissociate a notion. For instance:

The law is unambiguous on this point: a traitor to the nation does not have the right to a proper burial. Your brother’s destiny was to fight for the enemy and to pass away in the conflict that recently opposed your city to the one that is now his. You cannot resign yourself to leave his body to vultures; you break the law and put your brother in the ground. Your King is outraged: how dare you despise the law of the city? You answer by dissociating the notion of justice.

In addition to being entertaining, this exercise offers an opportunity to introduce students to the question of philosophical essentialism (Dupréel, 1939, p. 19; Popper, 1991).

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11 To train students in this means of proof, we asked them to produce a description to support and to refute the claim: “University is a good preparation for professional life.”

12 This technique is also often used in philosophical and scientific argumentation where an author often pretends that his/her predecessors did not grasp the true meaning of a particular concept.
Indeed, the practice of the dissociation of concepts confronts students with their spontaneous tendency to believe that sound argumentation consists of a process of clarification of concepts or ideas. By dissociating concepts, by looking for rhetorical means to make the result of their dissociations convincing, students become accustomed to the fact that the meaning of concepts as important as justice is a matter of agreement and cannot be grasped once for all. The practice of dissociation thus contributes to enlarge students’ perception of the field of argumentation, and, ultimately, cultivate their critical thinking.

3.2.2.3. Ethos

Introducing the ethical proof to university students was especially challenging. Indeed, the very idea that one constructs a self-image in a speech and that it is worth working on this image is at odds with the teaching students receive in most other courses. Students are often trained to believe that their discourses have to be neutral and objective, that their identities should not interfere with their writings. Against this view, we tried to make our students aware that the neutral and objective ethos of academic writing can also be a matter of rhetorical work. As Ruth Amossy (2010, p.187) judiciously states it, scientific ethos “is more the result of an erasing than of an absence”. It was also important for our students to understand that building a scientific ethos is only one possible rhetorical strategy among others. For instance, constructing an ethos of a specialist or an ethos of a witness can prove useful in various argumentative situations they might have to face in their university career.

To raise students’ awareness of ethos, we found inspiration in the ancient rhetorical exercise of ἠθοποιία / êthopoïia (Gibson, 2008, p. 355). In this exercise, the student must write a discourse from someone else’s perspective (for instance, writing the words a husband might say to his wife before leaving for a long journey). This requires understanding someone else’s mental states and feelings in a

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13 For a critique of the view that the result of a sound dissociation is a clarified notion, see Ferry (2012b, pp. 145-148; 2013a, pp. 2-5).
14 Such was Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s view when writing: “it is precisely because the notions used in argumentation are not univocal and have no fixed meaning that will not change that the conclusions of an argumentation are not binding” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 132).
15 Our translation.
given situation. Such an exercise is thus highly efficient in encouraging students to focus on ethos as an ethical proof but, also, for helping them to develop an intuitive understanding of the intimate relation between ethos and pathos.

3.2.2.4. Pathos

Finally, as far as pathos is concerned, the challenge was to make students understand that a rational argumentation does not consist in getting rid of emotions but, rather, in being aware of appropriate emotions (Aristotle, *Rhet.*, III, 1408a). To raise student awareness on emotional appropriateness, we designed the following exercise. Students were asked to rewrite a brief description of a car accident two times: first, in an attempt to induce sympathy for the driver and, secondly, in an attempt to induce sympathy for the victim. Here is the description students had to rewrite:

Around 8am, Marc, 45, salesperson in an appliance store, hit Veronica, a 35-year-old promising CEO. Veronica was not crossing on the crosswalk. She was having a phone conversation with a colleague at the moment of impact; she was not looking and did not see the car. She died before rescuers arrived. Marc was eager to take his children to school; he was driving at a speed of 47 km/h; the traffic light near the crossroad had just turned yellow.

This exercise requires exploring a *topic of emotions* (i.e. to identify the emotions different parties might feel in a given argumentative situation). Learning to explore, on any issue, the *topic of emotions* enhances students’ ability to craft speeches that would be acceptable for a wide audience (Ferry & Sans, 2014). To illustrate this point, we shall comment on the rhetorical strategy chosen by one of our students.

One student tried to induce sympathy for the driver by blaming the victim. In particular, he described Veronica as “an inconsiderate and distracted young woman” who “did not even look at the road, probably too absorbed by her phone call.” It is not difficult to prove that such a rhetorical strategy lacks universality since it does not take into account relevant emotions for the other side (i.e. Veronica’s relatives’ legitimate sadness). By contrast, the following rhetorical strategy induces sympathy for Marc while taking into account the other party’s legitimate emotions:
“Marc mourns the victim too. He the father, he the simple worker, is perceived as a murderer only for being at the wrong place at the wrong time.”

With their concept of *universal audience*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca advocated for a humanistic approach to rationality, as opposed to an idealistic conception of rationality. A humanistic conception of rationality consists in the *practical efforts* the orator makes to overcome the differences of opinion he/she is aware of (1969, p. 31). Along the same line, the above rhetorical exercises can be used to direct students’ efforts to reach a more *universal audience*.

### 4. Concluding remarks: teachers’ rhetorical *dunamis*

To conclude, we shall address the issue of the evaluation of students’ performances. The difficulty to find objective criteria of a *good* rhetorical strategy might be responsible for the educational administrators’ reluctance to support proper training in argumentation. It is, indeed, more reassuring to begin an argumentative exercise with an agreement on the rules one has to follow when arguing (such as the pragma-dialectical rules for discussion) and on the types of arguments one is allowed to use (avoiding the so-called *fallacies*). However, forbidding an opinion, condemning the argument on which it is grounded, will not incite a student to abandon it. Quite the contrary. In our view, a reasonable answer to the issue of the evaluation of students’ performances is to advise teachers to cultivate their own rhetorical *dunamis*. Indeed, the best way to evaluate students’ performances is not to join the rhetorical exercise with an idealistic idea of the *better argument*. The best way is to join the exercise with a sufficient mastery of rhetoric to show students that any *better argument* can be countered by an even better one.

### References


Abstract
This paper focuses on code-switching as a tool that allows emergent bilinguals to use their two languages in order to render meaning and express their bilingual and bicultural identities. It addresses different types and functions of code-switching in bilingual writing. The paper presents higher intermediate to advanced English as a second language (ESL) writing workshop instructional activities that help students use code-switching effectively for a range of purposes. Although these instructional activities have been primarily designed for emergent Russian-English bilinguals, they might also be applicable to bilinguals from other language backgrounds. The activities focus on specific bilingual students’ needs and relevant learning outcomes, such as overcoming a writing block, connecting writing to the socio-cultural experience, and expressing authentic writing voices in different genres such as personal narrative, descriptive essay, advertisement, menu, and recipes.

Introduction
Bilingualism has been determined as a specific form of advanced language competency (Cummins, 2005; Milroy & Muysken, 2000), since bilinguals use the interchange of two languages as a complex code system enabling them to negotiate meaning and express themselves, and thus, they operate their two languages at a more advanced level than monolinguals. However, for the purpose of effective instruction, it is important to consider numerous characteristics and forms of bilingualism, more specifically, it is necessary to differentiate between emergent and more advanced bilinguals. In North America, emergent bilinguals are the learners who started learning English relatively late and gradually transition to the state of bilingualism (Menken, 2013), with their primary language (L1) still being dominant in all spheres of oral and written communication. Advanced bilinguals are learners whose English proficiency level approaches that of their primary language, and even becomes dominant in some spheres of communication.

* Olga Makinina is a PhD student and instructor at Carleton University, and can be reached at olgamakinina@cmail.carleton.ca
Emergent bilinguals are most likely to experience difficulties in the process of learning L2 writing. The reasons for this might include deficiency of individualized bilingual-oriented learning programs, as well as students’ inaptitude to use their bilingualism effectively for a range of academic, life and career purposes. In addition, bilingual learners must learn how to negotiate between two socio-cultural and linguistic environments (Gort, 2012), which might lead to an identity crisis (Lo, 2007). According to Scanlan (2011) and Flores and Schissel (2014), the majority of bilingual students sometimes feel alienated from both the L1 and L2 communities because people perceive them as “different.” A student of mine once said, “My parents think I [am] completely Americanized, my friends at school say, 'He’s Russian,' and I sometimes feel Russian and sometimes American.”

Considering this, the task of a writing instructor is not only to help students develop their language proficiency, but also to help them to develop multicultural identities, regain individual voices, and manage stress. Students need to transition from marginality to interculturality (Liddicoat, 2011), which involves critical adoption of and mild curiosity towards both languages and cultures, and they need to learn how to navigate two languages efficiently. This paper addresses the problem of how to use bilingual learners’ specific knowledge and strengths in a writing course for higher intermediate to advanced learners of English; and how to help bilingual students regain individual voices in writing. The solution to this problem would be teaching students how to effectively implement the resources of both languages by using code-switching as a tool for different writing purposes and in different genres.

Views on Code-switching in Writing

Code-switching, sometimes referred to as translanguaging, polylanguaging, code-shifting, or code-meshing, is the most prominent manifestation of oral and written bilingualism. Gort (2012) defines it as "alternation of two languages within a single clause, sentence or turn" (p. 45) and notes that it is influenced by complex linguistic and socio-cultural factors, such as content, context, target audience, and personal preferences.
Views on code-switching in students’ writing differ significantly. Some linguists and educators perceive code-switching as a problem preventing successful development of writing skills in L2. Grosjean (2001) states that students code-switch to fill in the lexical gaps and compensate for language knowledge deficiencies. Chevalier (2004) argues that bilingual learners do not possess a full variety of complex written registers in their first language and that in the case when monolinguals need to switch to another register, bilinguals switch to another language. Therefore, “the ability to switch languages allows bilinguals to restrict the use of each language to familiar domains” (Chevalier, 2004, p. 3) and thereby limits their development of skills in their second language.

More recently, scholars have turned to a more positive view of code-switching as "a manifestation of high language competence" (Berthele, 2011, p. 454) and an important resource for developing multiliteracy in students’ writing. Indeed, even professional writers who are fully proficient in a language purposefully code-switch. We can find examples of code-switching in different written texts ranging from newspaper advertisements and online blogs to literary works and journal articles. That reveals multiple functions of code-switching that go far beyond filling in lexical gaps.

**Types of Code-switching**

The vast criticism regarding code-switching in writing is caused by general misunderstanding of the fact that there are different types of code-switching, and not all of them are beneficial for students’ writing. The most frequent type of code-switching in the writing of emerging bilinguals is *unintentional* code-switching as a result of not knowing L2 norms. Some researchers, for example, Holmes (2008), refer to it as code-mixing. Unintentional code-switching can be grammatical or morphological (Chirsheva, 2009; Rouzina, 2010; Sichyova, 2005), that is learners might use incorrect morphemes, forms of words, or sentence structure because their writing is largely influenced by their L1. Another variant of unintentional code-switching is its use as a lexical crutch (Montes-Alcalá, 2007; Zentella, 1997), which implies the unconscious usage of words or simply sentence fillers from L1 in L2 and vice versa. Zentella (1997) claims that the reason for a lexical crutch is language incompetence: one uses words from another language when not being able to recall a necessary word. These two types of code-switching are best
avoided in the classroom. However, there are also intentional lexical and grammatical switches that perform a variety of functions and might enrich the students’ writing.

**Functions of Intentional Code-switching**

As discussed below, intentional code-switching can serve social, metalinguistic, stylistic, socio-cultural, and self-expression functions.

1. **Social function:** Since writing is a social act, it is always oriented toward a certain audience. Researchers (Canagarajah, 2006; Cenoz and Gorter, 2011; Gort, 2012) argue that bilinguals choose language resources depending on the communicative purposes of their writing (persuading, engaging, informing, negotiating conflicts, etc.), and consequently might code-switch because their communicative intent is better conveyed through the means of a certain language. Code-switching can denote the reader-writer status, indicating social distance or closeness, formality or informality (Buell, 2004), and the overall context of a communicative situation. The example of social code-switching might be a wife writing to her husband an e-mail in English and addressing him by the Russian diminutive малыш [baby].

2. **Metalinguistic (informative) function:** Metalinguistic code-switching serves the purpose of explaining words, ideas, and concepts, exploring and reinforcing language forms (Gort, 2012), emphasizing an idea (Montes-Alcalá, 2007), or "adding another level of meaning" (Jonsson, 2010, p. 1296) to a word. For example, a student writing a report on Russian literature might want to use some terminology from Russian scholars.

3. **Stylistic (creative) function:** Code-switching is used stylistically "to convey a certain feeling" (Jonsson, 2010, p. 1302), in particular irony, and to create a poetic image. We can often encounter this type of code-switching in works of bilingual writers. For example, Reyn (2008) in the following passage renders the Russian mother’s critical attitude towards her daughter’s careless clothing by code-switching: «We Russian women are feminine, Anyechka, and look at you, with your sneakers untied <...> A chuchelo» (p. 165). The word chuchelo means scarecrow and is used here to evoke a certain image of a woman whose appearance does not correspond to the set standards.
4. Socio-cultural function: Code-switching is often used to name a cultural product or event that does not have an exact name in another language (Montes-Alcalá, 2007). Thus, many English speakers have probably heard about such Russian realia as matreshka, blini, and Maslenitsa. Code-switching might also be implemented for the idiomatic expressions and proverbs that do not have exact correlations in another language (Montes-Alcalá, 2007). For example, the title of the famous Russian movie "С легким паром" [literally: I wish you a bit of steam] is often translated as "Enjoy your bath!," yet the translation does not render the exact meaning of the saying.


**Research Approaches to Code-switching**

Quite a few theories and research approaches have been developed in order to understand the phenomenon of code-switching and its functions in oral speech and writing. Critical Discourse Analysis examines discourse as "a distinctive way of using language integrated with 'other stuff' so as to enact a particular type of (however negotiable and contestable) socially-situated identity (type of person)" (Gee, 2005, p. 44). Under “the other stuff” Gee (2005) implied specific ways of thinking, speaking, acting, dressing, etc. Therefore, code-switching is perceived as one of the discourse features that expresses the writer’s identity characteristics (Kang, 2008).

The rhetorical genre theory promoted by Bakhtin (1986) and Bazerman (1994) takes code-switching as one of the characteristics of specific genres. Several studies looked into the specifics of code-switching in formal discipline-specific genres such as math, science, etc. (Setati, Adler, Reed, & Bapoo, 2002), and in informal genres such as personal correspondence (Montes-Alcalá, 2007).

Finally, a multimodality theory-based study (Sebba, 2012) analyzed examples of Russian, German, Greek, and Spanish newspaper advertisements with code-switching and classified this code-switching according to several
criteria including the amount of code-switching, the visual, spatial, and morpho-syntactic structure of textual code-switched elements. These three theoretical approaches share an overall focus on the specific types and functions of code-switching, and have served as a basis for multiple classroom experiments and studies. See Table 1.

**Table 1: Teaching Activities involving Code-Switching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Activity description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graves, Valez and Rueda, (2000)</td>
<td>OPE (Optimal Learning Environment) model that is based on sociocultural learning theory, and makes use of task-based interactive creative activities such as interactive journal writing and Writers’ Workshop to create a class book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garcia (2002)</td>
<td>Students write an essay about something they know well and can explore (e.g., families losing homes and applying for welfare; life of a bilingual student, etc.). For this, they interview their friends, relatives, neighbors, synthesize their notes in the process of group work, and finally write a poem in response to their essay. They are free to implement resources of both languages in order to make their writing more expressive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahnmann (2006)</td>
<td>Classroom activity invites students to analyze works of bilingual writers and write their own poems “to explore taboo subject matter, awkward feelings, and quirky language involved in crosscultural experiences” (Cahnmann, 2006, p. 350).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canagarajah (2006)</td>
<td>Performative writing (writing as a social act); writing not as a context-bound but context-transforming process with students being not “passive, conditioned by their language and culture” but “agentive, shuttling creatively between discourses to achieve their communicative objectives” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 591).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez (2007)</td>
<td>Classroom activity teaches students how to shift between the languages in writing in the context of multiple social practices and contents. The shift should primarily concern rhetorical strategies, which reflect cultural and aesthetic values of the two languages’ worlds, but not grammar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The proposed methods of using code-switching in a writing class are valuable since they focus on overcoming writing blocks, connecting writing with the student's socio-cultural identity and experience, teaching how to negotiate meaning through rhetorical strategies, and making writing audience-oriented and contextualized. However, most of the studies tend to focus on one or two specific types and genres of code-switching and often do not address all the variety of code-switching functions and written genres in which code-switching might be used.

Proposed Model of Classroom Activities

The overall objective of the proposed activities is to make students understand advantages of written bilingualism, help them discover the ways to use two languages simultaneously in the practice of writing, and engage students in interpretive textual analysis "which relies on the analyst's existing knowledge of codes and their functions" (Buell, 2004, p. 103). The activities are built around the above-mentioned functions of code switching and different writing genres (advertising, menus and recipes, web-pages of radio and TV shows, poetry and prose).

Sample Activity 1

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Time required: 30 minutes

Functions addressed: Social and metalinguistic

Objective: Students will be able to determine functions of code-switching in advertisements, blogs and journal article excerpts.

Procedures:

1. Brainstorming: Students look at slide pictures of Russian-English advertisements, find examples of code-switching and discuss its functions. The instructor is to draw the students’ attention to the quantity of the Russian and English text in the advertisement and the visual image of words. Sample advertisements can be found in online newspapers such as English Russia (http://englishrussia.com), Russian in America (http://russianinamerica.com).

2. Comprehensible Input: Students work in groups of three or four on a small text of a blog or an article written in either English with code-switching in
Russian or in Russian with code-switching in English. Students analyze their texts following these guiding questions:

1) How many Russian/English words have you identified?

2) Try to change these words into English/Russian. Were you able to change all words? What has changed in the text?

3) What did the author use Russian/English for?

3. Application and Extension: Students compose a short text with one of the following purposes in mind:

1) You need to advertise a Russian product in America. Write its description for American customers so that it would stand out in a row of similar products, and they would want to buy it.

2) You need to write a blog about the Russian population in America. Describe their character and habits. What is unique about them?

**Rationale:** While advertisements use code-switching as a brand name, logo, or attention trigger, blogs and articles might use code-switching for clarifying or denoting specific concepts of phenomena. It is important for students to understand that intentional code-switching might make one’s writing more effective and concise. Students transition from interpretive reading to writing in order to understand what code-switching is used for and create their own texts for similar communicative purposes.

**Sample Activity 2**

*Level:* Intermediate to Advanced

*Time required:* 30 minutes

*Functions addressed:* Socio-cultural, namely irony and word-play

*Objective:* Students will be able to identify and use code-switching patterns for the purpose of language play.

*Procedures:*

humorous effect. In groups, they discuss the purposes of code-switching in the video and write their suggestions into a semantic web.

2. Comprehensible Input: Students are asked to examine examples from the works of Russian-English bilingual writers (Vasily Aksyonov, Joseph Brodsky, Irina Reyn, etc.), and think about what makes these examples humorous.

Guiding questions:
1) Does the writer use the whole Russian word or only its part when creating a humorous pattern?
2) Is the irony created by the form or meaning of the Russian words?

Sample:


Aksyonov describes the city where he lives, parodying Soviet formulas, when playing on the syllables ‘wash’ (in Russian w[v]ash means ‘your’) and ‘nash’ [our].

3. Application and Extension: Students are asked to find on the Internet, in TV advertisements, newspapers, etc., examples of humorous code-switching, and determine whether humour is created through the form or semantics of the words.

Rationale: When analyzing a video and literary works extracts, students learn ways to create irony when using code-switching. Both semantics and form (phonetic and morphological) can be involved into the language play.

Sample Activity 3

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Time required: 40 minutes

Functions addressed: Socio-cultural

Objective: Students will become aware of the correlation between language and cultural realia and use code-switching for the purpose of making their writing more expressive and L1 culture-connected.
Procedures:

1. Free-writing: Students are asked to write for 5-8 minutes about their favorite Russian dish, song, or movie.

2. Peer-reviewing: students read one another’s works, and underline Russian-like words.

3. Discussion: Students are asked to reflect upon the following questions
   1) What do the Russian words denote?
   2) What is their role in the essay?

4. Comprehensible input: Students are asked to read the menu of the Russian cafe and movie titles, and change the Russian words and patterns into their English equivalents. Then students determine what has changed in the essay without Russian words. They are supposed to identify three major functions of lexical items: (a) denoting cultural realia; (b) rendering a more exact meaning of the concept; (c) expressing a certain feeling.

   Examples:
   голубцы – stuffed cabbage rolls
   кулич – Easter cake
   Утомленные солнцем – Burnt by the Sun
   Ирония судьбы или С легким паром! – The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy your Bath!

5. Application and Extension: Students are asked to write an essay about a cultural event/holiday in Russia (for example, Easter, New Year, Christmas) incorporating English and Russian words so that to engage the reader and make them feel the Russian atmosphere of this event.

Rationale: When free-writing about such aspects of their native culture as food, movies, and songs, students will inevitably use Russian words. Then, analyzing these words in their written samples, as well as in other texts, they are likely to come to the conclusion that sometimes it is necessary to use lexis of another language to denote cultural realia.
Conclusion

When teaching writing to bilingual students, it is important to understand that writing is not a rigid strictly monolingual system. Although unintentional written code-switching has been traditionally considered a language error, intentional lexical and grammatical code-switching might perform multiple functions. Certain writing genres might benefit from a skillful interaction between languages. Therefore, while learning L2 writing conventions, students do not necessarily have to abandon the resources of their L1 altogether; rather, they need to know how to operate them depending on their communicative purposes.

References


Approaches to TA Training and their Impact on Students and Teachers

Adrienne Raw

Abstract
For many English departments, graduate teaching assistants (TAs) are a key component of undergraduate education. The teaching these students do also presents a foundational learning opportunity for future faculty. This research paper explores how Canadian university English departments prepare graduate students for the role of teaching assistant, compares current TA training with studies on teacher preparedness and effectiveness, and discusses the potential implications of TA training methodology and content for both students and teaching assistants.

Many of the faculty currently teaching in universities took their first steps in the classroom as graduate teaching assistants, and many undergraduate students have their first close instructor-student experiences with teaching assistants. Teaching assistants (TAs) provide the support structure for academic instruction at many universities, especially in English departments where TAs make large, introductory English courses possible (Austin, 2002; Buerkel-Rothfuss & Gray, 1991; Carroll, 1980; Piccinin, Farquharson, & Mihu, 1993). However, unlike elementary and high school teachers and university professors who take on teaching as a career, graduate student TAs are temporary teachers whose primary motivation for taking on the role is not that they chose it or love it (although they may, in fact, love it), but because it is often a requirement of their funding package or graduate program (Sullivan, 1991). They come into their role as a teacher with little formal...

* Adrienne Raw is a PhD student in English and Education at the University of Michigan. She welcomes email at araw@umich.edu.

1 While this statement is true of many university English departments, it is not necessarily true of them all. Depending on the university, the “best” applicants may be awarded TA positions, while less qualified graduate students may complete their education without serving as a TA. Similarly, the popularity and relative scarcity of TA positions at some institutions may prompt graduate students to compete fiercely for the limited positions available. In recognizing these differences,
background in the theory of education and little to no previous experience in teaching, and often receive limited formal training before stepping up to the front of a classroom (Cho, Kim, Svinicki, & Lowry Decker, 2011). Their primary education, then, comes from the departments where they are teaching in the form of written resources such as TA handbooks and information sheets; courses and workshops; mentoring; and on-the-job experience.

These training programs and their content is the focus of this paper. Over the past 35 years, there have been a number of studies done into the field of TA training and teacher education in general (Abbott, Wulff, & Szego, 1989; Carroll, 1980; Cho et al., 2011; Korinek, Howard, & Bridges, 1999; Piccinin et al., 1993; Shannon, Twale, & Moore, 1998; Stallworth Williams, 1991). These studies have consistently come to similar conclusions: more training in general, and particularly in the areas of pedagogy, produces more confident and effective teachers. Surveys of TA training programs done during the same period (Abbott, Wulff, & Szego, 1989; Carroll, 1980) have also shown that among the range of programs offered, not all provide the kinds of training that studies have shown promote more effective teaching.

These conclusions are more relevant than ever in the context of current trends in higher education, namely increasing class sizes. Due to a combination of factors including budget cuts and growing enrollment, class sizes have been increasing in recent years; however, not all universities have increased the number of professors and TAs to accommodate this growth (Arnone, 2011; Journal Staff, 2004; Bradshaw, 2013; Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association (OCUFA), 2014). As a result of larger classes, TAs face increased workloads and more pressure, requiring higher levels of performance from them. Their training, therefore, becomes even more important if they are to effectively meet the demands placed on them.

The role of the TA training program is not just critical for TAs while they are graduate students. Habits and practices learned as a teaching assistant will carry over to that individual’s eventual new role as a faculty member (Park, 2004; Piccinin et
It is easy to understand how habits formed as a graduate teaching assistant might carry over to ongoing work as a teacher at the faculty level. Faculty often experience their first teaching experiences as graduate students and these experiences may include the only training they receive in teaching. This concern is particularly important considering the number of TAs who eventually become faculty; according to studies cited in Mueller, Perlman, McCann, and McFadden (1997), nearly half of the current faculty in any given discipline were TAs at some point and approximately 75% of TAs (in 1997) planned to teach in college or university. Many scholars who write about TA training acknowledge the benefits that training gives to TAs and the subsequent benefits for their students. Since this training could carry through to a TA's future role as a member of the faculty, the effectiveness of that training should be of great concern.

With the pool of existing research in mind and with the awareness of the increasing demands on and importance of TAs, I undertook a preliminary study of the current state of TA training programs in Canada. The goal of this study is to summarize how English departments at Canadian universities train their incoming TAs, to identify trends in the methodology and content of this training, and to consider the impacts various practices in TA training might have on both the TAs (as teachers) and their students.

**Methodology**

This study includes data from English departments at seven Canadian institutions. The institutions included in this sample all have graduate-level English programs and use TAs as instructors. Material collected for the study includes descriptions of TA training programs; descriptions of the orientation sessions or courses provided to graduate student TAs; and materials provided to TAs as part of their training including handbooks and handouts. Information was provided from department heads, TA coordinators, and/or participating professors at the surveyed institutions, as well as collected from publicly available sources.

**Trends in Methodology of Training**

I began by analyzing the methodology of training in current TA training programs. The range of training methods represented in this sample was surveyed and
classified into five common categories: short courses (a single orientation session or a course up to a week in length), long courses (one term (four months) or longer), faculty mentoring (formal or informal), courses or workshops from other campus sources (outside of the English department), and printed materials (including handbooks, pamphlets, and handouts). I tallied the training provided at each institution and further specified whether that training was defined as mandatory or optional. The results are shown in Figure 1:

![Methods of Training](image)

**Figure 1. Methods of TA Training.** The numbers refer to the number of English departments surveyed (out of 7) using each method.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, there is a range of training methods provided in the surveyed programs. Short courses or orientation sessions are the most common method used (in use at 5 of 7, or 71% of, institutions), while the least-used method is courses of a term or more (in use at only 3 of 7, or 43% of, institutions). No single method of training is in use at every institution, and each method is used by at least three institutions. Additionally, each institution uses a combination of the available methods. On average, three different methods are used at each institution. The least number of methods in use in a training program is one, and the most is four.
This tally of methods in use in TA training programs does not enable a definitive conclusion that one method of training is more popular than another. However, short courses seem the most-used method of training, with faculty mentoring and handbooks nearly as popular. Though not directly represented in the above graph, the most common method of training is a conjunction of multiple methods, including a course (short or long) with faculty mentoring and/or handbooks and printed materials. These trends in training program methods can impact both the TAs as teachers themselves and their students, as discussed later in this paper.

**Trends in Content of Training**

After quantifying the trends in TA training methods, I performed a similar analysis on the content of the training materials. I began by surveying the written materials and training program descriptions to identify a list of common topics addressed in at least one piece of training material or program description. This analysis generated a list of topics that are discussed or taught as part of TA training programs (Table 1).

**Table 1. Content of TA Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TA Role Description</th>
<th>defining a TA; role and responsibilities of TAs; courses TAs teach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>role and responsibilities of TA mentors; how the mentoring program works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Preparation</td>
<td>course syllabus, ordering textbooks, planning assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Day of Class</td>
<td>what to teach on the first day; how to set the tone of the first class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading and Marking</td>
<td>regulations and guidelines; grading schemes and rubrics; providing feedback to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Skills</td>
<td>general teaching practices and principles; teaching pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching: Discussions</td>
<td>leading discussions; planning discussions; engaging students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching: Lectures</td>
<td>planning and delivering lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching: Seminars and Workshops</td>
<td>planning and delivering workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>evaluation of teaching assistants; when and how TAs are evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interaction</td>
<td>office hours; student conferences; dealing with students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once this common list was developed, I re-examined each of the materials and tallied whether a topic was addressed in the materials of each institution. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of how frequently each of the identified topics was discussed in the surveyed TA training programs.

As expected, the content of the training programs overlaps across many of the institutions surveyed. Only two topics (“grading and marking” and “student interaction”) are addressed at all seven institutions, and a further three topics (“TA role description”, “course preparation,” and “advice for difficult situations”) are addressed at six institutions. However, content is not universal across the programs. Over half of the 18 common topics are discussed at four or fewer institutions. Topics focusing on the teaching of classes (from general skills to specifics on teaching lectures, discussions, or seminars) are raised by as few as three institutions and as many as five.
Figure 2. Content in TA Training. The numbers indicate the number of institutions (out of the 7 surveyed) at which each topic was covered in TA training.

One potential problem of this method of examining the content of these materials is that it identifies only that the topic was mentioned. Each training program covers these topics to a different extent, ranging from a brief mention to entire pages (or hours of training time) devoted to this area.

In an effort to address this difficulty, at least in part, I undertook a second method of content analysis: the creation of a word cloud based on the frequency with which words were mentioned within the materials. From this, it is possible to see, for example, whether two concepts which might have been addressed by the same number of institutions would be weighted differently in terms of the amount of space or time they are actually given. The word cloud in Figure 3 was generated based on all the available content collected in this study.
Figure 3. Content in TA Training (word cloud). The relative size of each term indicates its prevalence in the TA training materials.

In this word cloud, prevalent terms — such as “students,” “instructor,” “teaching,” and “course” — are those that would be expected in any kind of material dealing with teaching. Looking primarily at the common topics and themes identified earlier, the word cloud largely aligns with the frequency graph. The most frequently used terms include “class” (241 instances), “grade” (226 instances), “assignments” (212 instances), “discussion” (167 instances), “workshops” (130 instances), and “evaluation” (97 instances). Words linked to less common topics — such as “online” (28 instances) and “pedagogy” (24 instances) — appear noticeably less frequently, indicating that less space is dedicated to these topics. Also appearing noticeably less frequently are the kind of actions verbs and concepts that might reference recommendations on how teachers interact with students or comport themselves — words such as “feedback” (13 instances), “connecting” (11 instances), “encourage” (20 instances), “effective” (29 instances), and “professional” (19 instances). The disparity between the most and least frequently used words
reveals trends in the space and attention given to some concepts as compared to others. Concepts that are given less space (and therefore appear less frequently) may be deemed as less important by the creators of the training materials.

It is evident from this analysis of training material content that, as with approaches to training methods, there is a wide range of content included in TA training and a wide range of perception about what content is and is not necessary for TAs to learn. Based on analysis of topics covered and content analysis of the available text, the trend in TA training is to give more attention to practical considerations such as grading and holding a class and less, if any, attention to the theoretical aspects of teaching including pedagogical theory and teacher-student interaction.

**Impacts of TA Training Programs on Teachers and Students**

The identified trends in data, in terms of both methodology and content of TA training programs, have potential impacts both TAs and their students. Studies into TA training programs and TA effectiveness have consistently shown a link between the training TAs receive and their performance in the classroom (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Gray, 1991; Carroll, 1980; Shannon et al., 1998; Stallworth Williams, 1991). These studies have covered topics including the content, length, and type of training provided, and reached conclusions based on qualitative and quantitative research providing insights from TAs, their students, and their departments. My preliminary study did not address, qualitatively or quantitatively, the effectiveness of the TA training programs under consideration, and further quantitative and qualitative research would be required to make conclusive statements about the impacts of current training programs. However, based on past studies, it is possible to hypothesize some of these potential impacts.

**Impacts of Methodology of Training**

The identified trends in training methodology could have both positive and negative impacts for TAs and their students. As demonstrated in the analysis of training methods, the most common method for training a TA is a short course or orientation session, typically lasting only a single day, and the least common method is a longer course of at least a term. As noted, the prevalent trend is the use of multiple
methods of training within a single program. The typical approach involves a conjunction of a short course with faculty mentoring and/or training materials.

This use of multiple methods of training, while possibly originating from budgetary concerns or as a way to get TAs into the classroom more quickly, could have the benefit of speaking to multiple styles of student learning. The popular learning styles hypothesis suggests that not all students learn the same way (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008). Some learn by listening to a teacher speak (as in a course or lecture), some learn by reading (as in printed materials), and some learn by doing (as in practical experience and mentoring). Theories regarding learning styles suggest that individuals learn more effectively when they are taught according to their learning style (Pashler et al., 2008). Therefore, a varied TA training program that provides instruction through multiple methods could support TAs in learning in the ways that suit them best. Though research into the effectiveness of teaching to specific learning styles is not conclusive (Pashler et al., 2008), TAs may still benefit from learning their role through several different methods.

Despite the potential positive benefits of teaching to multiple learning methods, the trend towards shorter courses could have a detrimental impact on the TA as a teacher (and consequently on their students). Studies have consistently shown that the methods through which teachers, including TAs, receive their education directly influences their efficacy as teachers and that, in general, having greater knowledge is beneficial to the teacher (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Gray, 1991; Carroll, 1980; Shannon et al., 1998; Stallworth Williams, 1991). For example, Shannon et al.'s (1998) study of the impact of training and teaching experience on TA teaching effectiveness demonstrated that students rated TAs with more training in pedagogical theory as more effective than TAs without such training. Their study found that the most effective teachers were teachers who possessed degrees in education (and therefore had a strong background in pedagogical theory) and teachers who had participated in supervised teaching experience (and thus had had oversight into the improvement of their teaching methodology) (Shannon et al., 1998). Linda Stallworth Williams' (1991) research into the effects of TA training on TA effectiveness supports this conclusion. In Stallworth Williams' experiment, university TAs were divided into two groups, both of which received theory and
pedagogy training, and only one of which also participated in a “consultant observation program” (Stallworth Williams, 1991) and peer mentoring. The results of the study were that TAs who received more training and guidance felt less teacher anxiety and were rated as more effective by students (Stallworth Williams, 1991).

Greater training and teacher knowledge, therefore, shape a teacher’s self-image and increases teacher confidence in the classroom, improving both the teacher’s own experience and the learning experience received by that teacher’s students (Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007; Sandi-Urena & Gatlin, 2013; Sheridan, 1991). Studies suggest that a longer course supplemented by rigorous faculty mentoring is the approach to TA training that would provide the best results to TAs in the classroom (Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007; Sandi-Urena & Gatlin, 2013; Sheridan, 1991). Research also suggests that the positive benefits of pedagogical training only appear after a training process of at least year (Postareff et al., 2007). Postareff et al.’s (2007) study revealed that a short course can be detrimental to teachers: teachers who received shorter training were less confident in themselves as teachers than even those who had received no training. And yet, longer courses are the least commonly used method of training found in the study sample. Additionally, while many training programs included aspects of faculty mentoring, this mentoring ranges from faculty being available to offer advice, to weekly meetings of an entire TA group, to formalized processes of mentoring that include classroom supervision and one-on-one mentoring. The ideal program would include a mentoring program on the more in-depth end of the spectrum along with a term-length course, at the least.

Yet this kind of a program presents its own difficulties — primarily that it requires significant time, resources, and dedication on the part of the TAs, the faculty, and the department (Carroll, 1980). Longer courses require that departments train their TAs for at least a term before they are considered ready to teach in the classroom. In-depth mentoring sessions similarly require significant time and investment from faculty who are already tasked with busy teaching and research requirements. Under both time and resource constraints, it is reasonable to expect that departments may opt for shorter programs and less-involved mentoring to balance their limited resources and need to have TAs in the classroom as quickly as possible.
In this sense, the approach of providing a range of training through various methods has another benefit. It enables departments to get their TAs into the classroom quickly while still providing some level of support. Many departments also actively encourage students to continue their own development through workshops and courses outside of the department. This suggests that departments are not unaware of the demands they are placing on their TAs, nor the difficult position the departments have in balancing the need for teachers with the need to educate those teachers.

Further research into the reasoning behind the design of TA programs could provide insight into how institutions balance the learning needs of TAs as future teachers with the logistical needs and constraints of the institution. Regardless of the factors influencing current trends in TA education, these trends can have positive impacts for both the TA (in enabling multiple learning styles) and their institution (in getting TAs into the classroom quickly). However, these trends must be observed in context with the content of training, and within this context the impacts of these trends could be magnified.

**Impacts of Content of Training**

Trends in the content of TA training present similar potential impacts to the trends in methodology. As analysis shows, content represented in TA training programs and materials is different across institutions, though some topics, such as grading and interacting with students, are more prevalent. An effective method of putting into perspective the trends visible in the collected data is to use the lens of teacher concerns explored by Fuller (1969) and further elaborated by Staton-Spicer and Bassett (1979). Staton-Spicer and Bassett summarized Fuller’s work as identifying three major phases in development through which most teachers pass: (1) concern about self and survival as a teacher, (2) concern about tasks and instructional duties, and (3) concern about the impact of teaching or concern about pupil learning (Fuller, 1969; Staton-Spicer & Bassett, 1979). We could think of these three stages of development as three struts supporting a tripod, on top of which is a fully developed teacher who can provide the most effective instruction to his or her students.
In the first stage and second stages of development, according to this model, teachers are primarily concerned about the self, including their adequacy and survival as a teacher, and their instructional duties (Fuller, 1969; Staton-Spicer & Bassett, 1979). In TA training programs, these concerns are reflected in topics such as role description, information about grading and marking, and information about difficult situations such as dealing with plagiarism. Instructional or task-related topics and self-related topics appear with similar frequency in training programs, suggesting the importance of these elements to English departments.

The third stage of teacher development in this model — concern about impact (pupil learning) — is the stage that includes a greater concern for the theoretical background of the recommended practices as teachers seek to better understand how their actions and techniques impact their students (Fuller, 1969; Staton-Spicer & Bassett, 1979). It is also the stage that is least represented in TA training content, as revealed in this study. While many TA programs address student learning, the content of this training is varied. Only about half of the programs address concerns such as teaching skills. Even within programs that address concepts such as grading, the content ranges from how to grade an assignment to the theory of different forms of feedback (with training predominantly focused on the practicalities of marking assignments and not the more theoretical aspects). Topics that also lack coverage are those that deal with the more intangible aspects of teaching, such as characteristics of student interaction and relationships with students. These characteristics of teachers — including respect, approachability, being engaging, communication, organization, responsiveness, and professional — were identified by one study as the key aspects of effective teaching (Delaney, Johnson, Johnson, & Treslan, 2013). However, current trends in TA training do not provide adequate time or attention to allow TAs to develop these skills. Without them, TAs lack a foundation for introspection and understanding of the impact their techniques have on their students.

The practicalities of presenting and grading a course are certainly of importance. However, understanding the pedagogical theory behind those practicalities can be equally fundamental for a teacher's effectiveness and ongoing development. As noted previously, research has shown that teachers with a stronger grounding in
pedagogical theory are more confident and effective in the classroom (Cho et al., 2011; Postareff et al., 2007). In Cho et al.’s (2011) statistical analysis of TA concerns, the authors demonstrated that TAs who are confident in themselves, the material, and, most importantly, their effectiveness as teachers, are more likely to go beyond the practical, self-focussed concerns of grading assignments and speaking in front of students and consider student-focussed concerns such as teaching effectiveness and pedagogical theory. However, TAs in current training programs may not be getting this theoretical grounding. The trends identified in this study reveal that the topic of teaching pedagogy is mentioned in less than half of the surveyed programs, and it appears with significantly less frequency and prominence than concepts such as grading. Without this theoretical background, therefore, TAs are likely to be less confident and effective in the classroom.

A teacher’s anxiety is also an important consideration because, as Stallworth Williams (1991) found increased anxiety in teachers can impair the achievement of students. Scholars such Stallworth Williams (2004) and Park (1991) also note that comprehensive training programs make a significant difference in teaching effectiveness. The general trend of this research indicates that a more comprehensive training program is better for teachers and for their students. While many students may not actively suffer from a TA whose training focus was instructional (process-related) concerns and not pedagogical theory, a TA without a strong grounding in pedagogical theory might not be able to provide the same level of instruction for his or her students. Additionally, without this knowledge, TAs might not be able to address the needs of some students (such as students who have different learning styles or who would benefit from a different approach inside and/or outside the classroom).

We must, however, consider content in the context of the methodology through which it is delivered. Though an understanding of pedagogical theory is the ideal in TA training, it represents, as discussed, a level of teacher concern beyond the practicalities of teaching. If TAs are expected to fully develop as teachers, then this understanding is certainly necessary. However, it requires time. And for institutions that (whether by choice or by necessity) only offer short orientations and some level of mentoring, there is little time to offer this kind of pedagogical insight.
Concerns about content in TA training are therefore closely tied to concerns about methodology. Research has found that longer, more comprehensive TA training programs are the best practice for the education of both teachers and students. However, given the varied needs of all involved, perhaps our current approach to TA training is the best we can do. Nevertheless, the concerns raised here suggest that we must seriously consider current TA training programs and how they might be improved.

**Conclusion: Opening a Conversation**

My analysis of the methodology and content of current TA programs shows a trend towards ensuring that TAs understand the practicalities of their role and that they have some support in fulfilling it. The current trend is to provide a short course in conjunction with training materials and/or mentoring, with the content of training focusing on practical concerns such as grading. However, few institutions seem to have made the leap to the part of TA education that answers the question of why we teach *this content* in *this manner*, the question that crosses the boundary between practical and theoretical. Even within these identified trends, there is a significant difference in how and what each institution teaches their TAs. Each institution uses a different combination of training methods and emphasizes a different collection of topics. And in all cases, there are impacts on the TAs and their students.

TAs’ performance and effectiveness in the classroom are fundamentally affected by the training they receive. Research done over the last several decades into the field of TA training has consistently demonstrated that TAs who receive more comprehensive training and training that includes pedagogical theory are more effective and confident in the classroom, resulting in greater success for their students. Yet trends in current training programs reveal a reliance on short courses and training materials that do not provide the time or space to address these key concerns. From the existing body of research, it seems the recommended nature of a TA training program should be a long, detailed course supplemented by formalized faculty mentoring and a wealth of resources.

It is impossible, though, to conclusively state that there is an ideal TA training program that can be implemented at all institutions. This study, as well as past
research into the topic, has shown that institutions use a range of training techniques to achieve different results. The consistent thread seems to be that training is necessary and more training is generally better than less training. However, institutions must balance this recommendation against the ever-growing and increasingly insistent demands on TAs and the urgency to get them trained and into the classroom as quickly as possible.

With each institution having unique requirements and concerns, what then should be recommended? In the end, each institution will have to make its own choices based on its unique needs and resources, but some trends seem to indicate greater success than others:

1. Training is necessary. Research across the board supports the necessity of providing some level of training for TAs. In most studies, teachers who receive training are more confident and effective in the classroom.

2. A combination of approaches can best meet varied needs. Each approach to training has its own positives and negatives. Some combination of multiple approaches seems to be both the trend and an effective method of meeting multiple needs.

3. Pedagogical theory should be considered. Research has consistently shown that an understanding of pedagogical theory is beneficial for the teacher and the student.

Still today we don’t have all the answers about the impacts, effectiveness, and justification of rationales for our TA training programs. We can only look at what we are doing and ask: Can we do better? How can we do better? Answering those questions will take work and engagement from every part of the TA world: student, TA, professor, and institution. There is certainly enough theory and data to show a mismatch between current conclusions about best practices for TA training and current trends in TA training programs. However, to understand the issue more fully, a comprehensive understanding is required not only of best practices, but also of the reasons institutions employ the programs that they do, and how those programs directly impact their students and teachers. Considering the key role TAs
currently play in undergraduate education and the ever-increasing demands placed on them, the question of the effectiveness of TA training programs is one we need to answer and a conversation we need to open not just within our departments, but across departments and institutions.

References


