The Object of Virtual Desire: seducing on the Internet

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O Objeto do Desejo Virtual: seduzindo na NET

Resumo

Combinando-se instrumentos da análise da composição textual com a especificidade das análises dos gêneros e da linguagem da avaliação, a pesquisa apresentará uma proposta para a categorização de perfis em *sites* de encontros como um subgênero digital *de facto*, pertencente à colônia dos gêneros promocionais. Os textos autodescritivos serão considerados eventos comunicativos socialmente dependentes e intencionais (Martin, 1985; Bhatia, 1993, Hoey, 2001), do modo ostensivo (Tanaka, 1999), cuja construção funcional assemelha-se àquela da oferta/produto, promovendo incentivo e sedução através de estratégias discursivas de autopromoção. A análise do corpus será realizada a partir dos movimentos retóricos e táticas conversacionais que permeiam o discurso do gênero promocional, mapeando-se, dessa forma, os macro- e micro-padrões, assim como os recursos semântico-discursivos, presentes na estrutura atípica desse tipo emergente de hipertexto.

Palavras-chave: gênero promocional; movimentos retóricos; macro-estruturas

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Abstract

This research seeks to combine the tools of corpus analysis with the specificity of genre analysis and the appraisal system framework to attempt at a categorization of online dating personal profiles as a truly digital subgenre within the genre system of online dating. Such profiles will be regarded as socially dependent communicative events of staged and purposeful social process (Martin, 1985; Bhatia, 1993, Hoey, 2001), of the ostensive kind (Tanaka, 1999), the functional construction of which resembles that of offer/product, promoting incentive and seduction through discourse strategies of self-promotion. The corpus will undergo scrutiny from the perspective of rhetorical moves and conversational tactics that permeate discourse of this promotional genre, in an effort to map out macro-patterns and micro-relations, as well as semantic-lexical, discourse-level resources, inherent to the atypical structural organization of this emerging kind of hypertext.

Key words: promotional genre, rhetorical moves, macro-patterns

1. Introduction

Systems of computer-mediated genres have evolved over the past decades to promote the communication of ideas and information in socially compatible interactive forms. As suggested by Yates, Orlikowski and Rennecker (1997, p. 51), "*Each organization has a repertoire of genres that can be identified with it at a certain moment of analysis. A set of genres can also interrelate in a wider communicative process thus forming systems of genre*". Conventional forms that are instantly recognized as hypertexts constitute a genre system *i.e.* a sequence of communicative actions. The genre system as a whole, as well as the individual subgenres constituting the system, can be said to have a socially recognized purpose and common characteristics of form.

Emerging digital genre systems have already been the subject of analysis by many scholars but no detailed survey has yet produced the exact number of genres that can be found on the World Wide Web. In fact, the Internet is not a homogenous virtual context thus it offers a great variety of formats allowing for different operating procedures with regard to participation and interactive processes. Marcuschi (2004, p. 26-30) uses the Portuguese terms *ambiente* and *gênero* for genre system and subgenre respectively, and relates the two concepts by saying that the former consists of a superordinate category that very often conditions the latter. Therefore, genre systems are not to be regarded as discoursal domains proper but rather domains of production and textual processing from which subgenres arise. Twelve digital genre systems are then identified and related to their non-virtual counterparts.

Personal ads, not included on the list of digital genres, constitute a distinct generic form which is linked to the small ad. While the ad offers something, the personal ad offers but, most essentially, seeks – the private search for the desired other.

Online dating, an activity that has drawn large numbers of web surfers all over the world would certainly constitute an additional variety of emerging digital genre systems. Sociological and anthropological justifications for such a recent trend have not yet been fully investigated and, as a consequence, analyses of hypertexts on dating sites have not been done from the perspective of genre analysis. This recent computer-mediated activity, still controversial and underrated by many from a social perspective, is undeniably spreading and discourse forms displayed on dating sites certainly deserve exploratory investigations due to their large variety of creative linguistic realizations.

2. The dynamics of online dating sites

Online dating sites offer a variety of functional interactions to their subscribers. The viewer can have access to many communicative moves that together accomplish an interaction: communication by means of e-mails, private chats and scheduled chats. The social interaction actually involves a blend of digital genre systems and the combination of subgenres to be surveyed, in terms of user perceptions of the form and contents of dating sites, reveals a significant correlation between commonly found elements and user preferences and expectations reflected in discourse.

Upon registration, prospective members of most dating sites are asked to fill out a form with personal introduction, personal appearance, and description of an ideal prospective date. Members describe themselves and list the attributes of their idealized partners. As expected, profile information is supposed to be attractive. And the way in which it is presented – the kind of language used – constitutes by all means a crucial and decisive move.

Profiles on dating sites are to be regarded as an asynchronic subgenre of a genre system since they display identifiable elements, rules of form, and content supporting both production and consumption - the basic determinants of discourse genres. Various forms of interaction, both synchronic and asynchronic, may follow. For example, a viewer identifies with, or feels attracted to, another profiled subscriber and may then choose a face-saving move that consists of simply clicking on the icon "add to favorites", on top of the other's profile window, to show interest. A window with basic information including an attention getter (a sentence produced by the profiler), a nickname or handle, basic information such as age, location and, in most cases, a photograph will be displayed on the recipient's list of favorites. Another possibility, a more assertive one, is to send an e-mail message to the other party through the site.

The user's full profile will be available by clicking on the nick name or photograph and a larger window will open with full profiles. Letter heads in bold introduce sections to be created by users themselves without any interference on the part of the web designer. They are expected to produce 1. an introduction, functioning as an attention-getting strategy, 2. a personal presentation, 3. a body description and, finally, 4. a description of who they are looking for. Members describe themselves and list the attributes of their idealized partners. The dynamic nature of "seductive" discourse is due to the fact that it is designed to be attractive and persuasive. In short, its primary purpose is to seduce by offering incentives for users to establish contact. As expected, profile information is quite attractive and the way in which it is presented – the kind of language used – is typical of the language of persuasion found in advertising.

3. The promotional genre and subgenres

Frameworks for the classification of text types have been proposed over the past thirty years by various researchers. Different parameters have been used to classify texts according to: linguistic features, situational features and functional features.

Swales (1990) and Martin (1985, 1992) share similar ideas while classifying texts. Martin's framework, based on genre theory, originates from Hallidayan systemic functional grammar and expands Halliday's work on language varieties by categorizing language use in terms of the culturally appropriate goals language users try to achieve through language. Such goals may, for instance, be to describe, explain, or narrate something realized by the genres 'description', 'explanation' and 'narration' [1] .Thus, the genre determinant is that of the goal or communicative purpose of a text. Martin (1992) further suggests that the major linguistic signal of 'purpose' in a text is the staging structure through which a specific genre unfolds.

3.1 Multiple communicative purposes

When Martin (1985) defines genre as a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity, he is referring to the fact that genres pave the way to the accomplishment of purposeful activities. The staged and goal-oriented organization of a genre is expressed linguistically through a functional structure referred to as the schematic structure.

Eggins (1994, p. 36) also asserts that the primary determinant of genre membership is that of 'purpose' while schematic structure and linguistic features are regarded as dimensions to the realization of genres.

According to Swales (1990, p. 58), "*A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes.*" These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Thus genre is defined

not as a text but rather as a social or communicative event. Furthermore, the definition tries to establish a relationship between the purpose accomplished by a genre and the structure of the genre, conveying the idea that the communicative purpose of a genre shapes the genre, rendering it a schematic structure.

Bhatia (1993), borrowing from Swales' framework, claims that promotion letters and job applications belong to the same genre because the overall communicative purpose of both texts is to promote a product, a company or a person with a typical schematic structure where a move or stage can be determined by the content of the move, grammatical or lexical patterns or functional features of the move.

So far, the notion of communicative purpose seems to play a fundamental role in genre theory. However, a thorough and undisputable definition of the term has not yet been produced to account for the variations within genres.

Swales (1990, p. 45-47) comments on the challenges and difficulties associated with the use of 'communicative purpose' as genre determinant. In order to clarify the concept of 'communicative purpose' Swales introduces two types of communicative purpose in his definition – what I refer to as overt communicative purpose and covert communicative. He does so when he identifies the purpose of news broadcasts as that of keeping their audiences up to date with events in the world, the generally socially acceptable purpose of news broadcasts which I refer to as ostensive purpose. Swales further proposes that the purpose of news broadcasts may also be that of molding public opinion, organizing public behavior or providing the network, radio station or news source with a favorable image. Here the purpose of the text would be categorized as 'covert', which is not necessarily accepted or acknowledged by individuals exposed to the genre.

As can be seen, Swales never comments on such distinctions in a straightforward manner and, while analyzing the promotional genre, this distinction which I will present in the following section devoted to inferential communication is crucial to the identification process of a genre on the basis of its communicative purpose.

In Bhatia's genre analysis (BHATIA, 1993, p. 59), which is based on Swales' framework, a company brochure is regarded as a 'promotional genre' and its communicative purpose is considered to be that of promoting the company. Following the same line of reasoning, personal ads on dating sites would also be expected to display the communicative purpose of promoting the profiled person. This works acceptably since the focus lies on the view of the sender – the person who describes himself in an intentional and purposeful way. However, from the receiver's perspective, the communicative purpose could be seen in a different light: the covert intentions behind the personal profiles. Therefore, by accepting the basic corollaries of functional linguistics, *i.e.*, that the cultural and situational contexts add meaning and purpose to a text, in order to identify the purpose of a text it is necessary to consider the context in which the descriptive texts occur so as to go beyond the overt intention of promoting oneself and arrive at the more covert one: what the individual is trying to achieve through its promotion. The combination of overt and covert intentions would then make up a subgenre within the primary genre.

In the corpus under analysis, the more overt purpose is to find romance, a partner and companion and, as many participants blatantly declare, to find their 'soul mates'. The rapid rhythm of urban centers which ultimately yields to loneliness and, consequently, pursuit of a partner, either for entertainment or romance, enhances the value of relationships. Thus, being able to browse through various online profiles becomes a useful tool and a highly valued asset. As a consequence, the main goal in the context – the overt intention – is to describe oneself as a 'qualified potential partner'. Here the collection of profiles plays a vital role. Even though the hypertexts do not establish partnerships in themselves, they can facilitate the matchmaking process through attractive descriptions of senders. All texts in the corpus emphasize the qualities of a great and reliable partner by means of attention-getting devices prompted by choice of words and

sentence structures. But there might be multiple purposes that are covert. The covert purposes may be, for example, to impress the opposite sex through aesthetic beauty (when photographs are included) or refined writing, to create the image of a reliable person, to assess the impact of one's own profile on the audience by the quantity of e-mails received, to obtain satisfaction through initiatives from readers/viewers, etc.

The point being made is that only by studying the participants in the situational context – both the sender (= the one describing himself) and the receiver (= the one reading the profile), can online dating personal ads be characterized as a genre in terms of communicative purpose. Furthermore, there may be multiple purposes behind such ads and those purposes depend on cultural values and attitudes on the part of registered participants of dating sites.

The question of the multifunctionality of texts, which also illustrates the difficulty in connection with using communicative purpose as genre determinant, should not be disregarded. Texts seldom fulfill an isolated function and Swales (1990) acknowledges this fact. Reasons may vary among individuals for the production of promotional texts of this type. It depends, in the final analysis, on the person writing the text, those reading the text and the contexts in which they are inserted. And once all these parameters are combined and thoroughly analyzed the researcher will refrain from considering company brochures, job applications, tourist promotion folders, magazine/newspaper advertisements of all kinds and book blurbs as instances of the same genre – the promotional genre which, in the work of Bhatia (*op. cit.*) is defined as having the purpose of promoting something. This is an extremely generic category which should undergo further categorization into subgenres. According to which purpose should the text be classified? Is the overt purpose more important than the covert? And which of the purposes will actually influence the schematic structure?

Concluding, it would be wise to consider advertising as a promotional genre system and variations of promotional ads, associated with related discourse types, as determinants of its subgenres: online personals ads, a case in point.

3.2 Ostensive-inferential communication

The notion of ostensive-inferential communication as a form of communication that facilitates inferential comprehension is defined in: "*The communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions*" (SPERBER & WILSON, 1986, p. 63)*.*

Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory was applied by Keiko Tanaka (1999) to the analysis of advertisements encompassing both covert and ostensive communication. By engaging in covert communication, the focus of which is commercial advertising, the advertiser does not inform for the sake of improving knowledge of the world, but only to sell products or services. Thus, covert communication is a response to inter-related problems faced by advertisers in their task of persuading or influencing. They wish, for example, to avoid negative social reactions toward aspects of their advertisements such as the use of sex and the exploitation of other politically incorrect concepts (*e.g.* snobbery, wealth, glamour, ethnicity, etc). Ostensive communication, on the other hand, encourages the fixation of belief. The communicator's intention to inform something overtly may lead to success in making the audience believe it. In commercial advertising, however, lack of trust does not prevent ostensive communication from taking place. Success will be attained once the audience recovers the advertiser's informative intention, without necessarily making the target audience believe something. It is common for people to easily recover the set of assumptions intended by the advertiser without actually believing them.

While in commercial advertising covert communication may prove itself to be more advantageous from the standpoint of the advertiser, in the subgenre of personal ads on dating sites ostensive communication is inevitable due to the fact that the very informative intention of those sites is inherently publicized.

Ostensive communication takes place in personal ads on dating sites and degrees of mutual trust and social co-operation are high once the monologic hypertexts of profiles are supposed to function as the initial channel for future real-life encounters. It is then presupposed that a trustworthy candidate introduces and describes herself to a trusting addressee. However, cases of limited or non-existent trust in ostensive communication through this medium may occur when the manifested sets of assumptions do not conform to realistic intentions. For example, someone who takes on a false identity in order to interact with the opposite sex virtually and create an unrealistic emotional environment to satisfy her fantasies. Notwithstanding, the informative intention is by all means true once the goal is to find a partner regardless of the status of participants: virtual or real.

For the reasons mentioned above, existing trust will be taken as a norm in the present analysis. Ostensive rather then covert communication is present here. The single man/woman searching for prospective dates on the Internet may be compared to advertisers whose primary goal is to persuade and attract an audience composed of single men/women registered on the site. Their activated profiles have two main functions: informing and persuading the viewer to establish contact. In addition, similar to typical strategies of advertisement campaigns, pictures are often placed on profile pages which serve as a reward for the audience's attention as well as a "magnet" – a source of physical attraction and sexual arousal, motivating the viewer to open a channel of communication by exchanging e-mail messages, making telephone calls or meeting face to face.

4. The corpus

The texts analyzed are profile segments posted on Match.com, Yahoo!, of online male members from both the Brazilian and the International website versions. The segments comprise the four sections completed by members without the aid of the menu of previously selected options. They are: introductions, personal presentations, body descriptions and descriptions of who the male members are looking for. All twelve (12) profiles selected for this study were elaborated by *cariocas* (6) and New Yorkers (6), with ages ranging from 35 to 40. By restricting the scope of the research to texts produced by mature, adult male subjects living in cosmopolitan areas such as Rio de Janeiro and New York City, the corpus is, arguably, more homogeneous and cohesive with regard to cultural diversity and register variation.

5. Discourse type features

The array of ads in the modern world has points of contact with various discourse types. In addition to persuading, which is a function central to the majority of ads, there are ads which are devised for reasons other than selling, for example, ads which simply inform, give directions, warn, etc.

There are many kinds of ads and, as a consequence, many discourse types associated with the genre. Cook (1992, p. 6) distinguishes different kinds of functions in relation to ads: addresser-function, sender-function, addressee-function and receiver-function. He asserts that a clear-cut characterization of ads – persuading to buy – is over simplistic and distinguishes product ads (houses, fridges, etc.) from non-product ads (charity and political campaigns, etc.), and offers a four-dimension categorization of ads according to: 1. medium: TV, radio, the Internet, etc.; 2. product or service (perfume, liquor, sports car, watches, housecleaning, laundry, car tune-up, etc.); 3. technique –

reason and tickle ads, appealing to reason and emotion respectively (BERNSTEIN, 1974, p. 118); and 4. consumer – categorization of target groups: women, men, young/old, middle/upper class, etc.

It is important to note, however, that these dimensions will not generate a uniform classification of ads. That is to say that all ads sharing one or more of these parameters will not necessarily constitute a distinct subgenre of advertisements. As can be seen, no simple definition is currently available to be assigned to ads in general. Advertisements perform multiple functions, in different forms, through different media, for various purposes and for different audiences.

The above features may be related to personal ads on dating sites: they are tickle non-product ads displayed on the Internet targeted at singles, male or female, who want to find a partner: the desired other.

Although personal introductions are provided in the written mode, the register often presents interactive features such as conversational tactics and moves. It resembles to some extent face-to-face interactive conversation, with heavily loaded information with lexical density communicated. Profile writers '*talk*' about themselves and request some reply from their audience. As a result, the self-descriptive texts under consideration are characterized grammatically by the frequent use of the first person pronoun *I,* a lesser frequent use of the person pronoun *you,* while addressing the reader of the ad – a potential date*,* a great deal of qualification by means of adjectives and/or adjectivals in general, and very few action verbs.

Below are some examples of introductions taken from Brazilian and American profiles:

(1) *Bom, não sou careca e a barriga ainda não se manifestou. Acho que estou dentro da média, não?...*

(2) *Bom, talvez até eu seja super em alguma coisa, mas isso é você quem deve descobrir...*

(3) *I love the outdoors. Camping, Hiking, Motorcycle vacations, and traveling in general are at the top of my "fun" list.*

(4) *I'm a charming, intelligent, sexy, romantic, talented, sensual, mature showbiz male who travels the world as an entertainer… I'm quite well built, not over thin, maybe could lose a pound or two, but certainly not fat. Manly would describe me.*

Other typical features include (1) attractive and/or funny nicknames or holders to make the piece more eye-catching, (2) catchy headlines – attention getters – capturing the reader's attention, (3) short paragraph and sentences with many intensifiers which are easier to follow and grasp, (4) formatting: capitals, bold, italic and underline that create impact and emphasis, and (5) photographs that add eye-appeal.

Therefore, the role taken on by the writer is that of an *expositor* – the persuading agent [2] – describing physical and personality traits of his own. Through persuasive language, the writer wants to reach the audience composed of prospective partners – the persuaded participants – so as to make them reply to his ad.

6. Genre macro-patterns

Advertisements regularly use Opportunity-Taking and Desire Arousal-Desire Fulfillment patterns "*hinting at the commodification of sex on the one hand and the eroticization of selling on the other*" (HOEY, 1997, p. 103). In the analysis of the corpus drawn from Match.com, Yahoo!, Opportunity-Taking stands for the medium itself: the dating site proper. Once individuals become members of a dating site, the opportunity is readily available to them. The profiled attractive man is the object with a purpose and that purpose is fulfilled when the opportunity is taken – he is making himself available for the satisfaction of the other: the desired female.

Furthermore, Problem-Solution and Goal-Achievement patterns can be easily identified since males whose ads are posted on the site are single – the problem – and therefore want to find a partner – the solution. Concomitantly, they have a clear goal in mind: finding prospective partners, communicating with them, and eventually meeting them in real situations, which is what they want to achieve. Thus, the promotional subgenre in this study promotes the interaction of Problem-Solution and Goal-Achievement patterns lodged within the larger Desire-Arousal pattern. All three macro-patterns are implicated in the structural organization of the subgenre and they often have indistinct borderlines.

Descriptions are given together with evaluation in terms of reactions to them, that is, intention to arouse desire in another. They also serve to allow identification of the object of desire by means of character detail in order to motivate action. The inclusion of an Object of Desire statement licenses a description in which the writer's physical and personality traits may be used for the satisfaction of the female reader.

Stereotypical features of attractive masculinity such as tan, hairiness and virility interwoven with positive evaluations such as *fantastic partner, ideal man, fun company, cúmplice em tempo integral, príncipe encantado para Rapunzel, sou real de verdade*, etc. set up the causal link between the Object of Desire and Desire Arousal.

In sum, Positive Evaluation by the first-person male writer of the Positive Result for the female reader/viewer becomes his Attempt to fulfill his own Desire.

Table 1 – Interaction of Macro-patterns of online Personal Ads

OPPORTUNITY-TAKING DESIRE-AROUSAL	Looking for good company and maybe more?
PROBLEM-SOLUTION GOAL-ACHIEVEMENT	A sensitive man who'll really listen to you after a hard day's work? That's me.
GOAL-ACHIEVEMENT PROBLEM-SOLUTION DESIRE-AROUSAL	Look no further! I'll hold you late at night. I guarantee I can change the oil in your car in 10 minutes flat.
DESIRE-AROUSAL	I'm good looking: 6'1", blonde, brown eyes, dark skin, nice lips. Love, kissing, touching, music, movies, talking with that person, sex, smile.... sharing and candle light dinner, just being with that special person

Table 2 – Interaction of Macro-patterns of online Personal Ads

OPPORTUNITY-TAKING PROBLEM-SOLUTION GOAL-ACHIEVEMENT	Amante da vida procura... Adoro a natureza e adoraria ter alguém que também curtisse.
DESIRE-AROUSAL GOAL-ACHIEVEMENT	Amar na plenitude em ambientes naturais, como praia, montanha e cachoeiras...

DESIRE-AROUSAL GOAL-ACHIEVEMENT	Tenho ombros largos, coxas grossas, pelos nos braços, pernas e tórax, dentição perfeita. Estou normalmente bronzeado devido as minhas caminhadas e por jogar vôlei de praia. Agora que vc já me conhece um pouquinho, escreva pra mim...me dê o prazer de tê-la como par perfeito....estou aguardando...

7. Moves in discourse structure

Bhatia (1993) proposes a framework for the promotional genre on the basis of moves in discourse structure. The seven moves are (1) establishing credentials, (2) introducing the offer, (3) offering incentives, (4) enclosing documents, (5) soliciting response, (6) using pressure tactics and (7) ending politely. Bhatia's seven-move discourse structure when applied to the present corpus requires two additional rhetorical moves, a substitute for (1) which will merge with (2) and adaptations for moves (4) and (7).

The first additional move is "attention-getting starters" since profiles on dating sites offer the opportunity for a personal statement before one's description. The functional purpose of this move is to focus the reader's attention on the heading of the profile. Typical strategies are the use of shocking, funny or unexpected statements or general pleasantries, as seen in the tokens below:

(1) *Interested in chatting? But not for too long…*:)
(2) *Sexy, Mature, Intelligent, Showbiz*
(3) *Já me disseram ser clone do Toni Ramos...risos...até de um Nicolas Cage ..que pretensão,..olha a forma...mas acima de tudo sou EU à procura de um EU especial..um sotaque curioso mistura português (origem), gauchesco (que barbaridade...tchê...), agora carioca..e ainda dizem que têm toques de francês...*
(4) *Já imaginou um cara com pinta de alemão dançando frevo???*

Bhatia's move (1) **establishing credentials** should be embedded in move (2). In establishing credentials, the goal is to confirm reliability by means of a specialist account. No such information can be found in dating site profiles. The closest kind of data is related to e-mail address, profession, area of expertise, etc. Move (2) **introducing the offer** has the function to highlight what the *product* offers. Since the second part of the profile form is used for the description of one's personality, looks, tastes, etc., the information given also functions as incentives (*cf.* "offering incentives" – move 3). Therefore, it is necessary to collapse the first three moves proposed by Bhatia (moves 1, 2 and 3) into a single and more pervasive move: "describing the self". Examples are as follows:

(1) *I'm a charming, intelligent, sexy, romantic, talented, sensual, mature showbiz male who travels the world as an entertainer. I love Opera, Jazz, quality Pop (Beatles, Stevie Wonder etc), I particularly love Bossa Nova! I've even sung it in Europe and even Brasil itself! I also love old films, town markets and flirtatious, gorgeous women!   ;-)*
(2) *Gostos: coisas, lugares, pessoas, sensações... Café expresso, pizza de massa fina, trabalhar com criatividade, Marcelo Kayath, Ipanema, Arpoador, Rio de Janeiro, passear de mãos dadas, conversar amenidades, papo de anjo, espreguiçar-se nas manhãs de sábado, dolce far niente, Cinema, Bergman, Woody Allen, Charlie Parker, crustáceos, cerveja premium, Matisse, óleo sobre tela, pintura abstrata, Paul Klee, Ang Lee, Música, violão, silêncio, som, chuva, aquietar-se, ouvir, pernas, dorsos, mulheres elegantes, preto e marron, Paris, Quartier Latin,...*

The second additional move has the function of describing the attributes of the prospective partner – the object of desire. As such it will be called "describing the desired other":

(1) *Firstly, I'm looking for an unattached, sexy, seductive woman of, say 20-40ys who prefers a mature man like me, preferably without children. I prefer warm, romantic women, but those who are also intelligent. A love of music is a big plus!*

(2) *Se você: (1) É bem-humorada até nas variações hormonais; 2) Não lê Caras, nem no cabeleireiro; 3) Gosta de cinema europeu; 4) Não usa correntinha no tornozelo; 5) É esbelta; 6) Não faz dança de salão; 7) Gosta do sexo oposto (sabe conviver com as diferenças e até mesmo admirar algumas delas); 7) Acha Reality Show um porre!; 8) Gosta de literatura; 9) Não acredita em duendes; 10) Acha engraçada a onda de esportes radicais; 11) Não é natureba; 12) Sabe que livro de auto-ajuda só "ajuda" o autor, que tal começarmos uma conversa?*

The first move to be adapted requires minor changes. In texts like those analyzed, there are no enclosed documents. It is possible, however, to find some related function: the optional insertion of one's photograph. Actually, the site allows for the posting of three photos at the user's discretion.

The second move to be refined frequently comes at the end of many profiles when site members, after having described their ideal partners, include a pleasant and frequently persuasive and seductive closing statement or question. This kind of move is an adapted version of Bhatia's (7) **ending politely** but, in addition to concluding with pleasantries, profile writers usually include some statement or a piece of comment that aims at attracting, persuading and/or seducing the reader. These two functions are tightly intertwined in many of the profiles under analysis. Indeed, when one looks at them more closely, it is easy to see that these two moves have much in common. As such, the communicative function of this move is to produce closure by seducing readers, either through sex appeal or humor, and make them feel compelled to respond. Therefore, the term "attention-getting codas" will be adopted to refer to the last move.

Examples of such moves are:

(1) *I look forward to telling you more about myself and learning all … about you.*

(2) *Give me a back rub when I come home tired, I'll do whatever you want in return…*

(3) *Bom é isto, eu só queria te dizer uma coisa: quero estar com vc, juntinho em um final de tarde na praia!!!*

(4) *Esse monte de Blá, blá blá só serve como referência, é essencial uma conversa ao vivo e a cores.*

Soliciting response is done by means of different strategies such as pleasantries, challenges (some pressure tactics are sometimes embedded here), direct and indirect requests:

(1) *I look forward to telling you more about myself and learning more about you.*

(2) *Well, why not write to me and find out more?*

(3) *Escreva-me sem medo, podemos trocar fotos e idéias.*

(4) *Será que estou querendo demais? Bem... Se você também pensa assim, por quê não me escrever?*

Pressure tactics involve the use of language of seduction that appeals to heart, mind, body and soul, stimulating the readers' imagination. Seduction does not only rely on sex appeal but also on wit and humor. The "persuading agent" weaves his language of seduction/persuasion, encloses his photo, in most of the cases, and solicits urgent response from female members. Examples of instances of pressure tactics are found in:

(1) *I'm just starting to learn Portuguese. Will you be my private instructor? :)*

(2) *Well, why not write to me and find out more. You won't be disappointed. Go on! You know you want to!*

(3) *Chame, tenho certeza que vc não irá se arrepender...*

(4) *Afinal se conhecer via net, até pode ser mais seguro e profundo do que um encontro eventual num bar à noite...*

With the changes and modifications described above, the order of moves for the purpose of the present analysis is: (1) attention-getting starters, (2) describing the self (collapsing the functions relevant to credentials, introduction of offer and incentives), (3)

enclosing photos, (4) describing the desired other, (5) soliciting response, (6) using pressure tactics and (7) attention-getting codas.

Table 3 – Revised Move Schemata of online profiles

MOVE 1: **Attention-getting starters**
Comments intended to get the readers' attention (quotations, proverbs, sayings included)
• philosophical entries
• pleasantries
• humor
MOVE 2: **Describing the self**
• physical features
• personality traits
• mental attributes
MOVE 3: **Enclosing photos**
• maximum of three (3) photos allowed
MOVE 4: **Describing the desired other**
• physical features
• personality traits
• mental attributes
MOVE 5: **Soliciting response**
The reader is encouraged to respond through:
• pleasantry
• challenges
• questions/requests
MOVE 6: **Using pressure tactics**
The reader is seduced, challenged or reminded of future regrets.
• personal e-mails
• sayings or proverbs
MOVE 7:Attention-getting codas
• polite, humorous, seductive and erotic comments at the end of profile
• rhetorical questions

An interesting aspect that deserves attention is where individual moves occurred relative to each other in the subgenre of dating site descriptions. Although the fields that require elaboration by members are sequentially ordered: 1. a nick or holder, 2. an introduction, functioning as an attention getting strategy, 3. a personal presentation, 4. a body description and, finally, 5. a description of who they are looking for, some moves are either differently placed, repeated or even embedded in others.

The location of three of the moves (M1, M2 and M4) is quite predictable. Although certain information on attributes of the self and of the desired other (M2 and M4) may be found scattered and embedded in other moves, for example, M5 and M7, they are also present in their respective sections, immediately following one another (*cf.* note that M3 - enclosing photos - is optional and pictures are posted on the left upper side of the profile page, thus not included within the space for description writing).

Moves 5 and 6 are the most flexible. They occur and, at times, co-occur, with nearly equal frequency in the beginning, middle and end of descriptions.

Move 7, attention-getting codas, is the one that is most ignored by profilers (3 instances in the Brazilian corpus segment and 2 in the American profiles). Instances of

attention-getting strategies that would normally function as codas co-occur with other previous moves in the texts.

Based on the above mentioned results, certain observations can be made about how moves are used within the subgenre. First, corpus tokens confirm that most moves identified and described by Bhatia (1983) are obligatory in the general structure with the relevant adaptations (*cf.* section 3.3). Secondly, Bhatia's move 7 – ending politely, which underwent adjustments due to the genre under consideration, seems to be merely optional in online dating profiles. Move 2 – introducing the offer and M3 – offering incentives, as previously discussed, collapsed in a single move category. This can be accounted for by the fact that since the *ambience* of dating sites is inherently filled with seduction and desire, whenever one describes the self he is inevitably offering incentives and encouragement for action by means of persuasive language, either sensual or humorous, to meet the overall goal of desire-arousal and a final achievement.

8. Concluding remarks

A primary goal of this study was to explore the self-descriptive profile on dating sites as a construct that functions as an offer/product (*cf.* Bhatia, 1993) and to show that its designer produces incentives by means of self-promotion, seduces through words and requests either directly or indirectly some kind of response from his audience.

The combination of tools of corpus analysis with the functional and rhetorical approach of genre analysis has confirmed its effectiveness in providing qualitative detail and opportunity to answer questions about how texts are structured and organized, what rhetorical moves are common to them and, finally, how different arrangements of such features become genre-triggering macro-patterns.

By working with corpus and genre analysis in this study, the conclusion arrived at is that the subgenre of online personal ads does indeed represent a very dynamic form of language use that offers many creative options. Although the subgenre under consideration, not yet fully accepted and investigated, offers more flexibility in structure than many others, there is clearly an intrinsic coherent structure that shapes it. This can be easily noticed regardless of the size limitation of the corpus.

The flexibility seems to be generated by some internal features such as variability in move sequencing between well-recognized promotional texts and informal promotional descriptions of the type under scrutiny. As for external features, it should be born in mind that the "man seeking woman" audience is inherently heterogeneous due to the very nature of the interaction. Consequently, the genre structure proposed here together with its lexical interface do not readily account for the wide variety of multi-patterned descriptive texts that make up this still obscure promotional subgenre.

While this functional analysis is a step forward towards the understanding of structural organizations and lexical choices that permeate strong and persuasive promotional genre text types, this simple analysis offers little insight into how the proposed moves can be fully realized in linguistic terms. How do grammatical and lexical choices and rhetorical functions interrelate? How are seductive, persuasive appeal, credibility and affective aspects operationalized in this subgenre? These represent just a few of a wide variety of questions that are left unanswered.

As a final comment, I would like to stress the importance of monitoring and analyzing new kinds of practices that are pervasive in the seductive space called the Internet. Borrowing from Aaron Ben Ze'ev's reflections (2003) on the potential interactional possibilities of this medium: computers have changed not just the way we work but the way we love. Falling in and out of love, flirting and even cheating have all become part of the modern way of living and loving. Yet, what are the rules of engagement? We know

very little about these new types of relationships. And until we do so innovative hypertextual corpora are surely coming our way.

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NOTES

[1] It is worth noting that de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) regard such categories as 'text types' and Hoey (2001:12) further proposes that text types such as descriptions, narratives, etc. feed into both genres and register.

[2] I have coined the terms *persuading agent*(s) and *persuaded participant*(s). They refer respectively to profile writers and their potential audience. While examining the related literature I did not come across the use of such terminology.