

CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTIC STUDY OF WEBSITES PROMOTING CHEESE

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Abstract

The promotion and selling of products online has become a new trend, so the websites need to be up-to-date and offer detailed information on their products. The corpus of texts was compiled from websites that sell traditional dairy products, especially cheese from three different countries: Romania (Covalact, Tudia), Italy (Granarolo, Agriform, Zanetti, Galbani) and the United Kingdom (Wensleydale, Neal's Yard Dairy, The Fine Cheese Co.). For the first two countries, only the websites that had presentations in English were selected. The corpus of texts was compiled by downloading 30 texts advertising for cheese, summing up approximately 5000 running words. Wordsmith Tools 6.0 was used to wordlist the adjectives.

The study revealed that there are some basic adjectives that can be found in all three corpuses of texts; the differences come from the variety of cheese commercialized (fresh or aged), tradition in cheese making (centuries old or brand new), types of cheese (soft or hard) and the property of words.

Key words: corpus-based analysis; types of cheese; Romanian, Italian, British

On a daily basis we come across all kinds of short texts, ranging from messages, short news, horoscopes, film reviews to advertisements on house/ car selling and presentation of all kinds of food and non-food products. The small texts can also be found in specialized communication, be it medical, law, business or technical. Although all these genres can be considered of minor importance to the written communication they have drawn the attention of researchers in the last few years: Pierini (2011) on language used in ads of properties for sale, Lazović (2014) on online bank advertisements, Rasanen (2013) on job advertisements, Pitrelli *et al* (2006) on science in advertising, Marza (2011) on the adjectives used in promotional hotel websites.

Advertising, as a whole, is a very dynamic genre, incorporating an almost endless variety of subgenres (Bhatia, 2004: 57-65), most of them being short messages, due to special or temporal reasons. They all seem to have the same purpose, i.e. to persuade the audience to buy products. Nowadays, more and more companies turn their interest in presenting and selling their products through websites.

This paper, which investigates websites that promote and sell dairy products, is based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a small corpus of texts in English from the UK, Italy and

Romania. The aim is to explore linguistic and textual features of websites and also to have a contrastive study of a representative corpus of texts on dairy products, with a special interest on varieties of cheese.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

As we all can imagine, the web is an almost infinite depository of documents, offering an enormous amount of samples of language of various genres belonging to all types of communication.

Returning to the websites that promote food products, we selected those advertising dairy products. The websites belong to national and international companies, from the United Kingdom, Romania and Italy. We chose only those that are in English, in order to have a more homogenous corpus of texts to analyse. The websites selected are quite different, even if they advert for dairy products.

The corpus was compiled by downloading 30 texts advertising for cheese and saving them on MHT (web page archive format) and text format, summing up approximately 5000 running words.

As regards the method, the basic linguistics methodology was used, that is the frequency analysis of words and use of collocational information. The study was assisted by the use of Wordsmith Tools 6.0 (Scott 2015) and it had two

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steps. The first was to obtain a wordlist of the repetitive items in all the texts and the second was to analyse the presence of certain words and the absence of others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Food industry on the web

The promotion and selling of products online has become a new trend, so the websites need to be up-to-date and offer detailed information on their products. And, of all the products and services merchandized on webpages, the food products have a special place.

According to the European Commission, the food and drink industry is the “EU’s biggest manufacturing sector in terms of jobs and value added”(https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/food_en). Within the broader spectrum of this industry, the dairy products’ industry is no exception.

Thus, we need to take into consideration the profound changes that appeared a long history in merchandising these fresh products. And the last step was transferring their selling on the internet. Every product wants to tell a story and has to stand out from the competitors.

Considering that the online texts belong, in fact, to the written communication, it is not difficult to notice that they have special traits belong to this genre. According to Pierini (2011:97-98) there are three types of genres that can be found in a “computer mediated environment”. Some already existing genres (such as research articles); some re-mediated traditional genres (cf. Pierini, Boter/Grusin 2000: 40-50; 196-210) such as electronic newspaper; and the third one, the “website” to which our corpus of texts also belong to. All these types of written texts had to transform and adapt to the new environment.

The corpus of texts was compiled from websites that sell traditional dairy products, especially cheese from three different countries:

Romania, Italy and the United Kingdom. For the first two countries, only the websites that had presentations in English were selected.

Romanian cheese websites

In the recent years several Romanian dairy brands have emerged on the market, some as traditional small producers (De la Ferma, Mirdatod, SIM. Puternic romanesc, Zada, Five Continents, Tudia), others as part of large multinational chains of factories (Albalact, LaDorna, Muller).

When gathering the necessary information for this study, much to our surprise not all the brands belonging to multi-national companies have an English version of their site. So, only two webpages that present and sell Romanian dairy products (Covalact and Tudia) will be part of this endeavour. Even if we are aware of the small number of foreigners that might be interested in the information present on these websites, we consider the presence of the English version of the site as a sign of self respect and openness for new opportunities.

First we analysed the entire corpus of Romanian texts from the two websites, which included the history of the company, way of manufacturing the products and also a short description of the most important types of cheese.

Regarding the most frequent words that appear in the corpus of texts, the result of the analysis done with the help of Wordsmith 6.0 shows that the adjectives such as “fresh” and “natural” are at the beginning of the 100 positions (23 and 27, respectively). Also, the noun “quality” appeared on the 20th position (14 occurrences). These indicate that the Romanian cheese websites are interested in promoting fresh products, made of natural ingredients and of the highest quality.

Adjectives used in Romanian websites of cheese

Table 1

No.	Adjective	Occurrence	Percentage
1.	fresh	12	2.27%
2.	natural	8	1.51%
3.	light	5	0.95%
4.	high	3	0.57%
5.	low	3	0.57%
6.	pleasant	3	0.57%
7.	traditional	3	0.57%
8.	creamy	2	0.38%
9.	healthy	2	0.38%
10.	sweet	2	0.38%

Afterwards, we reduced the corpus of texts to those that made a minute description of the

products and we could see a clear increase of the adjectives used to characterize cheese: *fresh*

(position 9 – 12 occurrences), *natural* (pos. 12 – 8 occ.), *light* (pos. 23 – 5 occ.), *high, low* (pos. 46-47 – 3 occ.), *pleasant* (3 occ.), *traditional* (3 occ.), *creamy* (2), *healthy* (2 occ.). These adjectives are expected to appear in any description related to dairy products (the Romanian advertisers were not highly creative). Interestingly enough, the noun “quality” does no longer appear in the wordlist.

Italian cheese websites

When surfing the internet searching for Italian webpages that presented dairy products, especially cheese, we could find some similarities with the Romanian webpages. A large part of what can be found was only in Italian, regardless the size of the company (Vallelatta, Trevalli, Delizia Campana, Valcolatte).

The companies we decided to study were Granarolgroup, Agriform, Zanetti and Galbani. Of these, the last one has the official Italian website only in Italian; instead, they created a website especially designed for UK, and that was the version used for the present study (www.galbani.co.uk). The corpus of texts is made up of presentations of various types of cheese, not including the history of the companies.

Table 2

Linguistic items used in Italian websites of cheese

No.	Adjective	Occurrence	Percentage
1.	flavour	24	0.69%
2.	mature	15	0.43%
3.	aged	14	0.40%
4.	sweet	14	0.40%
5.	white	14	0.40%
6.	delicate	13	0.37%
7.	fresh	13	0.37%
8.	hard	13	0.37%
9.	traditional	12	0.34%
10.	ideal	11	0.31%
11.	typical	11	0.31%
12.	different	9	0.26%
13.	aroma	8	0.23%
14.	aromatic	8	0.23%
15.	quality	8	0.23%
16.	excellent	7	0.20%
17.	yellow	7	0.20%
18.	mild	6	0.17%
19.	sharp	6	0.17%
20.	texture	6	0.17%

The analysis through Wordsmith list points out that the Italian texts tend to have a thorough presentation on the type of cheese, regarding the texture, be it fresh or aged. Thus, linguistic items such as *mature* (15 occ.), *aged* (14 occ.), *fresh* (13 occ.), *hard* (13 occ.), *maturation* (6 occ.) are quite common. There are also to be found more adjectives that characterize the flavour of the cheese: *sweet* (14 occ.), *aromatic* (8 occ.), *mild* (6

occ.), *sharp* (6 occ.).

The well-known varieties of Italian cheese that were listed in the top 100 words were Mozzarella, Pecorino and Scamorza.

British websites

The British websites of cheese selling have a large variety of products to display from the famous Cheddar to less known varieties for foreigners, such as Appleby’s Cheshire or Lancashire cheese. The corpus of texts selected for this study is made up of information on characteristics of cheese and the history of the manufacturing the products: Wensleydale, Neal’s Yard Dairy, The Fine Cheese Co. For this group we conducted two analyses, one of the entire text and one only with the corpus promoting the dairy products.

Interestingly for us, the wordlist pointed out that, besides the information on type of cheese (mature, red, aged, classic), we also found words used to advertise the product, to enhance the gustatory perception of the customers. Examples in point are *creamy* (12 occ.), *fine* (12 occ.), *rich* (12 occ.), *smooth* (11 occ.), *mellow* (9 occ.), *sweet* (8 occ.).

As the corpus also comprises stories of making and history of the type of cheese presented it was no surprise to find many occurrences either of names of certain ones, or the name of the region where they come from or even the name of the brand. The names were so often used in order to remain in the minds of the readers: *Cheddar* (46 occ.), *Somerset* (11 occ.), *Yorkshire* (9 occ.), *Cathedral* (7 occ.), *Davidstow* (7 occ.), *Caerphilly* (6 occ.), *Lancashire* (6 occ.), *Wensleydale* (6 occ.), *Westcombe* (6 occ.).

Table 3

Frequency of names occurring in the British corpus

No.	Name/ type of cheese	Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Cheddar	46	1.28%
2.	Somerset	11	0.31%
3.	Yorkshire	9	0.25%
4.	Cathedral	7	0.19%
5.	Davidstow	7	0.19%
6.	Caerphilly	6	0.17%
7.	Lancashire	6	0.17%
8.	Wensleydale	6	0.17%
9.	Westcombe	6	0.17%

When reducing the corpus of texts to half and analysing only the descriptions used to define certain cheeses, we noticed that the number of adjectives used doubled. There were new entrances in the top 100 words used by frequency: *fresh*, *delicate*, *crumbly*, *baked*, *balanced*, *savoury*.

Contrastive analysis

Each country, be it Romania, Italy or the United Kingdom, has its own particular way of

making cheese and the varieties are uncountable. There are some long-century varieties, such as

mozzarella and cheddar and some new, like *Brânzică de vaci*.

Table 3

Adjectives used to describe cheese on websites

Romanian Websites	Italian Websites	British Websites
fresh	mature	creamy
natural	aged	fine
light	fresh	rich
high	sweet	smooth
low	aromatic	mellow
pleasant	mild	sweet
traditional	sharp	fresh
creamy	-	delicate
healthy	-	crumbly
-	-	baked
-	-	balanced
-	-	savoury

After analysing the corpus of adjectives we bound both similarities and differences. All the three corpuses of texts use the basic, most common adjectives related to cheese: *fresh, traditional*.

Nevertheless, the differences in the types of cheese commercialized by the companies of the three countries are considerable. The Romanian cheeses are generally of the fresh type. So, the information points out more the “natural”, “light” and “pleasant” side of the product.

The Italian and British types are more related as their products can be both “fresh” and “aged”, belonging to the soft and hard groups.

Of all the websites, the British ones are the most generous in using the adjectives, maybe due to the ease to appeal to them, as English is the mother tongue. Examples in point are: *smooth, creamy, mellow, crumbly* and *savoury*, which were to be found only here.

CONCLUSIONS

The present corpus-based study highlights the way in which the lexical items are related to the domain of dairy products and their selling. The group of adjectives play a special role in the promotional discourse of this food-related domain.

We can conclude that even if there are some basic adjectives that can be found in all the three corpuses of texts (coming from Romania, Italy or UK), the differences come from the variety of cheese commercialized, tradition in cheese making, types of cheese and the property of words.

The Romanian cheeses have a tradition in making fresh cheese, while the Italians and the

British on the aged type.

The cheese related websites from UK have the most persuasive adjectivisation.

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