



UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN
Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación

Trabajo Fin de Grado

**A functional approach to
the texture of English
e-forum posts**

Alumno/a: Alfonso Jesús Galián Ginés

Tutor/a: Prof. Dr. Alfonso J. Rizo Rodríguez
Dpto.: Filología Inglesa

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Abstract

The main objective of this piece of work is the study and analysis of an e-forum sample text from the registerial and generic perspective, as well as its cohesive analysis following the theoretical foundations of the Systematic Functional Grammar. In order to do that, the notions of context, culture, register, genre, texture and cohesion will be described and exemplified, as according to different authors, mainly Halliday, Hasan and Eggins. Lately, we will identify these different notions in a text taken from the popular e-forum Reddit that represents what could be a standard exchange of impressions on the internet. Finally, the results of the analysis will be summarised and interpreted in the context of the situation in which this type of exchanges typically occur. The ultimate aim of this investigation is proving that the emergent electronic genres have greater linguistic potential than previously thought.

Key words

Cohesion, E-forums, Genre, Register, Systemic Functional Grammar, Texture

Resumen

El objetivo principal que persigue este trabajo es el estudio y análisis de un texto representativo de los foros electrónicos desde el punto de vista del registro y el género, además del análisis de sus elementos cohesivos tal y como son entendidos en la Gramática Sistemico Funcional. Para llevar a cabo este cometido, será preciso describir y ejemplificar los términos contexto, cultura, registro, género, textura y cohesión, de acuerdo a autores tales como Halliday, Hasan o Eggins. A continuación, se procederá a la identificación de estos términos en un texto de *Reddit* que representa fidedignamente el tipo de conversación que se da en internet. Por último, se ofrecerá un resumen de los resultados del análisis, así como la interpretación que proceda dentro del contexto en el que tienen lugar estos intercambios verbales. El objetivo final de esta investigación es demostrar que los géneros electrónicos que están emergiendo aúnan un potencial lingüístico muy rico.

Palabras clave

Cohesión, Foros electrónicos, Género, Gramática Sistemico Funcional, Registro, Textura

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social individuals. Historically, humans have produced a wide variety of items that have contributed to the enrichment of the society and its development, and have rightfully recorded their success in different fields through written medium, for upcoming generations to understand the progress. Nevertheless, it is precisely that, language, what has been overlooked during many centuries, maybe because language is one of the first (and more complex) mechanisms that humans ever developed and thus it has been ‘taken for granted’ and it has been relegated to the position of just a tool for other endings. Notwithstanding, by observing how much societies have evolved, one could speak of the history of the reproduction of a language as a history of success, for language is a system of meanings which is alive; it keeps changing, proving its livingness. Indeed, it is a miracle that language survives today and has not been replaced by another kind of system.

In the same way in which nobody would deny the fact that there are different languages, nobody could deny that one same language varies in different situations or when used by different users, and still remains being the exact same language. Similarly, by simply observing the environment that surrounds human people, one can easily realise that technology is already a common and worldwide accepted part of our daily life, and language has evolved in order to match this progress. As a result of this, a lot of people have access to different electronic texts through the internet, these including for instance news, e-mails, texts messages, or e-forums, among others. And what is more, as the immense number of text sources which internet users can possibly be in contact with grows exponentially every day, or even every hour, one is most likely to find people that already consider internet as their prime channel to access both information and communication with others in their daily basis. Summing up, it may be clear by now that, while reading a novel through a laptop’s screen does not ‘feel’ exactly the same way as holding a paper book on our hands, we cannot either neglect this outstanding reality nor underestimate the internet sources just because they are not perceived as the traditional way of presenting texts.

The main aim of this paper, therefore, is to provide an overview on the elements that constitute e-forum comments as a proper and recognisable genre on their own, in the frame of the new emergent varieties of language that have appeared and remain tightly close to the internet. For said purposes, the notions of text, genre, register, and texture will be outlined, according to Halliday & Hasan (1976, 1989), Biber & Conrad

(2009) or Eggins (2004) among others. The focus will be on the situational context, the generic structure and the linguistic choices that make up the texts as members of a bigger whole, and the cohesive devices that allow the unity of the text. Ultimately, while it is evident that the physical constraint prevents a long and meaningful piece of research, it has to be taken as a humble first step in this direction.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Towards a functional view of the language

Language is a system of meanings. By manipulating language, its users can engage in different activities such as exchanging goods and services, creating and reinforcing interpersonal relationships, entertaining themselves or getting access to useful information. Eggins (2004: 3) summarises the basic tenets that Halliday maintains about the language:

1. that language use is functional
2. that its function is to make meanings
3. that these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged
4. that the process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings by choosing.

In short, the Systemic Functional Grammar (commonly abbreviated SFG) theory of language of which Halliday is one of its major contributors, identifies three metafunctions of the language, these being ideational, interpersonal and textual. Language, thus, is conceived as the process of creating and conveying these meanings by making choices among the different options in the systems that relate to each function. The ideational function refers to the expression of the process, participants and circumstances in the sentence; the interpersonal function reflects the mood and relationships between the interactants of the text; and finally, the textual function accounts for the organization of the text itself as a coherent and cohesive unit.

2.2 Text

Of course, as studying a language in its whole extension is impossible, or rather unachievable in such a short piece of research, we need to focus our attention on the most tangible products of the language: those what are called texts. In Halliday & Hasan's (1976: 1) words, the notion of text "is used to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole." Note that, in this precise

sense, the controversial and colloquially frequent distinction spoken/discourse and written/text is completely dismissed here. What remains important, though, is the issue of semantic **unity**. Indeed, a text is “a unit not of form but of meaning” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 2). For this reason, we must not measure texts by their length, but by their meaning; a text is a text, no matter how long it is: in the same way a novel is a text, a shopping note is a text as well.

Nevertheless, we may bring into the conversation a useful distinction concerning the difference between ‘complete text’ and ‘text excerpt’. Biber & Conrad (2009: 5) argue that “a complete text is an instance of extended discourse that has a clear start and finish, such as a research article or a sermon”, whilst text excerpts are “segments of discourse extracted from a larger complete text.” In this sense, text excerpts may be interpreted as texts that belong into a bigger text; but it also works the other way around, a complete text might contain other texts.

Finally, we have to keep in mind that perfect reproduction of a text is virtually impossible. Even when some texts can be recognised as similar, no text is exactly the same as another, there are always some features that characterise it and make it different in some respects. Thompson (1984: 32) summarises Bakhtin’s main points of view about this issue, and states:

Bakhtin maintains, therefore, that each reproduction of a text by a subject (and, by extension, for the purpose of the present discussion, each new example of a given generic type) is in fact a new performance, a new text, a new event.

From this, we gather that even ‘the same text’ produced by different speakers is not truly the same text. We shall discuss now the notion of context, which influences greatly the creation and meaning of a text.

2.3 Context

Coming back to what we briefly mentioned early, if we agree that language can be used for many different purposes, we should also agree then on the fact that different uses of the language are caused by their occurrence in different situations, i.e. different **contexts**. Indeed, no instance of language occurs on its own. It was Malinowski who first spotted the important role that the **context of situation** played in the production of a specific text while researching on a far community. Malinowski argued that the context of situation could be defined as “the environment of the text” (Halliday & Hasan, 1989: 6). Besides that, Malinowski also realized that the culture in which the

language was used influenced the production of texts, and named this phenomenon **context of culture**. According to Halliday & Hasan (1989: 7), Malinowski stated that:

[...] involved in any kind of linguistic interaction, in any kind of conversational exchange, were not only the immediate sights and sounds surrounding the event but also the whole cultural history behind the participants, and behind the kind of practices that they were engaging in, whether practical or ritual.

Additionally, Biber & Conrad (2009: 34) add that “it is normal for a culture to make genre/register distinctions that are not recognized in other cultures”, so that one type of text which may be idiosyncratic and clearly distinguishable in a culture, might not be differentiated as such in another culture. Because of this reason, the assumptions made here will be exclusively referred to the English language, and all the examples will be taken from English texts.

2.3.1 Context of situation and register

2.3.1.1 Field, tenor and mode

As we said above, employing language in different situations entails producing different varieties of that language. Although there is no consensus on the description of the elements that compound and differentiate one situation from another, Halliday, in his own description of the English language, recognises three different elements that constitute the context of situation. These, as defined in Halliday & Matthiessen (2014: 33, their emphasis), are:

- **field** – what’s going on in the situation: (i) the nature of the social and semiotic activity; and (ii) the domain of experience this activity relates to (the ‘subject matter’ or ‘topic’)
- **tenor** – who is taking part in the situation: (i) the roles played by those taking part in the socio-semiotic activity – (1) institutional roles, (2) status roles (power, either equal or unequal), (3) contact roles (familiarity, ranging from strangers to intimates) and (4) sociometric roles (affect, either neutral or charged, positively or negatively); and (ii) the values that the interactants imbue the domain with (either neutral or loaded, positively or negatively)
- **mode** – what role is being played by language and other semiotic systems in the situation: (i) the division of labour between semiotic activities and social ones (ranging from semiotic activities as constitutive of the situation to semiotic activities as facilitating); (ii) the division of labour between linguistic activities and other semiotic activities; (iii) rhetorical mode: the orientation of the text towards field (e.g. informative, didactic, explanatory, explicatory) or tenor (e.g. persuasive,

exhortatory, hortatory, polemic); (iv) turn: dialogic or monologic; (v) medium: written or spoken; (vi) channel: phonic or graphic.

Thus, any environment can be defined on account of this three-dimensional perspective: what is happening, who is doing it and how the language organises for those aims. Of course, the election of these three elements and no others was not made at random by Halliday. The context elements identified as field, tenor and mode relate themselves directly in turn with the three metafunctions of the language recognised by him and already mentioned above, the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. Eggins (2004: 111) summarises this relationship as follows:

- the field of a text: can be associated with the realization of ideational meanings; these ideational meanings are realized through the Transitivity and Clause Complex patterns of the grammar.
- the mode of a text can be associated with the realization of textual meanings; these textual meanings are realized through the Theme patterns of the grammar.
- the tenor of a text can be associated with the realization of interpersonal meanings; these interpersonal meanings are realized through the Mood patterns of the grammar.

Following this, we may acknowledge that the different elements of a situation that make up a specific register are reflected in the use of the language through the construction of different kinds of meanings. We will discuss this issue in section 2.3.1.2 Register.

Finally, since text and context actually ‘go together’, speakers or writers of English are likely to ‘predict’ (in very broad terms) one from the other, providing they face a type of text that they have already met before because “we reconstruct from the text certain aspects of the situation, certain features of the field, the tenor, and the mode”, and, equally, “given the text, we construct the situation from it” (Halliday & Hasan, 1989: 38).

2.3.1.2 Register and register analysis

A recognisable variation of a language corresponding to its adaptation to the context of situation is what we call a **register**, a “variety according to use” (Halliday & Hasan, 1989: 41). The fact that different registers exist proves that language itself adapts to these precise situations that are defined by the elements of field, tenor and mode. Therefore, the environment in which the language is produced affects the shape the language takes in a text. In other words, the context affects the **realisation** of the

language in a text, by means of the variation of the register. According to Biber & Conrad (2009: 9), these three different factors (field, tenor and mode) can condition the appearance of different linguistic forms:

All speakers use language in different contexts, under different circumstances, for different purposes. Those patterns of behavior cannot be derived from any linguistic phenomena. In contrast, the linguistic differences among registers can be derived from situational differences, because linguistic features are functional.

From this, we gather that it is the context what conditions the occurrence of specific forms in a text, and never the other way around. It may be useful at this point to introduce an example that illustrates the ties between the context in which a text is produced and the realisations of the language present in it. Eggins (2004: 102) offers a really clear example:

Hey, Freddie! Get off your butt and give me a hand here. Shove that chair over closer to the desk.

If a native speaker of English heard this, she or he would automatically know that the person (the speaker) uttering that sentence and Freddie must necessarily know each other. One would not say nor hear someone saying “get off your butt” and giving orders like that to anybody that they have never met before, unless the speaker was a very rude and impolite person, situation which is by no means impossible but that we shall ignore here due to physical constraints. Hence, we may recall that this situation is rather informal. By doing a preliminary analysis, we could briefly describe this short but meaningful text in terms of field, tenor and mode to check if our hypothesis is right:

- **Field:** The speaker is commanding Freddie (the listener) to do an everyday activity that presumably he does not want to. The language is then used to talk about the speaker’s necessity of help to overcome that activity and the lack of willingness to do so on the part of Freddie.
- **Tenor:** There is a close relationship between the speaker and the addresser of the message, Freddie. As they should know each other, there are traits of clear familiarity and the power between them is likely to be equal. We could probably have Freddie telling the speaker the same kind of statement in the same situation, with no particular changes in the wording.
- **Mode:** The language is used as a tool for other activity; the language itself is not the focus of the text. Besides, the language is used for the ‘persuasion’ of Freddie to help the speaker. Finally, this text is probably

one turn in a dialogue; the text being produced across the spoken medium by the phonic channel.

All in all, considering that the field reflects a common, every-day topic, that the tenor shows the close relationship of equal individuals, and the mode proves that this text could be part of a bigger dialogue, we could conclude, roughly, that this text belongs to an informal register, that of informal conversation. Further proofs that can be recovered from the text reinforce its identification as informal. In English, a language whose culture gives a lot of importance to the will and freedom of every individual person, the use of imperatives such as *get off your butt*, *give me a hand*, *shove* is perceived as quite impolite and even offensive in the speech, and indeed in this example its choice over other kinds of structures which mitigate this effect shows that the speaker paid little attention to Freddie's right to refuse these instructions, maybe because there are not instructions at all in this text; they are orders to be followed. The speaker is not asking Freddie for help; rather she or he is reminding Freddie that he is supposed to help the speaker whether he likes it or not, and she or he is recriminating him for not doing so. In this sense, if Freddie and the speaker were not close enough in terms of familiarity, for instance by virtue of being strangers, this exchange could easily end up in a conflict, provided Freddie claimed his freedom over the imposition of helping the speaker.

2.3.2 Context of culture and genre

2.3.2.1 Context of culture

If different countries and their people understand key aspects of life such as politics or economy in a rather different way, why would the cultural context that surrounds texts be out of that equation?

As has been clear for many ages, the variation of situation is encompassed within the variation of culture, the latter being the core from which the former ultimately depends. Halliday & Hasan (1989: 46) effectively identified the field, tenor and mode registerial factors as dependent on the cultural background within which the language in which the texts are produced:

Any actual context of situation, the particular configuration of field, tenor and mode that has brought a text into being, is not just a random jumble of features but a totality – a package, so to speak, of things that typically go together in the culture.

People do these things on these occasions and attach these meanings and values to them: this is what a culture is.

The variation that depends on the context of culture is generally known as **genre**. Nevertheless, neither the notion of register nor the notion of genre are fixed ones. Depending on several factors, the interpretation of the same text can vary depending on the cultural background of those who carry out the analysis. Biber & Conrad (2009: 35) stated:

[...] genre/register distinctions are culture-specific. Furthermore, even when two cultures have seemingly equivalent genres/registers, they can turn out to be different because they have distinctive communicative purposes.

2.3.2.2 Genre and genre analysis

The concept and the discussion of genres is by no means new in the field of linguistics, as Beghtol (2001: 17, her emphasis) explained:

The word *genre* means “kinds of” or “sort of” and comes from the same Latin root as the words *genus*. Discussions of genre probably began in ancient Greece with Aristotle, and the practice of distinguishing kind of texts from each other on the basis of genres and their characteristics has continued uninterrupted since then.

The classification of texts in terms of their ‘kind’ proves that even the ancient civilisations used to appreciate the differences in form and function of texts, for they could study them separately by these characteristics. In its modern sense, genres are identified with “the ‘cultural purpose’ of texts” (Eggins, 2004: 54); so that, provided that we are familiar with the cultural background of the production of a text, we should be able to identify a genre if we pay attention to the function (or functions) it develops in the culture in which it was produced. For instance, we can only understand a journalistic article as an informative text which provides whoever faces it with some information about an event or succession of events; and we can only understand a recipe book as a useful tool if we realise the need of having a collection of recipes for humans to feed themselves with a balanced diet.

Furthermore, genres are recognisable because the specific role that they play obliges them to make use of specific realisations that make this possible. It is true that in some respects the genre analysis shares some points in common with the register analysis previously described, but it focuses on these elements that answer the demands of the culture for that type of genre. According to Biber & Conrad (2009: 2):

The genre perspective is similar to the register perspective in that it includes description of the purposes and situational context of a text variety, but its linguistic analysis contrasts with the register perspective by focusing on the conventional structures used to construct a complete text within the variety, for example, the conventional way in which a letter begins and ends.

The different elements that constitute genres are not decided at random, but they exist in order to cope with the needs of the society which are closely tied to them. The specific arrangement of the stages that build up genres creates a structure that goes from the beginning to the end of the genre, and acts as the skeleton of text, making possible its identification. It is precisely this **structure** what we may pay attention to, because, as Biber & Conrad (2009: 16) stated “in the genre perspective, the focus is on the linguistic characteristics that are used to structure complete texts.” Hence, we may infer that what makes us capable of recognising a text as a member of a generic variety is its compositional structure, which is made of by the specific steps that are tightly tied to the needs of the culture. The generic stages or elements that build up this structure are called **genre markers** by some authors. Biber & Conrad (2009: 54) explain their relevance in our analysis:

Genre markers should be distinguished from both register features and register markers. Genre markers are the distinctive expressions and devices that are used to structure a text from a particular genre. Genre markers are not pervasive; rather, they normally occur only one time in a text. As such, they are also not frequent. But they are distinctive, normally being formulaic and occurring in only a particular location of a text from a particular genre (often at the beginning or end).

Due to this, it is clear that in the genre analysis we need to consider **complete texts** (which we purposely distinguished in section 2.2 from text excerpts) because the elements that appear on specific positions may not be spotted in concrete texts excerpts that belong to larger texts. Halliday & Hasan (1989: 62) differentiated between **obligatory** and **optional elements** in the structure of a genre:

[...] the obligatory elements define the genre to which a text belongs; and the appearance of all these elements in a specific order corresponds to our perception of whether the text is complete or incomplete.

While, on the other hand, “an optional element is one that can occur but is not obliged to occur. The conditions under which there is a high probability of its occurrence can be stated.” Therefore, for the fulfillment of the role of a genre there is only need for obligatory elements to appear. In order to clarify this, we will use a clear example originally put by Hasan in Halliday & Hasan (1989: 54):

C: Can I have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please?

V: Yes, anything else?

C: No, thanks.

V: That'll be dollar forty.

C: Two dollars.

V: Sixty, eighty, two dollars. Thank you.

It is pretty easy to identify this short dialogue as a service encounter with a transactional use of language (exchange of goods and services), because there are some obligatory elements that always occur in this kind of genre; such as the **Sale Request** ('Can I have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please?') or the **Sale** itself ('That'll be dollar forty') (Halliday & Hasan, 1989: 59).

Finally, we have to reinforce once again the idea that the division between registers and genres is not totally clear-cut. Trosborg (1997: 10) summarises it:

Genres are subordinated to registers only in the sense that one register may be realized through various genres. Conversely, one genre may be realized through a number of registers just as a genre constrains the ways in which register variables of field, tenor and mode can be combined in a particular society.

Genres and registers and their analysis are not all-or-nothing. There are scales of grey, and we by default try to decipher every fragment we face as effectively a text. Now, we shall turn our theoretical description to the last of the features that make us texts; that of **texture**.

2.4 Texture

Every instance of a text owns some specific features at the organisative level that make it fairly recognisable for speakers and writers as a proper text. This is called **texture**, and it is defined as "the property of 'being a text'" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 2), and is what allows users of a language to differentiate between what is a text actually and what is not (a non text). The texture is the set of features that makes the text be perceived as a single piece. Texture in a text is primarily achieved by means of coherence and cohesion; and we will focus on cohesion. Nevertheless, we should note that the thematic structure also plays a key role in the organisation of texts, but that issue will not be discussed in here because of the physical constrains.

2.4.1 Cohesion

2.4.1.1 The meaning of cohesion

According to Halliday & Hasan (1976: 4) “the concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text.” The cohesive relation is achieved by the relation between a referring item and the presupposed item which it refers back or forth. A presupposition must be satisfied by means of this relation; for every referring item there must be a referent because the referring item “cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 4). No referring item is cohesive by itself without its correspondent referent because “the cohesion lies in the relation that is set between the two” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 5). The general term applied to this item to which the tie refers is **presupposed item** (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 330). Note that “the presupposed item may be not in the immediately preceding sentence, but in some sentence that is more distant in the past.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 330).

Halliday & Hasan, as well as other authors, distinguish between **grammatical cohesion** and **lexical cohesion**, and the borderline between them: **conjunction**. They justify this division because “some forms of cohesion are realised through the grammar and others through the vocabulary” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 6), but the limits are often so blurry.

2.4.1.2 General types of ties

From now on, whenever we refer to cohesion we are referring to “the set of semantic resources for linking a SENTENCE with what has gone before” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 10, their emphasis). Thus, the kind of ties which we will be referring to will be **meaning** ties. In general terms, whenever the referent unit to which the referring item is pointing to is in the text, this is called **endophora**. Under this umbrella, pointing semantically backwards in the text is what is called **anaphora** (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 14), while pointing forwards in the text is called **cataphora**. There is also the possibility for a referring item to refer to something outside the text, in the **environment** of the participants. This is called **exophora**. Nevertheless, as this tie is in fact produced with something outside the text, Halliday & Hasan (1976: 18, their emphasis) does not consider it as cohesive:

This type of reference we shall call EXOPHORA, since it takes us outside the text altogether. Exophoric reference is not cohesive, since it does not bind the two elements together into a text. [...] The significance of the exophoric potential is that, in instances where the key to the interpretation is not ready to hand, in text or

situation, the hearer or reader CONSTRUCTS a context of situation in order to supply it for himself.

The next step in our description of the way texts are organised is the analysis of every different tool that contributes to the creation of cohesion in a text. These are: **reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion and conjunction.**

2.4.2 Major tools for the achievement of cohesion

2.4.2.1 Grammatical cohesion

2.4.2.1.1 Reference

According to Halliday & Hasan (1976: 31) it is possible to find in texts elements which “instead of being interpreted semantically in their own right, they make reference to something else for their interpretation”, such as the pronouns *she*, *their* or *this*. These elements have no meaning in their own, and they depend on their **co-occurrence** with ‘semantically loaded’ elements to have full sense. In this sense, what is being referred to is the **identity** of the element they accompany. Whilst realised through grammatical structures, reference is a semantic relation, and there is no need for the referent to be of the same grammatical class as the referent, while they are commonly Heads (Things) of nominal groups.

Reference can be either endophoric (referent inside the text) or exophoric (referent outside the text). If endophoric, it could be either anaphoric or cataphoric. Exophoric reference is then context-bound, and some concrete registers are so, meaning that they exploit exophoric reference. This is not either good or bad, as long as it matches the appropriateness of the situation. As Halliday & Hasan (1976: 37, their emphasis) stated:

Exophoric reference contributes to the CREATION of text, in that it links the language with the context of the situation; but it does not contribute to the INTEGRATION of one passage with another so that the two together form part of the SAME text.

Exophoric reference, then, links the text with the situation, but does not link the text with itself; hence, it is not cohesive in the sense these authors explored.

Halliday & Hasan (1976: 37) identified three different types of reference: **personal, demonstrative and comparative.** We will discuss them now.

Personal reference refers to persons and inanimate objects that act as participants in the sentences, distinguishing them “by their roles in the communication process” and “all the other entities” in the sentence (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 45).

Therefore, personal referring items may be defined firstly on the basis of the role on the process as either speaker or addressee; and secondly as either first (*I, we*), second (*you*) or third person (*he, she, it, they*). However, we need to remark that both the speaker and addressee roles are not recognised as cohesive because these roles are **outside the text** (hence exophoric). In addition, note that in a specific and restricted use, *it* can refer to bigger chunks of text in what is called **extended reference** (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 52). In this sense, *it* is referring to a whole process instead of a single participant.

Demonstrative reference is used to point something on the basis on how the speaker “identifies it on a scale of proximity” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 57). Note that in English the ‘nearness’ is speaker-based, never addressee-based. The elements that made up this system are: *now, then, here, there* (Adjuncts), the definite article *the* (non-selective) and the demonstratives *this, these, that, those* (selective), which act as determiners at nominal group level. *Here, this* and *these* are ‘near’ in terms of proximity, whilst *there, that* and *those* are ‘far’ or ‘not near’. Similarly, items which are closer to the speaker in terms of textuality or feelings will be accompanied with *this* or *these*. Halliday & Hasan (1976: 60) added that “*that* tends to be associated with a past-time referent and *this* for one in the present or future.” Furthermore, we should be aware of the fact that *this* and *that* without any following noun can possibly be referring by **extended reference** to a whole preceding process. Finally, the definite article *the* simply identifies the item and marks that the information can be recoverable “either in the situation or in the context” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 71), whilst *here* and *there* express locative meaning and *now* and *then* express temporal meaning.

Comparative reference is the kind of reference which is based on the **similarity** between two entities. Because of this, we need a standard for that reference. We can distinguish two types, “general comparison” and “particular comparison” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 77). On the one hand, **general comparison** expresses how similar or dissimilar the things being compared are. This is achieved by employing *so, as, the same, such*, etc. On the other hand, **particular comparison** is made “in respect of quantity or quality” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 77). The property which is taken as the basis of the comparison can be expressed with comparative quantifiers such as *more*, comparative adjectives or comparative adverbs, for instance. As a final remark, we should note that comparison reference is fairly more anaphoric as typically both the referent and the comparative word(s) or construction(s) are found in the same media, generally the text. However, every type of reference can still be identified.

2.4.2.1.2 Substitution

Substitution is the replacement of one item by another; there are several differences between reference and substitution that can help us in our description. In Halliday & Hasan (1976: 88) words: “substitution is a relation in the wording rather than in the meaning”. As substitution is a grammatical process, the substitutes need to have the same structural form as the substituted (presupposed) items, so that they can in turn be specifically replaced by the original substituted items, as they are only acting as a ‘placeholder’. Substitution is fairly anaphorical, although there are other cases.

A key concept that we need to consider is that substitution implies that what is being substituted is not exactly the same in the sense of exactly the same reality. By this, it is implied that the substitute is usually modifying or elaborating on the original meaning. If the whole item is not ‘carried over’ in the process of substitution, then what is missing is being “repudiated” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 93). What is repudiated may create different subtypes of specifications in the meaning. There are three main types of substitution: **nominal**, **verbal** and **clausal**, which will be summarised now.

Nominal substitution occurs at the nominal group level. Even though it can also vary in number, substitution only works for countable nouns. The substitute *one/ones* is frequently found as a nominal substitute, and “always functions as Head of a nominal group, and can substitute only for an item which is itself Head of a nominal group” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 91). *Same* can also act as a nominal substitute, but “typically accompanied by *the*” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 105). However, *the same* and its variations substitute a full nominal group except what is “specifically repudiated” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 105).

Verbal substitution takes place in English, with *do* as the verbal substitute, occupying the place of lexical verbs. Whenever acting as such, “its position is always final in the group” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 112). A variation of substitute *do* is *do so*. *Do so* “combines anaphora with prominence, so that it has the effect of explicitness” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 116). There are some times in which the verb cannot be replaced because there is a relation of expectancy between the process (encoded in the lexicogrammar level by the finite/predicate) and some participant (actor, location).

Clausal substitution is a process that presupposes an entire clause where “the contrasting element is outside the clause” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 130). We use *so* and *not* for this. According to Halliday & Hasan (1976: 131), clausal substitution with

so and *not* only take places in three environments: reports (not reported facts, just reported wordings), conditions and modality (negative). What these three environments have in common for this clausal substitution to be triggered is that the clauses are hypotactically dependent on a main clause.

2.4.2.1.3 Ellipsis

Ellipsis is sometimes defined as ‘substitution by zero’ because is the process of replacing an element in the clause by nothing. However, the fact that some element is elliptic implies that the missing piece of information is understood, or at least understandable. In fact, the process of ellipsis implies that something is ‘unsaid’ but ‘understood nevertheless’ (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 142). In this respect, we should take into consideration that Halliday & Hasan (1976: 143) stated that:

We are referring specifically to sentences, clauses, etc whose structure is such as to presuppose some preceding item, which then serves as the source of the missing information.

More often than not, ellipsis creates a contrast and therefore conveys new information. In the spoken language, this is marked by a natural accent on the contrastive element which is going to be repudiated in the ellipsis. Ellipsis is generally anaphoric, but there are also instances of cataphoric use. There are three main types of ellipsis: **nominal**, **verbal** and **clausal**. We will offer a summary on their essential features.

Nominal ellipsis is the ellipsis that takes place within the nominal group. It implies that an item regularly found as a modifier ‘upgrades’ to the position of Head (Thing in SFG), since the Head is always elliptic in this kind of constructions, and that position cannot remain vacant. In a complex nominal group, the presupposed elements are those which appear after the element that is acting as the head in the elliptical phrase, whilst the ellipsis repudiates all the elements that hold a position equal or earlier than the element which is the head in the elliptical (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 151).

Verbal ellipsis designates ellipsis inside the verbal group. It can also presuppose the verb of hypotactic sentences. There are two distinct types: lexical ellipsis and operator ellipsis. **Lexical ellipsis** occurs whenever there is an absent lexical verb in a verbal group. Besides, some other members of the verbal group can be elliptic, “with the exception of whatever word is in first position” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 173). But some verbs may be ambiguous, as *be* and *have* can be either finite operators or lexical

verbs. **Operator ellipsis** “involves only the omission of operators: the lexical verb always remain intact” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 174), and the subject, which is also presupposed. Finally, note that the polarity is maintained in the lexical ellipsis, but lost and presupposed in operator ellipsis. Whilst the same phenomenon happens with modality and finiteness, voice is always presupposed.

Clausal ellipsis makes reference to the fact that lexical ellipsis usually takes with it propositional ellipsis (that of the residue of the interpersonal structure), whereas verbal operator ellipsis takes with it modal ellipsis (that of the mood of the interpersonal structure). Note that the modal element is made of the subject plus the finite, and the propositional is the remainder of that (Halliday & Hasan 1976: 197).

2.4.2.2 Lexical cohesion

Lexical cohesion is a term used to describe the distinct relations in meaning between the words with lexical content (nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives and adverbs) that can be found in a text. Eggins (2004: 42-43) distinguished between two types, namely “taxonomic lexical relations” and “expectancy relations”.

Taxonomic lexical relations are relations by means of category, “either class/sub-class (*rodent-mouse*) or part/whole (*tail-mouse*)” (Eggins, 2004: 42, her emphasis). According to Eggins (2004: 43), this kind of relation further subdivides in either **classification** or **composition**.

A. **Classification** is referred to “the relationship between a superordinate term and its members or hyponyms” (Eggins, 2004: 43). There are different types to be distinguished (Eggins, 2004: 43):

- Co-hyponymy: takes place when two or more than two lexical items found in a text are hyponyms of a common superordinate class, eg *dog-cat (animals)*
- Class/sub-class: takes place when a hypernym and at least one of its hyponyms co-exist in a text, eg *child-girl*
- Contrast: takes place when two or more lexical items are joined by force of contrast or antonym, eg *girl-boy, sun-moon*
- Similarity: takes place when two or more lexical items are joined by force of closeness in meaning. Two types:
 - Synonymy: use of words that are very close in meaning, often being interchangeable, eg *boy-lad*

- Repetition: exact repetition of an item, eg *car-car, boy-boy*

B. **Composition** is described as “the part/whole relationship between lexical items which are meronyms or co-meronyms” (Eggins, 2004: 43). Distinguish between:

- Meronymy: relation of whole to part or the other way around, eg *hand-finger*
- Co-meronymy: relation of two or more items by force of being part of the same bigger whole, eg *heart-lungs* (Eggins, 2004: 43)

Expectancy relations are based on the predictability of the relations, generally “between a process (verb) and either the doer of that process, or the one effected by it (e.g. *mouse-squeak, nibble-cheese*)” (Eggins, 2004: 43, her emphasis). Different types:

- Process/action-doer, eg *teach-teacher*
- Process/action-effected participant, eg *whisper-word* (Eggins, 2004: 43)
- Process/event-location, eg *burial-graveyard*
- Individual lexical items-nominal group they form, eg *child-care* (Eggins, 2004: 44)

Finally, we have to take into consideration the fact that it is possible to recognise long chains of lexically related items in texts. This notion is what Eggins (2004: 44) called **lexical strings**:

A lexical string is a list of all the lexical items that occur sequentially in a text that can be related to an immediately prior word (if possible) or to a head word either taxonomically or through an expectancy relation. [...] Sometimes you’ll find that a lexical item can be linked in to more than one string.

2.4.2.3 Conjunction

In the borderline between grammatical and lexical cohesion we find conjunction. Conjunction is a very special kind of cohesion because they have a double function. According to Bloor & Bloor (2004: 97, their emphasis):

These are words or expressions that have two textual functions: they indicate *conjunction* and, at the same time usually indicate the type of relationship that operates between the elements being joined (for example, relationships of *time, reason, cause, result, concession*).

Conjunctions are generally conceived as a link between what was just before and what comes just next. Nevertheless, we are aware that only a few processes in the expression plane are so fixed a phenomenon. In respect to this, Halliday & Hasan (1976: 227) stated:

The conjunction relations themselves are not tied to any particular sequence in the expression; if two sentences cohere into a text by virtue of some form of conjunction, this does not mean that the relation between them could subsist only if they occur in that particular order. [...] When we are considering these sentences specifically from the point of view of cohesion, however, we are inevitably concerned with their actual sequence as expressed, because cohesion is the relation between sentences in a text, and the sentences of a text can only follow one after the other.

Because of their nature, conjunctives tend to appear at initial position in the sentence, but this is not an all-or-nothing situation. Note that structural *and* has also a retrospective ('retrojective', projecting backwards) feeling: *John, Lewis and Patrick* means 'John and Lewis and Patrick'. *Or* has the same effect. Some conjunctive elements can accompany *and* at initial position, them being either Additive or Adversative.

Halliday & Hasan (1976: 241-244) distinguished four major types of conjunctions, namely **Additive**, **Adversative**, **Causal** and **Temporal**. This is an easy typological classification that prevents text analysis from getting more complex than it should be. There are some subclassifications, some affecting just a few of the categories, other being general. One general classification distinguishes between **internal** (discursive, speaker-oriented; "interpreted in terms of the INTERPERSONAL function of the language" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 240, their emphasis)) and **external** organisation (oriented towards the content). Rather than describing all of them, we will present a summary of the main types classified in Halliday & Hasan (1976: 242-243) in a tabular form, exemplifying them with their examples:

	Internal/External	Internal only	External only
Additive	<i>And, and also, nor, and... not, or, or else</i>	<i>Furthermore, besides, that is, thus, likewise</i>	
Adversative	<i>Yet, though, only, but, however, nevertheless, despite this</i>	<i>In fact, actually, instead, rather, in any case</i>	<i>But, and however, on the other hand, at the same time</i>
Causal	<i>So, then, hence, therefore, for this reason, as a result</i>	<i>For, because, it follows, on the basis, to this end</i>	<i>Then, in that case, otherwise, in such an event (also internal)</i>

Temporal	<i>Finally, at last, first... then, at first... in the end</i>	<i>Then, next, finally, in conclusion, up to now, hitherto, first... next</i>	<i>Then, next, at once, thereupon, soon, meanwhile</i>
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Apart from these, there are some continuatives in English which are not considered as conjunctions, but are worth mentioning. These are *now, of course, well, surely, after all, and anyway.*

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE TEXT

Before we analyse the text that have been chosen for this section, we will make an attempt to describe e-forums from the point of view of both register and genre analysis, so that the text can be understood properly.

3.1 The register of e-forums

Human beings live in a world which is constantly in change. There is no way to measure all the different texts, both spoken and written, that speakers or writers may be producing all across the world at a precise point. Even by counting and classifying all the written texts known up to this moment, which would be itself a hard quest, we would fail in an obvious manner to provide an accurate result, as there is no way to measure the spoken texts.

Nevertheless, probably the largest corpus of texts which runs nowadays is none other than the internet. Since its arrival, the internet has completely changed the way people understand communications, work and many other things. Texts have not escaped this reality. Apart from the reinforcement of other registers and genres through the electronic medium, the internet brought with itself many new types of texts that, although similar in some respects to others known before, have distinct enough properties to be considered different. Such is the case of e-forum posting.

If you have ever surfed on the internet, you may have noticed that some websites enable spaces for the users to share their experiences about different topics. These are called forums. Biber & Conrad (2009: 190) sum up some useful notions that will help us in our description later on:

The “postings” (or “posts”) are all available for public viewing, and any participant can respond. Forums are designed to be a place where people with a similar interest (usually called the “community”) can discuss that interest. Forums serve many of

the same purposes as a face-to-face club meeting, where participants share information and enthusiasm.

We could describe forums as a kind of blank sheet of paper in which anybody can write or reply to whoever they wish for. The rules are simple: there is a topic, and all the participants should strictly adjust to it. Typically, deviation from this topic will be penalised by “an administrator who makes sure that discussions remain on topic and civil” (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 190), but this depends on many factors, such as how rigid the topic is (some topics allow more different discussions than others, as there are topics which are more general, e.g. sport in general as a whole vs. Irish football), how much strict the forum is, how active the ‘administrators’ are, and so on. This is important for the analysis because, although off-topic posts actually belong into the e-forum register, we will ignore them here, so that we can offer a more solid picture of the register, as they could be thought of as not cohesive or coherent by outsiders.

Furthermore, while e-forums are heterogeneous environments in terms of their participants, very often they are accompanied by a kind of ‘ranking system’ which displays the level of ‘experience’ or ‘prestige’ of the users in the community, usually rated by the number or quality of their comments or the time they have spent as active participants of the forums (commonly measured in years). Biber & Conrad (2009: 190) pointed this key feature out:

Most sites also have a status system, showing the ratings of participants in the forum. The ratings are usually based on judgments of helpfulness to other participants (as rated by the participants). The number of postings an individual has made is also usually listed.

From the perspective of what concerns language, e-forum posting employs mainly the written channel. This means that “senders can take as long as they want for planning and revising their messages before they post them, and readers can re-read at their leisure” (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 191), with most forums also allowing their users to edit their messages once posted – for example, if they have to correct a grammatical mistake they do not want to be ashamed of. Indeed, the issue of editing may attract our attention here. The fact that electronic texts can be edited, re-written or re-arranged online in real time constitutes one of the most outstanding and characteristic features of the last generation texts that the internet brought with it. With the arrival of SMS, instant messenger services such as WhatsApp or Telegram, and forums, technology opens a door for us to understand communication in a whole different level. This situation allows users to completely change what they said – or more accurately, wrote

– at will, which, obviously, recalls the repair mechanisms of the spoken language that are available for speakers. Thus, we may think about the new electronic registers, with e-forum posting among them, as **hybrid** registers, which present resemblance to both the spoken and the written varieties of the language, and that rightfully can be found in a point in the middle.

Besides, very often posts or replies to them also contain multimedia resources such as attached images, videos, music tracks or links to other websites, so that meanings are also exchanged through different semiotic systems, with their own codes. In addition, several web spaces also share a jargon, with their own vocabulary, expressions or references, which could be more common to all forums, or more restricted to a specific community. Moreover, we need to take into account that the use of jargon is really common in the most informal varieties, whereas it is typically almost completely absent in most formal situations.

Summing up, we could possibly describe this register in broad terms as follows:

- **Field:** Any topic is valid for this register, as long as it is followed during the discussion, but this ultimately depends on the forum itself. Some forums are sub-divided in different ‘sub-forums’ classification which creates a progression in the delicacy of the ‘specificity’ of the topic, Reddit.com being one of the most famous English-speaking forums of this kind.
- **Tenor:** There is great variation in here; whereas the participants of this register are heterogeneous in terms of sex, age, nationality or religion, they are typically homogenous and equal in terms of power relationship, familiarity, etc. Nevertheless, it is of course possible for the participants to interact with the same user on several occasions, getting to ‘know each other’ at least at some degree of familiarity, but very commonly, users never get to know each other in the real life.
- **Mode:** Whilst it is not the norm, language itself can be the focus of the discussion, provided the topic deals with language or linguistics, as it could be the case in specialised forums. Besides, the language can be used with different purposes, although “a prime purpose is resolving problems” (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 193), as forums were originally conceived as questions & answers zones. Furthermore, although one can find some users that tend to post long monologues which remain un-

answered, discussions in e-forums tend to have a dialogic structure, which different speakers intervening in different conversations, sometimes having different interactants answering the same question to the same user at the same time. Finally, as we said before, the channel is graphic and the medium is written, but the possibility of editing texts reminds us of the spoken medium.

Finally, it may be useful to introduce some notions about the particular style that is very commonly found in e-forums posting. As we said above, this register is the product of a mixture between the written channel and the traces of the spontaneity of the spoken register. This is also reflected at other levels:

[...] it is useful to note that, in general, the e-forum postings follow the traditional rules for grammar and punctuation found in written texts. The most common non-standard modification is to use no or only occasional capitalization. There is also some ellipsis, particularly skipping subject pronouns. (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 194)

Paradoxically, capitalisation is also used in this register to express emphasis, with the capitalised word or words meant to reflect the prosody of the spoken language and to be interpreted as having a marked focus¹ in the tone unit, bringing prominence to that element and creating contrast between what was previously said and what is said now.

3.2 The genre of e-forums

If different cultural needs mean different generic answers, then it is easy to follow that a change in any culture may well mean (and provoke) a substantial change in its generic repertoire, for new questions require new answers. Such is exactly the case that we face if we are aware of the sudden increase of the internet capacity, which has brought with it the appearance of new (and some not that new), recognisable genres. Nevertheless, several authors coincide in that not all the genres are exclusively internet-tied. Crowston (2010: 12), for instance, by in turn paraphrasing Orlikowski & Yates, is conscious of this issue:

Orlikowski and Yates suggested that in a new situation (such as in the introduction of a new medium such as the Internet) individuals will typically draw on their existing genre repertoires, reproducing genres they have experienced as members of other communities.

¹ According to Greenbaum & Quirk (1990: 400): “The condition for marked focus arises when special emphasis is required. Frequently such emphasis is needed for the purposes of contrast or correction.”

Following this, we can start familiarising us with the idea that some already existing genres have been adapted to the internet resources or **reproduced** by them through the years. Similarly, Caballero (2008: 21, her emphasis) identified three different origins for electronic genres (or *cybergenres*, as she called them):

In fact, the genres that may be found on the Web show diverse degrees of digitalisation and/or novelty to the extent that whereas some are the same as their print counterparts (e.g. many of the academic papers accessible online), others are slowly coming to terms with the new medium and, accordingly, exhibit a mixture of conventional and new –digital– traits (e.g. electronic dictionaries and encyclopedias), and others are unique to the online medium (e.g. wikis and social networking websites).

Note that in order to make things easier, we will sum up Caballero’s taxonomy either as “printed but digitalised”, “mixed” or “e-unique”. In spite of this fairly clear distinction (even when the frontier between “printed but digitalised” and “mixed” is sometimes blurry), classifying electronic genres is of course not an easy task at all, mainly because of their dynamic nature, which is clearly associated to the dynamism that characterises the internet, the source of electronic genres. Among the main issues concerning the analysis and distinction of the electronic genre is **functionality**. In this respect, Crowston (2010: 10) argued that “the increased functionality of the Internet has been paralleled by an explosion in Internet genres.”

Focusing now on the forum genre, an “e-unique” one, we have to take into consideration that one of its most interesting traits is that it is an example of **asynchronous communication**. Montero-Fleta, Watts & García-Carbonell (n.d., 1-2), drawing on Lapadat (2002), defined this notion in the following terms:

[...] asynchronous communication, e.g. in discussion forums (DFs), implies threaded discussions held through messages posted by the participants at their own pace, as contributions to the specific topic of the ongoing discussion in a forum. Not being constrained by real time can make carefully crafted contributions, adapted to the audience, dense with meaning, coherent and completed (Ladapat: 2002). Messages are stored and, unlike synchronous communication, do not require the sender and receiver to be at the same place at the same time.

Nevertheless, we must be aware that there are different types of forums based on the time constrains under which users can post, namely: non-threaded, semi-threaded and full-threaded (Kadir, Maros & Hamid, 2012: 276):

The non-threaded forum function is similar to a notice bulletin board as it does not encourage discussion or reply to messages. The messages are normally displayed in

chronological order. The semi-threaded online discussion forums, on the other hand display the initial messages on top and allow other users to reply to the messages. The replied messages will then line up under one another below the initial message which is normally in chronological with the most recent messages display below or vice-versa. Finally, the fully threaded online discussion forums enable other users to reply to the initial messages. The basic layout is similar between the semi-threaded and fully-threaded online discussion forum. However, users in fully-threaded discussion forums are allowed to response to the replies of the initial messages which later on can develop into a string of discourse.

In principle, our interest will be focused on the study of semi- or fully-threaded forums, because it is in those specific kinds of forums that the communication never stops unless closed by an administrator or moderator, in a way that both provides us with more data and does not prevent users from editing texts (and whenever possible, we are interested in considering edited texts in our analysis).

When we were discussing genre and generic analysis in section 2.3.2.2, we agreed that it was the **structure** that answered to a specific set of cultural needs what allows us to differentiate between one genre and another. Thus, our approach to the distinction between genres is based on the occurrence (or lack) of distinct **genre markers**, which are arranged as generic stages that are repeated in textual samples of the same genres in a way that make them recognisable. Inside genre markers, we also followed Hasan's (1976) distinction between **obligatory elements**, which need to take place no matter what, and **optional elements**, which alternatively can either or not appear. That being said, we shall make an effort and try to identify the different generic elements that make up forums' posts identifiable as a genre. For this, we will distinguish firstly between the different types of **initial or original posts (thread-initiatory movements)** that the users use to start a thread, and the possible **replies** to those initial posts or to other replies. Taking into consideration that we do not identify messages by their length but because of their **roles, linguistic features and functions**, we will simplify them taxonomically as follows:

- **Initial or original posts** (thread-initiatory movements):
 - Discussion: sometimes, users or administrators may raise an interesting, trendy topic in the form of a question or a comment just for the sake of discussion, with the aim of acknowledging the different opinions of the community.

- Asking for help (Q&A-ish): very often, users post doubts in forums because they are in need of help to overcome any kind of issue related to a topic. They expect their doubts to be solved by experts or people that have already coped with the same issue.
- Sharing knowledge, information, facts or tips: more often than not, users altruistically start posts by writing down and sharing what they know about something, for they think the community can appreciate it or learn something from it. This is often done from an “expert position”. When we say “altruistically” here, we mean that these users will just earn some **recognition** in the community. Sometimes, this type of thread-initiatory movements are conveyed by closed messages posted by administrators just for the community to know. (For instance, if the servers are going to be under maintenance for any good reason.)
- Sharing things users made for fun: a minor type but still worth mentioning, as some users (either professional artists or skilled amateurs) are prompt to share the art they create in forums such as Reddit.com; they may be sharing drawings, music tracks or handmade items, among many other creative things. This also includes the popular posting of *memes*.
- **Replies** (either to initial posts or other replies):
 - Offering help: whenever someone asks for help, she or he actually expects receiving it. Replies that offer help try to solve issues original posters or others replies may be dealing with. Sometimes, help-replies may appear without nobody asking for them. Even if someone is sharing a perfectly drawn picture she or he just made without asking anything at all, any other user could provide her or him with concern about any detail the original poster may have missed.
 - Engaging in discussion: very commonly, users may express contrary opinions to those of others, creating a contrast in the meanings they convey, starting and exchanging opinions and beliefs.

- Giving positive feedback or showing appreciation: this generic field comprises messages of the like of “thank you”, “well done”, “this is a thing of beauty, if you ask me” or “keep it up with the good work, dude”, which are intended to reinforce and warm the original posters, or other repliers.
- Giving negative feedback or showing refusal (respectful or non-respectful): this generic field is an umbrella term for all the messages that show criticism towards thread-initiatory messages or other replies, either respectfully done or not. Non-respectful negative feedback only intended to harass or embarrass someone on the internet is commonly labelled as *trolling*.

Because of their ambiguous nature, the type of replies that appear in forums' posts are not restricted, in principle. It is true that if one asks for help, it is most likely that most users in the comments section will help the poster, but this is pretty much the only “fixed” interaction, if we are allowed to use “fixed” in these terms. Even in that kind of situations, users may be blatantly flouting the norms of the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) if they consider the questions as very easy or obvious (or repetitive), with a fair chance of answering ironically. The issue of the replies poses more interesting features. It is possible to find a closed administrator's post explaining something with no replies, but still creating communication in a writer-reader spectrum, such is the case of a note left over a table. Therefore, we will consider **initial or original posts** (thread-initiatory movements) as the **only obligatory element** (genre marker) in the structure of the forum genre for them to be realised, with the **replies** stepping at one side, being labelled as **optional elements** in our analysis.

Furthermore, among other minor optional elements we find **formulas of salutation and closure**. In this sense, Giménez & Martínez (2017: 156) stated that the lack of these formulas is highly common, because “the omission of the salutation is a characteristic feature of most posts in forums, especially in those pivoting around the family register.” Hence, although we may find extremely polite users that start their posts with a warm salute directed towards a specific (or non-specific) addresser, and/or close their comments with whatever formula they prefer, this is not generally the norm. Even in posts that are clearly aimed to praise the original posters we may observe the lack of these elements, and we would still consider them as polite. Although it can be unappreciated, this is a big difference with the real time, face-to-face communication.

All in all, we can summarise the e-forum genre as an “**e-unique**” genre that allows users to engage in **asynchronous communication**, with a recognisable generic structure made up, strictly, just of one obligatory element, “**thread-initiatory movements** (also labelled as **initial or original post**)”. “**Replies**” are extremely frequent optional elements, and salutation and closure formulas are less frequent minor optional elements.

3.3 Analysis

We will try to apply now the theoretical concepts that were described above to the analysis of a genuine e-forum text, which can be found in the appendix section. The sample text has been taken from the well-known forum Reddit.com, which sub-divides in different sub-forums (labelled there as *subreddits*), progressing in the level of delicacy of their content. The text belongs to the subreddit *Today I Learned* (shortened as *TIL*), where the motto is that users are kindly invited to post interesting or curious things that they learned that very same day just for the sake of sharing facts. Note that the punctuation and even the grammar is not followed as strictly as in the classic written medium, because it is generally not that penalised. The text can be retrieved from https://www.reddit.com/r/todayilearned/comments/chx9n8/til_eulers_work_touched_up_on_so_many_fields_that/ev08g3c/?context=3

The sample text that we are analysing is made of just three posts or moves: one initial post (thread-initiatory), and two replies found in that thread, the first one being a reply to the original post, and the second one being a reply to that reply. However, we have to bear in mind that this whole single thread has more than 1.6 thousand comments, which is a further proof of the large and virtually endless linguistic corpus that the internet can offer us. The first, initial comment of our analysis will be referred as ‘**Comment 1**’ (from line 1 up to line 2, in red colour); and the first and second replies will be referred in turn as ‘**Comment 2**’ (from line 3 up to line 9, in blue colour) and ‘**Comment 3**’ (from line 10 up to line 18, in green colour). Nevertheless, any combination of comments of the thread would still be a text, and the choice of these ones and not others is caused by the fact that the replies form a ‘string’. Note that in the analysis in the next page, capital letters mean that the word appears in the TIE column, whilst the use of italics means that the word appears in the PRESSUPOSED ITEM column. Similarly, the symbol ^ indicates ellipsis.

1 *TIL: Euler's work touched upon so many fields that in an effort to avoid naming everything after EULER, MANY*
2 *discoveries are attributed to the first person to have proved THEM after EULER.(1)*

3 It always amazed me how *THESE guys were able to FIGURE OUT* so MANY THINGS in so MANY different FIELDS. (2) Like *one day*
4 *THEY* would wake up and feel like WORKING on COMPLEX NUMBERS. (3) THEN, as if *THEY* would get bored, ^WORK on STRUCTURES. (4)
5 *THE NEXT YEAR* on ALGEBRA, then ^to FLUIDS DYNAMICS because why not. (5) THEN ^back to COMPLEX ANALYSIS *again* and then
6 ^switching to ASTRONOMY. (6) AND still MANAGE to DISCOVER/PROBE *revolutionary stuff* over and over AGAIN. (7)
7 *Da Vinci* is another example, ART, MEDICINE, ENGINEERING, WEAPONS... (8) You NAME IT and THE *DUDE* WORKED on THAT. (9) *Gauss*
8 also comes to mind, as well as *Bernoulli* and a few others. (10)
9 AND HERE I am, struggling with mediocre Excel formulas. (11)

10 There was a golden era for *THIS kind of STUFF*, where *money* was not a *barrier to becoming* a full time *researcher* and
11 *scholar*. (12) It also so happened that so *MANY FIELDS* were in *THEIR INFANCY* and one could realistically BECOME a relative
12 MASTER of a number of scientific FIELDS simultaneously or with 2/3 years' STUDY. (13)
13 THAT's not me shitting on *THESE GUYS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS*. (14) Given *THE SAME CONDITIONS* I wouldn't have *ACHIEVED* what *THEY*
14 DID. (15)
15 BUT *THE modern world* makes *THIS kind of life* quite DIFFICULT. (16) We look on *DILETTANTES* as *dreamers* and *wasters* and
16 *penalise* (socially) *PEOPLE* who don't pick a *line of WORK* and stick with IT. (17)
17 We MARVEL at *PEOPLE* who get PHDS in two DISCIPLINES, when in fact if *FINANCIAL BARRIERS* were removed, *THIS* is an
18 ACCOMPLISHMENT within *THE reach* of most *PEOPLE*. (18)

3.3.1 Registerial and generic analysis

From the perspective of the register analysis, we must define this text in terms of the elements that identify registers as distinct, field, tenor and mode, in the way we agreed in sections 2.3.1 and 3.1.

- **Field:** In the text, the users are commenting about Leonhard Euler, a famous Swiss mathematician and researcher. The starting point of the thread is the huge number of discoveries that Euler actually made but were attributed to different people in order to prevent all of them from being named after him. From this, the replies expand on the possibility of working in different scientific fields back in the age of different well-known geniuses, and how we as a society marvel at those accomplishments whilst making them impossible for a single person now. As in principle any topic is valid for e-forums, and this one complies with the specific requirements of the sub-forum where it was posted, this registerial element matches our expectations.
- **Tenor:** Apparently, none of the three different users involved in this text happen to know each other, or at least there is no clue about whether or not they actually do. Because of this, the status role is the one proper of an equal relationship, and their familiarity proximity is possibly minimal, as it is most likely for them not to have had previous contact. Because of these reasons, we will label them as strangers, as there is a fair chance for them to have never met before and never meet again in the future.
- **Mode:** The focus of this text is not on the language itself, but it is being used to establish the communication. The text is primarily orientated towards the field, Comment 1 being more or less explanatory, whilst Comment 2 and Comment 3 are focusing on some other aspects, so that we could label them as explanatory. Nevertheless, it is also true that Comment 2 is also focused towards how amazed about different researchers' acknowledgements its poster is, which also reflects on the writer's own thoughts. In respect of turns, this is a dialogic communication, as there are different interventions by different users, but physical constraints prevent us from taking into consideration the possibility of finding further replies of these same users. Finally, as we

agreed above for the register of e-forums, the medium is written, and the channel is graphic; and there is an e-link to the source of the fact stated.

Now, from the perspective of the generic analysis, we must define this text in terms of obligatory and optional elements, as well as the generic structure made up of those genre markers, in the way we agreed in sections 2.3.2 and 3.2. This text contains the only one obligatory element that we agreed it was necessary for the realisation of the genre, the initial or original post, which acts as a thread-initiatory movement, already identified as **Comment 1**. Among all the subtypes, this thread-initiatory movement is a mixture of both the ‘discussion’ and the ‘sharing knowledge, info, facts or tips’ types, as the creator is not only sharing the fact, but implicitly looking forward to the reaction of other users that have subscribed to this *subreddit*. The reply to the original post that we are considering (**Comment 2**) as well as the reply to that reply (**Comment 3**) are very frequent optional elements, both of them being members of the ‘engaging discussion’ subtype of replies. Moreover, as we should expect after we have understood the way online discussion works, there is no presence of any kind of salutation or closure formulas. Hence, following the pattern that Eggins (2004: 64)² poses for representing texts’ structure, the structure of this text could be:

Thread-initiatory movement ^ (Reply to the post) ^ (Reply to the reply)

All in all, we could say that this text that we have analysed meets all the registerial and generic requirements that we previously set for e-forums to be linguistically considered as distinct. Now, we will analyse the cohesive elements that contribute to its texture.

3.3.2 Cohesive analysis

In order to analyse every cohesive tie in our sample text, we will consider each tie from the perspective of the classification described in sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2. For this purpose, we will use the following code:

- **R** stands for Reference
- **S** stands for Substitution
- **E** stands for Ellipsis
- **L** stands for Lexical cohesion

² According to Eggins (2004: 64), $X \wedge Y$ states that “stage X precedes stage Y (fixed order)”, while (X) means that “stage X is an optional stage”.

- **Tax** stands for Taxonomic lexical relations
 - **Cla** stands for Classification
 - **Com** stands for Composition
- **Exp** stands for Expectancy relations
- **C** stands for Conjunction
- **Ana** stands for Anaphoric
- **Cata** stands for Cataphoric

We will present the result of the analysis in a tabular form so that it will be simplified, making it possible to understand it at a single glance. Remember that we are not considering here the frequent exophoric elements of the kind of *I, you, we* or *us* because by definition the presupposed elements which they refer to are outside the text.

Line (Sentence)	Tie	Type of tie	Presupposed item (Line, Sentence)
1 (1)	Euler (1)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Euler (1, 1)
1 (1)	Many (1)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Many (1, 1)
2 (1)	Them	R: Personal, Ana	Discoveries (1, 1)
2 (1)	Euler (2)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Euler (1, 1)
3 (2)	These	R: Demonstrative: Selective	Guys (3, 2)
3 (2)	Figure out	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Synonymy	Proved (2, 1)
3 (2)	Many (2)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Many (1, 1)
3 (2)	Things ³	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Discoveries (1, 1)
3 (2)	Many (3)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Many (1, 1)
3 (2)	Fields (1)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Fields (1, 1)

³ Halliday & Hasan (1976: 274) labelled words with general meaning such as *thing(s)* or *stuff* as “general nouns”.

4 (3)	They (1)	R: Personal, Ana	These guys (3, 2)
4 (3)	Working (1)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Work (1, 1)
4 (3)	Working	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Synonymy	Touched (1, 1)
4 (3)	Complex numbers	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
4 (4)	Then	C: Temporal: External	Sentences 3 & 4
4 (4)	They (2)	R: Personal, Ana	These guys (3, 2)
4 (4)	[They would]	E: Clausal: Modal	They would work (4, 4)
4 (4)	Work (2)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Work (1, 1)
4 (4)	Structures	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
5 (5)	The	R: Demonstrative: Non-selective	Next year (5, 5)
5 (5)	The next year	L: Tax: Cla: Contrast	One day (3, 3)
5 (5)	Algebra	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
5 (5)	[They would go]	E: Clausal: Modal	They would go to (5, 5)
5 (5)	Fluids dynamics	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
5 (6)	Then	C: Temporal: External	Sentences 4 & 5
5 (6)	[They would go]	E: Clausal: Modal	They would go back (5, 6)
5 (6)	Complex analysis	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
6 (6)	[They would be]	E: Clausal: Modal	They would be switching
6 (6)	Astronomy	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
6 (7)	And	C: Additive: Internal	Sentences 6 & 7
6 (7)	Manage	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Synonymy	Were able (3, 2)
6 (7)	Discover	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity:	Discoveries (1, 1)

		Repetition	
6 (7)	Discover	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Synonymy	Figure out (3, 2)
6 (7)	Discover	L: Exp: Process-effected participant	Revolutionary stuff (6, 7)
6 (7)	Prove	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Proved (2, 1)
6 (7)	Stuff (1)	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Discoveries (1, 1)
6 (7)	Again	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Again (5, 6)
7 (8)	Art	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
7 (8)	Medicine	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
7 (8)	Engineering	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
7 (8)	Weapons	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Fields (1, 1; ...)
7 (9)	Name	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Naming (1, 1)
7 (9)	It	R: Personal, Ana	Any field
7 (9)	The	R: Demonstrative: Non-selective	Dude (7, 9)
7 (9)	The dude	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Da Vinci
7 (9)	Worked (3)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Work (1, 1; ...)
7 (9)	That	R: Demonstrative: Selective	Any field
9 (11)	And	C: Additive: Internal	Sentence 11 to the previous ideas
9 (11)	Here	R: Demonstrative	The user's life
10 (12)	This	R: Demonstrative: Selective	Kind of stuff (10, 12)
10 (12)	Stuff (2)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Stuff (6, 7)
11 (13)	Many (4)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Many (1, 1; ...)
11 (13)	Fields (2)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Fields (1, 1; ...)

11 (13)	Their infancy	R: Personal, Ana	Many fields (11, 13)
11 (13)	Become	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Becoming (10, 12)
12 (13)	Master	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Near-synonymy	Scholar (11, 12)
12 (13)	Fields (3)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Fields (11, 13)
12 (13)	Study	L: Exp: Process-doer	Researcher, scholar (10, 12)
13 (14)	That	R: Demonstrative: Extended	Sentences 12 & 13
13 (14)	These	R: Demonstrative: Selective	Guys (13, 14)
13 (14)	These guys	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Euler, Da Vinci, Gauss, Bernoulli
13 (14)	Accomplishments	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Synonymy	Discoveries (1, 1)
13 (15)	The	R: Demonstrative: Non-selective	Same conditions (13, 15)
13 (15)	The same conditions	R: Comparison: General: Identity	Sentences 12 & 13
13 (15)	Achieved	L: Exp: Process-effected participant	Accomplishments (13, 14)
13 (15)	They	R: Personal, Ana	These guys (13, 14)
14 (15)	Did	S: Verbal	Have achieved (13, 15)
15 (16)	But	C: Adversative: Internal	Joins sentences 12-15 with sentences 16-18
15 (16)	The	R: Demonstrative: Non-selective	Modern world (15, 16)
15 (16)	This	R: Demonstrative: Selective	Kind of life (15, 16)
15 (16)	Difficult	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Near-synonymy	Barrier (10, 12)
15 (17)	Dilettantes	L: Tax: Cla: Contrast	Scholar (11, 12)

16 (17)	People (1)	L: Tax: Cla: Class/sub-class	Dreamers, wasters (15, 17)
16 (17)	Work (4)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Work (1, 1; ...)
16 (17)	It	R: Personal, Ana	Line of work (16, 17)
17 (18)	Marvel	L: Tax: Cla: Contrast	Penalise (16, 17)
17 (18)	People (2)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	People (16, 17)
17 (18)	PhDs	L: Exp: Process/action-doer	Scholar (11, 12)
17 (18)	Disciplines	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Synonymy	Fields (11, 13)
17 (18)	Financial	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Synonymy	Money (10, 12)
17 (18)	Barriers	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Barrier (10, 12)
17 (18)	This	R: Demonstrative: Extended	All previous part in sentence 18
18 (18)	Accomplishment	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	Accomplishment (13, 14)
18 (18)	The	R: Demonstrative: Non-selective	Reach (18, 18)
18 (18)	People (3)	L: Tax: Cla: Similarity: Repetition	(17, 16; ...)

Reference is by far the most common type of grammatical cohesion found in this text. There are 20 cases of Reference, which is 80% of the total of the grammatically cohesive interactions recorded (20 out of 25). Furthermore, every subtype of Reference is featured, and Demonstrative Reference items in this text mainly act as determiners. On the other hand, Substitution is almost not featured in our sample text, with only one case of Verbal Substitution within it, found in sentence 15 (line 14). Similarly, there are few cases of Ellipsis in the text. Only user 2, creator of Comment 2 in our analysis, employs Clausal Ellipsis, using it four times in a row. The use of the Ellipsis in this user's writing reflects the hybridity of the genre, reminding us of the spoken register.

Considering the length of this text, there are relatively less Conjunctions than one could expect. The text features 5 Conjunctions: two Additive ones (*and*), two Temporal ones (*then*), and one Adversative (*but*).

We shall consider now the relations tied by force of meaning. There are 54 cases of lexical cohesion. The text starts with a short lexical string at the beginning which consists on the repetition of “Euler” across the first two lines which make up Comment 1. Nevertheless, one of the most easily recognisable strings in the text is the one made up of the topic of researching and discovering, which is essentially the text’s major topic. It is *work-discoveries-attributed-proved-figure out-discover-researcher-scholar-master-accomplishment*, and runs across the whole text.

Complex numbers, structures, algebra, fluids dynamics, complex analysis, astronomy, art, medicine, engineering and *weapons* compounds a fairly long string of co-meronyms of the same hypernym, scientific fields. This string goes from the beginning to the end of Comment 2, and user 2 uses this string to convey her or his excitement about the different fields in which distinct geniuses managed to work on successfully. The point of this string is that the fields stated share things in common, but are so different that studying them simultaneously is a pretty hard task.

As one could expect, the word *field* is among the most repeated ones in the entire text, thing which could be obvious, as all these discoveries need a “field” of knowledge to be made in. However, towards the end of the text, user 3 employs *discipline* instead of *field*, maybe purposefully trying to avoid repeating *field* once again. This issue created a five-words-string that goes from Comment 1 to Comment 3, maintaining it cohesive. In the same sense, *many* is the most repeated determiner in this text, often sub-modified by *so*. Similarly, *work* and some of its flexive forms are also employed several times during the outcome of the discussion and it seems to be the preferred verb to refer to the study that these researchers made in different fields. In addition, there is a three-word-string of the word *people* towards the end on the text, in which user 3 (author of Comment 3) is speaking about the way society judges whoever dedicates her or his study to more than one discipline nowadays.

4. Conclusion

E-genres, as the conventional genres, are part of our reality. The point of overcoming the not so easy task of identifying, recognising and analysing a specific type of text from all the theoretical points that were considered in this honest piece of work usually

serves to one common tenet: that of stating how the text works and towards what aim it moves. In this sense, we always kept in mind our initial purpose, which was directly related to the study of texts proper of the e-genres, in a way that we could prove them to be as recognisable as any other genre.

As we have seen, even when probably some members of our society do not even know what an e-forum might be, the genre of the e-forum is surprisingly not that different from what one could expect; it is not a completely distinct reality, but a different combination of the same elements that we already know. The genre (or e-genre) of e-forums is labelled as electronic simply because of the technological requirements that we are supposed to comply with prior to the actual contact with them: we forcibly need a mobile phone, a tablet or a computer, we are supposed to know what is a screen and how it works, and so on, but we do not need specific knowledge about algebra, computers or technology to use them.

Moreover, our analysis of the Euler's extract clearly proves that we can find linguistic elements that were conceived a lot of time before the e-genres were even invented. In our forum text, as it happens in many others, there were fewer numbers of references and substitution, whilst the main cohesive device employed by the writers was the lexical one. The reason behind this particular configuration is that forum conversations tend to be quick, informal and improvised. Even when writers may revise and edit their texts if they want to, they are not obliged to do so, and this usually leads to lesser words being used, incomplete sentences being sent or loose descriptions being given, which ultimately sets the ground for strong vocabulary connections to work for the consecution of cohesion.

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6. APPENDIX

reddit r/todayilearned Search r/todayilearned

Posted by u/hissingbrunch3343 1 month ago

44.4k **TIL: Euler's work touched upon so many fields that in an effort to avoid naming everything after Euler, many discoveries are attributed to the first person to have proved them after Euler.** en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L...

1.6k Comments Give Award Share Unsave Hide Report

SORT BY BEST Single comment thread. [View all comments](#)

Maezel 1.6k points · 1 month ago

It always amazed me how these guys were able to figure out so many things in so many different fields. Like one day they would wake up and feel like working on complex numbers. Then, as if they would get bored, work on structures. The next year on algebra, then to fluids dynamics because why not. Then back to complex analysis again and then switching to astronomy. And still manage to discover/probe revolutionary stuff over and over again.

Da Vinci is another example, art, medicine, engineering, weapons... You name it and the dude worked on that. Gauss also comes to mind, as well as Bernoulli and a few others.

And here I am, struggling with mediocre Excel formulas.

Reply Give Award Share Report Unsave

seamustheseagull 59 points · 1 month ago

There was a golden era for this kind of stuff, where money was not a barrier to becoming a full time researcher and scholar. It also so happened that so many fields were in their infancy and one could realistically become a relative master of a number of scientific fields simultaneously or with 2/3 years' study.

That's not me shitting on these guys' accomplishments. Given the same conditions I wouldn't have achieved what they did.

But the modern world makes this kind of life quite difficult. We look on dilettantes as dreamers and wasters and penalise (socially) people who don't pick a line of work and stick with it.

We marvel at people who get PhDs in two disciplines, when in fact if financial barriers were removed, this is an accomplishment within the reach of most people.

Reply Give Award Share Report Unsave