



Closeness and distance through the agentive authorial voice: Construing credibility in promotional discourse

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ABSTRACT

Credibility is a function associated with promotional genres and persuasion, and a powerful marketing concept (Eisend, 2006; Ming, 2006) which provides trustworthiness about the quality of products or services offered by hotels (Suau-Jiménez, 2012a, 2019). It is partly attained through the hotel's self-mentioning in websites. When this self-mentioning is agentive with action verbs, the main instantiation is the pronoun *we*, projecting closeness and assertiveness. However, this self-representation is also construed with depersonalized realizations like the hotel's proper name, other nominalizations or even pronouns like *it* and *they*, which provide attenuating aspects and create a sense of distance. The current corpus-based study of 112 hotel websites hypothesizes that this attenuation may diminish closeness of the authorial voice (Brown & Levinson, 1987), thus displaying authority, following disciplinary and generic constraints. Results suggest that discursive closeness and distance, intertwined with personalized and depersonalized self-representations of the authorial voice, may aid to improve credibility.

KEYWORDS: credibility, persuasion, closeness, distance, agentive self-mentioning, attenuation, hotel websites.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction

Self-mentioning or self-representation is the way in which writers express and show their identity and visibility following different social, disciplinary and generic constraints

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(Fairclough, 1992; Herrando-Rodrigo, 2014, 2019; Ivanič, 1998; Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016). As Hyland (1998: 20) puts it, it is: ‘the way writers deploy community-sensitive linguistic resources to represent themselves, their position and their readers’. Self-representation has been the object of a vast number of studies in academic writing, but little or no research has been conducted in professional discourses and/or genres.

In promotional genres like hotel websites, persuasion is the key purpose and credibility an associated function and a powerful marketing concept (Eisend, 2006; Ming, 2006). The credibility that must support and assure quality in the services offered through the authorial voice needs to be discursively projected in a non-imposing or aggressive way, though at the same time expressing a certain authority. The current study’s interest lies in the *natural discourse* of hotel websites, that is, in the monoglossic discourse emanating from the ‘figure of the locutor’ (Calvi, 2019), main enunciator or expert voice, physically situated in the body of the websites or of the tabs that describe the different services (rooms, restaurant, spa, events, etc.), and not in the discourse of hotel websites seen as a whole, which is heteroglossic since it includes tourist voices as enunciators that intervene in the reviews section of the side bars providing their personal opinions or evaluations. In the expert’s natural discourse, credibility is largely materialized by two stance markers (Hyland, 2008): on the one hand, *hedges* are clearly meant to diminish every shade of imposition and thus persuade readers with suggestions; on the other hand, *self-mentions*, standing for the hotel’s voice, are intended to reassure customers through closeness and assertiveness to provide trustworthiness (Suau-Jiménez, 2012a, 2019).

However, when these self-mentions are observed in detail, one can distinguish two categories: personalized and depersonalized lexico-grammatical constructions. Personalized constructions are a very powerful strategy, since they establish a direct bond of closeness and familiarity with the readership, which facilitates persuasion. They contain plural personal pronouns or adjectives like *we*, *us*, *our* or *ours* that entail various grammatical and syntactic functions, ranging from subject and object personal pronouns (*we*, *us*) to subject and object possessives (*our*, *ours*), all of them contributing to create the above mentioned closeness. What interests us in this study is the agentive subject *we* with action verbs, since it is the most direct way to communicate with potential customers through generic and disciplinary rhetorical functions like *advising*, *recommending*, *offering*, *accommodating*, or *arranging*.

Nevertheless, agentive constructions are also materialized, to a lesser but important extent, through what we consider and will refer to as depersonalized self-mention uses like the hotel’s *proper name*, *the hotel*, *the restaurant*, *the staff*, *the spa* or third person personal pronouns like *it* or *they*, which establish distance with the readership, and thus a certain mitigation of the authorial voice. This mitigation or attenuation derives from the fact that the authorial voice is objectivized, showing a lower degree of personal commitment, since it is not anymore the management team who guarantees services or quality by means of personal

pronouns but an impersonal concrete subject that doing so projects authority and professionalism. The agentive personal self-mentions (*we*) interplay with them, the result being a subtle combination between closeness and distance, subjectivity and objectivity, visibility and invisibility, to achieve credibility as a means towards persuasion. This phenomenon presents a dual instantiation of the self-mentioning lexico-grammatical choices that is worth studying. Likewise, depersonalized agentive self-mentions show an array of uses that could constitute a gradation of the distance with the readership and provide different values or qualities, from more to less authority, objectivity, specificity and professionalism that are also worth exploring.

To sum up, this corpus-based study of 112 hotel websites aims to unveil the discursive closeness and distance that exists in promotional genres, more specifically in hotel websites, through personalized and depersonalized self-mentions, and their lexico-grammatical uses. It ventures that depersonalized self-mentions provide attenuation of the personal closeness and assertiveness of the authorial voice, thus contributing a certain distance that projects authority and in the end, more credibility.

1.2. A view of mitigation/attenuation

Mitigation or attenuation is here acknowledged as a pragmatic competence oriented towards the elimination of conflict in communication, showing previous constructed plans (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 8), and determined by tact, focusing on social distance and power relations (Holmes, 1995). Attenuation is also regarded as a minimization of the illocutionary force and that of the participants' roles, in an attempt to achieve effectiveness in social communication, as well as to manage social image (Albelda, 2013, 2016, 2018; Caffi, 2007). In hotel websites, the attempt to eliminate conflict through positive politeness (doing something before doing) (Brown & Levinson, 1987) could be partly achieved through the use of depersonalized self-mentions that attenuate a too direct way to interact socially through the authorial voice. Attenuation can therefore be viewed as softening the force of assertiveness in order to focus on a more effective reader's reception of the hotel's social image (Albelda, 2018; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 2010; Lakoff, 1972). Many authors have recently contributed new knowledge into the pragmatic phenomenon of mitigation or attenuation (Albelda & Mihatsch, 2017; Briz, 2007, 2012a; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005; Schneider, 2013, 2017). However, it is particularly relevant for this study to mention specific contributions, such as Haverkate (1992) –impersonalization mechanisms-, Caffi (2007) –shields- or Briz (2011) –depersonalizations and impersonalizations- who claim that certain attenuators like *one* in “*when one gets nervous*”, or impersonal/depersonalized and agentless passive expressions as in “*breakfast is served from 8am to 10am*”, challenge the personal enunciator of a sentence without diminishing the illocutionary force of their corresponding speech acts. (Caffi (2007: 107) calls this mitigation *shields*: “[...] in *shields* the (speech) act is not

mitigated by explicit linguistic devices, but rather, it is dislocated by means of backgrounding and de-focalizing strategies, or even by the deletion of the utterance source.” These *shielding* strategies or processes can be due to external, at time emotional reasons, following a yes-no motivation that makes the enunciator visible or invisible. Jespersen (1924, quoted in Caffi, 2007) related these grammatical choices to psychological motivational grounds which depended on the speakers’ willingness to either include or exclude themselves in the utterance, following a superordinate reason. Thus, these forms of personal deixis are linked to de-responsabilization, a feature which is essential for mitigation.

1.3. Variables that shape an effective social communication

Before approaching the concept of authorial voice and its associated pragmatic functions, this section intends to establish some premises on the variables that shape effective social communication in general, and promotional communication in particular. When a piece of discourse is construed, there are specific circumstances or variables that affect how it is perceived and interpreted. That senders or text authors control these variables is crucial for an effective communication. These variables are those which shape all means of messages, conversations, dialogues and polylogues.

Another interesting notion, relevant to understand how the discourse of effective communication works, is what Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) called ‘recipient design’ or how senders/writers design and negotiate their interactions so they are sensitive to the receivers. Thus, to be communicatively successful, senders/writers must know what are their readership’s expectations and attitude, and adapt their discourse accordingly. Atar (2017) claims that if a text is structured for a good reader’s reception it must take into account certain factors, shared knowledge (Heritage, 2012) being an important one, to ensure mutual understanding. Mutual understanding, also called intersubjectivity (Schegloff, 1991) is necessary between the participants of a talk seen as a social phenomenon (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). As Herrando-Rodrigo (2019: 54) suggests:

[...] the writers’ identity is finally perceived, negotiated and interpreted by a potential readership while reading the writers’ texts. To allow readers to get to such interpretations writers use certain linguistic and textual features to show the potential audience their proximity, attitude or even commitment regarding what is conveyed in the text.

Therefore, an effective authorial voice should encompass variables such as a good recipient’s design, -a concept linked to that of social community conventions-, but also pay attention to the disciplinary conventions. White (2003: 276) regards the author’s stance as an intersubjective positioning with what he calls the ‘construed reader’ or the ‘ideal’, ‘intended’, ‘imagined’ or ‘model reader’, who the author aligns with through an array of different value positions.

Closeness and distance, or the author's (in)visibility and to what extent this (in)visibility can be quantified and qualified (Dressen-Hammouda, 2014) are concepts affected by disciplinary conventions in academic genres. Academic genres and self-representation in authorial voice are approached in the next sections as a departure point to deal with non-academic ones, since there seems to be a lack of studies on how this phenomenon works in promotional genres, and more specifically on how the agentive authorial voice is projected in the discursive design of websites.

1.4. Authorial voice: closeness and distance

As said above, the authorial voice has been extensively studied in academic writing, which is necessarily the field from which to depart. Herrando-Rodrigo (2014) offers an extensive review of the literature on the attention self-representation has received in academic genres. As can be drawn from different approaches, self-representation is related to the idea of identity (Ivanič, 1998), who observes that certain linguistic choices that are imposed by the generic conventions of texts have to be taken as realizations of the writers' self. In the same vein, Fairclough (1992) suggests that writers' identities may be affected by other dominant identities. Hyland (2005) indicates that when writers want to mark their presence, and thus project their voice and their visibility onto their texts, they use self-mentions such as first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives—*I, me, mine, exclusive we, our, ours*. This phenomenon is 'based on a view of writing as social engagement' (Hyland, 2004: 133), which presupposes the author's intention to establish a connection with potential readers of the text with the aim of reaching certain communicative goals, 'to acknowledge, negotiate and construct social relations' (Hyland, 2005: 173). Based on the Bakhtinian concept of voice (Bakhtin, 1981) several researchers (Martin & White, 2005; Kaplan, 2004; White, 2003) have addressed this phenomenon as *engagement*, as 'a resource for managing the play of voices in discourse' (Martin & White 2005: xi – Preface)

Hyland (2015) adds to this the concept of identity, saying that writers construct it resourcing to linguistic choices in order to maintain disciplinary membership, which includes their relationship with colleagues and with the linguistic materials used. As Herrando-Rodrigo (2014: 75) puts it, 'the idea of power and the subsequent relationships embedded in different social, ethnic or literary canons, for instance, shape for good or for bad both discourse and self-identity of a writer'.

Thus, to characterize how the authorial voice is shaped through self-representation, it can be said that closeness and distance outstand as two central concepts. Closeness or proximity has been defined as "a writer's control of those rhetorical features which display both authority as an expert and a personal position towards issues in an unfolding text" (Hyland, 2010: 116). Hyland's notion of closeness embraces both the author's identity among

colleagues of the speech community (proximity of membership) and her/his involvement with the contents or the material presented, i.e. with the discipline.

Distance can be described as a specific way through which authors project authority by means of diverse linguistic choices including objective and/or depersonalized realizations with the deliberate intention to show credibility. Authors, departing from discipline-based grounds, as is here the case of tourism, choose specific lexico-grammatical options to negotiate social relationships with their readers purposefully. Closeness and distance can then be seen as reader-oriented, following the notion of ‘recipient design’ (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974), i.e. what readers expect as most convincing ways to be addressed, following disciplinary and generic constraints.

The authorial voice and the several features that construct interpersonal ways of interaction with the readers have been extensively researched within the academic discourse (Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Hyland, 2005, 2008; Lorés-Sanz, 2011a, 2011b; Nelson & Castelló, 2012; Zhang & Cheung, 2018, among others). In these studies, it is assumed that authors project a *persona* (Cherry, 1998) that builds a specific discursive interaction which readers must perceive as such, and where closeness and distance interplay following contextual factors. Closeness is here linked to visibility, in the sense that, the more visible authors appear, the closer they look to their readerships. This visibility and the variables that intervene in shaping the author’s persona are described in this way:

[...] authors also manage to make themselves more or less visible in the text, depending on various factors of different nature, such as the conventions of the disciplinary community they belong to, the cultural context in which they write, or the function of the text, or stage of the text, they are constructing. (Lorés-Sanz, 2011: 174)

To finish this section, it should be added that studies that encompass interpersonal discourse interactions, as is here the case with self-mentioning and its readers’ reception, should take into account the different contextual variables that shape that discourse, like discipline, genre or language, and thus, take discourse as the departing point (Suau-Jiménez, 2016; Suau-Jiménez et al., 2021).

1.5. Authorial voice in promotional genres: hotel websites

The above-mentioned authorial features of closeness and distance in academic texts are also valid for non-academic ones. In our case, hotel websites are a variety of promotional genres, where conventions of the disciplinary community –tourism- the culture context –English- and the communicative purpose of the text –persuasion- are variables to be considered. Promoting services and products through different genres, as are websites is largely based on credibility (Eisend, 2006; Ming, 2006), a concept that yields persuasion. Studies of discursive interpersonality in promotional e-genres (Ivorra-Pérez, 2014; Mapelli, 2008; Suau-Jiménez,

2012a, 2019) show that the use of personalization as self-mention markers projecting closeness is prominent in English, in comparison to other languages like Spanish, which opts for more depersonalized uses in order to attain persuasion.

The use of plural, first-person pronouns and adjectives (*we, us, our, ours*) is one means by which writers of hotel websites present their authorial voice and self, projecting closeness, and as a result, authority and trustworthiness. However, as said above, when this authorial voice is materialized through an agentive subject, it is represented by *we* for the personalized option or uses like the hotel's name, *the hotel, the restaurant, the staff, the concierge, the rooms*, etc. for the depersonalized one. This phenomenon, described as an author's lesser or higher (in)visibility in academic genres (Herrando-Rodrigo, 2014, 2019; Lorés-Sanz, 2011), has not been approached from the discourse of promotional genres. As regards self-mention agentive depersonalizations, academic genres have a somewhat limited distribution to several realizations (the research, the article, the study, the experiment), pursuing objectivity and scientific recognition. In hotel websites, objectivity seems to be sought through agentive depersonalizations that deploy a vast array of nominalizations standing for hotel proper names, sections, departments, specific employees, services or parts of the hotel, thus contributing to showcase the rich variety of attention that the hotel is offering and, at the same time, pragmatically attenuating the personalized agentive self-representations. Besides, this varied depersonalization individuates the self-mentioning strategy, linking it to each hotel's own marketing objectives and brand image, thus enhancing certain services, sections or departments that are central to each business (the Spa, the Events Rooms, the Suites, the Restaurant, etc.). The richness of the depersonalized lexico-grammatical choices can be considered a disciplinary and generic convention of promotional tourism, differently, for example, to academic genres, where generic and disciplinary constraints seem to limit their linguistic choices to only a few options. The conventions of each discipline and genre are directly related to a concrete way in which readers interpret the authorial voice, following what is more acceptable, more credible, less imposing or aggressive and therefore more persuasive. This is how a successful social communication is attained, and what the next sections attempt to deal with

2. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two hypotheses are to be tested in the current study:

1. The first one ventures that, although agentive self-mentioning in general is a stance strategy that creates closeness with the readers, and thus trustworthiness, when observed in depth, different linguistic uses formed by personalized and depersonalized structures materialize this self-representation, projecting closeness (personal pronouns *we*) or distance (nominalizations and third person pronouns *it* and *they*).

Its corresponding research questions are the following:

- 1.1. Are personalized agentive self-mentions (*we*) more or less frequent than depersonalized agentive self-mentions (*nominalizations* and *third person pronouns it* and *they*) in our corpus?
- 1.2. To what extent is this relation between personalized and depersonalized linguistic choices representatively valid to the current study?
2. The second hypothesis starts from the assumption that depersonalized agentive lexico-grammatical uses entail a certain attenuating aspect of the authorial voice assertiveness. This could be produced through the creation of distance, which might be aiding to attain credibility.

Their corresponding research questions are:

- 2.1. Can we say, from a qualitative viewpoint, that depersonalized agentive realizations are speech act attenuators? If so, in what ways would this affect the authorial voice to achieve credibility?
- 2.2. Are there associated values and/or gradations in the creation of distance by depersonalized agentive realizations? If so, which ones and how do they influence credibility?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In The corpus under study was collected between 2012 and 2014, as part of the R+D National Project FFI2011-24712, it was named COMETVAL: Corpus Multilingüe de Turismo de la Universidad de Valencia. It was compiled with the aid of an electronic database tool (File Maker), and as for the hotel websites, it consists of 112 four and five star US and UK hotels that were considered as a set of samples in English as an international language. The following sections (tabs) of the websites were compiled: Home, Rooms, Eat and Drink, Meetings and Events, Spa.

As The analysis is based on self-representations of the authorial voice or *self-mention* markers, which belong to what Hyland (2005, 2008) classifies as part of the stance voice category. We propose a quantitative and a qualitative approach for a more comprehensive study. In the quantitative analysis several tables are included that show the numerical differences between personalized and depersonalized agentive uses with action verbs, as well as the different lexico-grammatical realizations of the depersonalized linguistic choices, with percentages and statistical support.

For the qualitative approach, we draw upon mitigation/attenuation (Albelda 2013, 2016, 2018; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Caffi, 2007), in order to gain an insightful view of the possible effects of depersonalization of the authorial voice on the illocutionary force of speech acts, and as a result, on credibility and persuasion; we also take into account the ‘construed reader’ concept (White, 2003) within the engagement system (Martin & White

2005) since their interpersonal dimension can assist to understand the authorial voice positioning and its negotiation with a recipient design (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974).

Data were analyzed manually with the help of the Ant.Conc 3.5.8. concordancing tool.

As for the final methodological decision, it is referred to the use of a statistical hypothesis test: the one-tailed test. According to the statistician's advice (personal communication), hypothesis test was selected because it serves to check whether or not there are differences between the items, as the rates indicate. In the one-tailed test we hypothesize that there are differences between two groups and we specify in which direction the differences exist.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Quantitative analysis

The following tables provide a quantified evidence of, firstly, how total agentive self-mentioning choices are distributed in our corpus. Secondly, the numerical distribution of depersonalized agentive self-mentions is also shown, in order to be used as a proof in the further qualitative analysis. Additional statistical support is provided to this end.

Total agentive self-mentioning

Table 1 shows that personalized agentive self-mentions clearly outnumber those of depersonalized ones with 5,765 (92.21%) against 487 (7.79%).

Personalized (personal pronoun <i>we</i>)	5,765	92.21%
Depersonalized (nominalizations, third person <i>it/they</i>)	487	7.79%
Total	6,252	100%

Table 1. Total agentive self-mentions

As for the statistical support, in this study, we take $p < 0.05$; that is, a significance level of 95%, which is considered significant in social sciences (Dornyei, 2007, 210).

The ratio of depersonalized agentive self-mentions is [7.23% and 8.57%]. If a one-tail test is calculated to prove $H_0: p_1$ (depersonalized agentive self-mentions) $<$ p_2 (personalized agentive self-mentions), then $p\text{-value} = 0$. This suggests that there are statistical reasons to conclude that the ratio of depersonalized agentive self-mentions is significantly lower than that of personalized agentive self-mentions.

Depersonalized agentive self-mentioning (active or passive)

Table 2 shows how depersonalized agentive options are distributed in our corpus. They are realized through diverse nominalizations and third person pronouns standing for the hotel's *name* and *the hotel* in the first places, followed by different hotel sections, departments, services or employees, that could be interpreted as pragmatically challenging the assertiveness of personalized agentive instances materialized by *we*. Depersonalizations bring in objectivity, distance and thus a certain attenuation of the authorial voice, that can result in a more authoritative, professional and credible message.

Nominalizations, it/they (in agent position)	Total occurrences	Percentage within depersonalized self-mentions
hotel names	258	52.97%
the hotel	82	16.83%
It (standing for hotel/hotel section)	46	9.44%
they/these (standing for hotel/hotel section)	22	4.51%
the restaurant	12	2.46%
the staff	15	3.08%
the bar	11	2.25%
the concierge/concierge team/staff	19	3.90%
the spa	4	0.82%
the management	2	0.41%
the butler	16	3.28%
TOTAL	487	100%

Table 2. Depersonalized agentive self-mentions

One can observe that there are two uses that outnumber the rest with a very considerable difference: the hotel's *name* (52.97%) together with *the hotel* (16.83). These agentive uses suggest a pre-established intention to make the hotel wholly responsible for the speech act contained in each corresponding function, thus showing great authority. The rest, starting with the pronoun *it* (8.46%), which stands for the hotel or its sections, show a lower representation, and denote a more constrained and specific authority.

As for the statistical support in these data, the ratio of “hotel name”, which is the main depersonalized agentive use, is [3.64% and 4.62%] with $p < .05$ significance level. If a one-tail test is calculated to prove $H_0: P_1$ (hotel name) $< P_2$ (total of depersonalized uses), then, $p\text{-value} = 0$. This suggests that there are statistical reasons to conclude that the ratio of “hotel name” is significantly lower than that of “total” (we + depersonalized uses).

Summing up, it could be ventured that there is a gradation within depersonalized agentive self-mentions, going from more (hotel’s *name*) to less authority and specificity (third person pronouns *it* and *they*), while keeping the same distance with the readership, in contrast with the personalized agentive *we*, which deploys closeness as a fundamental tool for persuasion.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

4.2.1. Personalized versus depersonalized self-mention uses in agentive position

The following analysis compares personalized versus depersonalized self-mention instances in agentive position. To this end, the analysis focuses on the triangulation that comprises rhetorical functions, personalized and depersonalized linguistic choices that materialize them and possible effects that the author’s positioning may have on the final reader reception. Closeness and distance are analyzed from the viewpoint of self-mentioning, attenuation and engagement. For this, the values that closeness and distance entail (*assertiveness*, *subjectivity* and *friendliness* for closeness; *authority*, *objectivity* and *professionalism* for distance), are also considered, since they may help to reach a more insightful view of the effects that closeness and distance have in the construction of credibility.

ACCEPTING

Personalized

- (1) “*We accept* all major credit and debit cards. Upon arrival a pre-authorization of \$30.00 per day for incidentals will be required.
- (2) “As one of Chicago’s favorite pet-friendly hotels and *we accept* any number of pets and don’t impose size or weight restrictions”.

Depersonalized

- (3) “*The Colonnade Boston Hotel proudly accepts* the American Express Card for payment or functions”.
- (4) [...] “*the Hotel accepts* no responsibility or liability for any loss or damage to property of the Client, delegates and/or guests.”

Accepting credit cards through a personalized agentive self-mention (1) shows closeness and assertiveness, but it is devoid of objectivity. Example (2), uses a personal pronoun with a topic (pet acceptance) that is part of customer family concerns and therefore, closeness could be here beneficial for persuasion. The two depersonalized self-mentions (3)

and (4) show distance through a displacement of the personal author in favour of hotel names. Closeness is lost, but objectivity and authority are projected in relation to important matters as payments or liability. Both examples of depersonalized agentives seem to restrain the assertiveness of the personal authorial voice, but not its illocutionary force, which is ‘compensated’ with authority, objectivity and professionalism.

ADVISING

Personalized

- (5) “*We advise* all guests to have valid travel insurance when booking in Advance Purchase rate booking”.
- (6) “*We advise* you to regularly revisit this page to see whether any amendment has occurred”.

Depersonalized

- (7) “Deeply knowledgeable about the fines and most diverse opportunities in New York City, *the concierges advise* guests on restaurants, nightlife and theater events.”

Both personalized examples (3) and (4) advise about important matters as are customer insurance and reservations. Again, this closeness projects familiarity and assertiveness, but one does not know which department is responsible for this action. On the contrary, example (5) uses a depersonalized self-mention, with the concierge department as agentive. Here again, the depersonalized uses diminish the assertiveness of the authorial voice, but the final message and its illocutionary force seem unspoiled, and again, specificity of who is responsible, authority and professionalism are added.

OFFERING

Personalized

- (8) “*We offer* unforgettable experiences, no matter how grand or intimate the event”.
- (9) “*We offer* valet parking at a cost of \$25 per night for guests – no prebooking required for this service.”

Depersonalized

- (10) “Measuring 257 square meters of space, *the Wedgwood Room* is a multipurpose room located and the lower lobby level. *It offers* an intimate space for smaller parties.”
- (11) “Book *an Events room at an Apex hotel* for a room specially tailored to your event. *They offer* comfort and convenience to make your occasion truly memorable.”

Example (8) personalizes the way to address customers in relation to offered experiences and events, thus projecting closeness and some friendliness. Example (9), on the

contrary, shows familiarity on something related to cost. Depersonalized examples (10) and (11) include nominalizations using the hotel's room names, which project distance, but also objectivity and authority about what they offer (events). Therefore, assertiveness of the authorial voice is only attenuated through *shields* that do not seem to affect the final illocutionary outcome.

RECOMMENDING

Personalized

- (12) “*We recommend* booking adjoining bedrooms or a suite with an adjoining bedroom. Just call Reservations on 0207 640 3557 to talk over what you need and we’ll do our very best to help”.
- (13) “*We recommend* making your reservation as early as possible to ensure the availability of your desired room type”.

Depersonalized

- (14) “A quick 30-minute dry brush treatment with unique massage is known to result in a smoother and slimmer body. *Regular treatments are recommended* for a visible, lasting improvement”.
- (15) “*Reservations are recommended* for this popular event. See our menu, then call (407) 934-1609 to make your reservations.”

Examples (12) and (13) address matters related to reservations in a personal, friendly way that suggests closeness and assertiveness, but again, they are not as objective as examples (14) and (15) that rely on passive, impersonal constructions that objectivize the recommendations and make them more authoritative. Here again, assertiveness of the authorial voice is weaker than with personalized uses, but its illocutionary force does not seem to be affected.

ACCOMMODATING

Personalized

- (16) “People work hard and play hard in New York, so when it comes to leisure, *we accommodate* everyone’s interests”.
- (17) “To ensure *we accommodate* families with older children we are happy to guarantee rooms next door (adjoining) at time of booking”.

Depersonalized

- (18) “*The Drury Inn & Suites offers meeting space that can accommodate* a wide variety of groups.”
- (19) “One of the finest and most private event venues in New York City, *The Setai Fifth Avenue can accommodate* private events of nearly any size.”

Examples (16) y (17) personalize how accommodation is dealt with in these two hotels, in a familiar, assertive and subjective tone. In contrast, examples (18) and (19), much more objective in their uses of hotel names, create a distance that projects authority and attenuates a

too direct authorial voice, but without attenuating its illocutionary force, which is compensated by the mentioned authority, and is only subject to the non-affecting effect of *shields*.

ARRANGING

Personalized

- (20) Alternatively, *we can arrange* for a very good taxi service to collect you.
- (21) *We can arrange* for the shipment of any surplus luggage and are happy to take delivery of any larger item.

Depersonalized

- (22) *The concierge team can arrange* for a personal chauffeur for your airport pick-up or for use during your time with us.
- (23) *The Butler can arrange* a nice glass of wine and some candles for you, then all you have to do is relax.

Examples (20) and (21) include speech acts with a strong illocutionary force. They describe how the hotel can arrange transportation services, but with no specificity of which department is in charge. Again, this suggests closeness, but not authority. On the contrary, examples (22) and (23p) are more objective about which section of the hotel arranges each service and thus project a higher authority and professionalism.

In summary, in the previous examples, it can be observed that the effect of their messages is rather different. Those entailing personalized agentive realizations (*we*) base their persuasive strategy in engendering a close, assertive, subjective and almost friendly authorial voice. The involved speech acts contain statements centered on those principles, although at the same time they project a certain vagueness since the authorial voice hides behind a collective *we* that is undefined in business or organizational terms. The depersonalized agentive utterances, on the contrary, show distance, objectivity, authority and professionalism due to the organizational specificity of their agents (*the hotel, the restaurant, the butler, etc.*). In all cases, it seems that depersonalized self-mentions attenuate the agentive personal voice prototypical of hotel websites as enunciator of a natural discourse because there is an evident dislocation of the personal subject, but this does not affect the implied illocutionary force.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

For the sake of clarity and coherence, this section must fall back to the hypotheses and to the method that has been followed. Taking the first hypothesis and in order to answer the two first research questions, the quantitative analysis and tables show that personalized agentive self-representations of hotels with *we* are by far the most frequently used and therefore the most genuine agentive realizations. The total amount of personalized agentive uses -5,765- is

much higher to that of depersonalized agentives -487-. However, although having a small numerical occurrence, depersonalized instances constitute a self-mentioning representation that is interesting to be studied since it characterizes how the authorial voice is shaped in promotional tourism genres. Then, this first hypothesis can be proved correct.

As mentioned above, the discourse of hotels is an expert discourse (Calvi, 2019), monoglossic and deploying intravocalization (Kaplan, 2004), since no other voices –like customer reviews- are used in the website discursive design to search persuasion. However, one can see that two distinct realizations of the authorial voice are projected: the most frequent is that of the collective, subjective, close and *familiar* “we”, and the less frequent, that of the objective, distant enunciator, in the form of a depersonalized entity, with a wide variety of linguistic uses. The agentive *persona* (Cherry, 1998) that is construed in this promotional discourse is then mainly visible, close and subjective. However, it is also built through other values, like distance and invisibility, which contribute authority and professionalism.

Since the number of personalized instances is blatantly higher, and bearing in mind that closeness and distance are reader-oriented following the notion of “recipient design” (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), it could be concluded that readers expect closeness and visibility as a primary way of addressing them. However, they may also appreciate a certain degree of objectivity, invisibility and distance in the discourse, since it reflects professionalism and authority, thus aiding to attain credibility.

As for the second hypothesis and its corresponding research questions, it would seem that all the instances that contain a depersonalized self-mentioning deprive speech acts of some of their illocutionary force, since the pragmatic effect upon the readers/customers is that of distantiating them from the sentence agent. However, this attenuation could be interpreted following what Caffi (2007) conceptualizes as *shields*, where the enunciator is made visible or not depending on external reasons, but without damaging the illocutionary force, since the contents of the message are not manipulated. Here the external reasons point towards the discipline –tourism- and the genre –promotional- that act as variables which are intended to project a hotels’ convenient social and professional image. Therefore, the second hypothesis is only partially correct, due to the fact that depersonalized agentive choices can act as attenuators of the authorial voice as a whole. Nevertheless, this would not affect the speech acts illocutionary force, since they can be interpreted as attenuation shields (Caffi, 2007). These disciplinary and generic shields would keep the illocutionary force of each speech act, maintaining the effect on the construed readership unspoiled. In other words, they can be seen as a case of objectivization where some displacement of the visible enunciator (*we*) takes place, rendering it invisible by means of de-focalizing strategies (*nominalizations*, *it* or *they* personal pronouns). As Haverkate (2001) and Briz (2011) claim, attenuators can challenge the personal enunciator of sentences without diminishing the illocutionary force of their corresponding speech acts. Although personalized uses are by far more representative of

the authorial voice, it seems that a certain amount of depersonalized realizations adds objectivity, authority and a feeling of professionalism that aims to build credibility and finally, persuasion

As the qualitative analysis suggests, personalized agentive self-mentions transmit closeness, familiarity and a sense of friendliness to customers, which is a path to attain credibility. In other words, personalized uses attempt to persuade as a friend would do, inviting customers to trust the hotel's authorial voice because it is close and visible, and this closeness parallels trustworthiness. This author's positioning, based on the personal pronoun 'we', aims at reaching a construed reader (White, 2003) who expects closeness in order to be persuaded. On the contrary, depersonalized agentive self-mention uses embody a different message: that of distance, objectivity and authority, thus encompassing another authorial voice positioning (Martin & White, 2005).

Another conclusion that could be drawn, although further research is needed, is that certain topics –like pet accommodation, being served a glass of wine or offering taxi service– could be more effectively communicated through personalized uses where the author is visible, since these imply closeness and friendliness to deal with “petty” matters. Contrarily, other issues, like payments, insurance or events organization could be more persuasively transmitted through objective, invisible authors embodied through *the hotel*, *the staff*, *the management* or the hotel's *name*, since the distance they create suggests authority and thus improves credibility on important matters. Another interesting aspect to be mentioned is that, within depersonalized agentive instances, a visibility gradation similar to what happens with academic articles (Herrando-Rodrigo, 2014, 2019) can be observed, going in this case from the hotel's *name* as the more visible and objective depersonalization, to other intermediate cases as *the hotel* or hotel departments or sections (*the restaurant*, *the spa*, *the staff*, *the rooms*), to finish with third person pronouns such as *it* or *they*. This gradation could be interpreted as a fine-tuning of the depersonalized authorial voice, designed in a subtle way to manage the hotel's interests, making certain departments or sections the agents of specific functions like offering, recommending or accommodating. In terms of effective social communication, senders/writers must know what are their readerships' expectations and attitudes (Heritage, 2012; Schegloff, 1991) and adapt their discourse accordingly. In this sense, our results suggest that promotional genre readers expect that businesses persuade them discursively with a high degree of closeness, but also with authority and professionalism which materialize through depersonalized nominalizations or other constructions that engender distance and represent a disciplinary identity (Hyland, 2015).

It could finally be concluded that this study has explored a new avenue where promotional discourse constructions and authorial voice strategies have been approached from a socio-pragmatic perspective. Results point towards a more insightful view of how

English should be used in the design of promotional websites, in search of a successful social and professional communication.

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