

The Blog is Served

Crossing the 'Expert/Non-Expert' Border in a Corpus of Food Blogs

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Abstract

The present study investigates some of the most popular food blogs (FBs) in the United Kingdom. The aim is to examine this particular genre of computer-mediated communication and, in particular, to individuate the features that characterise its discourse, in which language seems to constantly cross the border between professional and popular terminology. Through corpus-based research methods, the lexico-grammatical aspects of the FBs are analysed to see when and to what extent the food bloggers make use of a more professional language and when and to what extent they employ a more popular(ised) level of discourse. The paper provides evidence that the food bloggers constantly cross the border between the role as experts and the role as food lovers to avoid a lecturing style that would make the FB less attractive to the average user.

Key words: food blogs, computer-mediated communication, corpus linguistics, English for Specific Purposes

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1 Introduction

In the last few years, food blogs (henceforth, FBs) have increasingly grown in importance also in relation to the popularity that food-related activities are enjoying in our society. For instance, we can consider the sheer number of publications dealing with food and drink that have recently been published in the UK alone; according to *The Guardian's* author Bee Wilson, Nielsen Books Services reveals that “1,808 food and drink titles [were] published in the UK in 2014” (Wilson 2015). To printed books we should add dedicated TV channels and TV shows.

In this context, blogs dedicated to food and drink allow anyone who is not a famous chef or expert in nutrition to be in the spotlight and contribute to the sharing of knowledge about specific food, food-related personal experiences and recipes that can be reproduced by other people even when their cooking skills are quite limited. In this regard, FBs take the role of “virtual communities” (Blanchard 2004), in which people with a common interest in food – including its preparation, processing and serving – share information, stories and, above all, recipes. The visitors of the FBs can interact with the authors, share their experiences, ask for more details, instructions or advice; something that is impossible to do with famous chefs and experts appearing in TV shows. In these shows the most successful food bloggers, along with the so-called ‘TV-chefs’, present their recipes and provide useful advice for a healthy diet and lifestyle through food consumption.

In TV shows, however, there is a very limited – if any at all – interaction with the public. On the contrary, FBs can be considered as ideal platforms for interaction between the ‘expert’ who runs the blog and ‘the non-expert’ who visits the same blog and possibly posts comments. However, this interaction is more complex than just a dual relationship between the author who spreads expert knowledge and the public who receives it; visitors include not only beginners but also experienced amateurs in the field of cookery and, in more general terms, food-related professions or activities.

The present study analyses a group of the most popular FBs in the United Kingdom in order to investigate if and to what extent food bloggers switch between their roles of experts and the roles of non-experts for a friendlier approach, especially when they explain the procedure and provide comments on their recipes. Through corpus-based research methods the study will look at the linguistic features, such as common nouns and lexical verbs, that contribute to shape the discourse of these specific virtual communities in which language seems to be used to constantly cross the border between expert and non-expert communication (cf. Diemer & Frobenius 2013).

The study can be considered as a first step to test the ground for a larger investigation that could conduct a more complex and thorough analysis of the language of FBs in order to understand its nature and to examine its potential for the teaching of EFL in professional-/occupational-specific domains as well as in mainstream EFL courses.

2 Food Blogs (FBs) as a Genre

FBs can be considered as “a written, asynchronous genre of CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication)” (Diemer & Frobenius 2013, 53). In addition, they are considered (ibid.) a complex sub-genre of blogs in general, composed of pages that contain recipes as any traditional printed cookbook, with the further addition of detailed food-related personal events and memories; FBs also display pages providing nutrition-related information and a platform for discussion with other likeminded internauts.

With regards to their organisation as a textual genre, FBs contain complex, multi-modal features that range from graphic, both static and dynamic, elements such as animations and sounds, text, pictures and videos, as well as hyperlinks. They also contain interactive features such as, for instance, dedicated sections to post comments, links to social media, subscription to a newsletter, access to searchable archives, and so forth.

Considering both their contents and their structure, FBs appear as places where the expert knowledge of food bloggers and other users and the ‘common practice’ of non-expert users or novices in the field meet. In this way they all contribute to create not only a discourse community interacting via computer-mediated communication (i.e., “human-to-human communication via computer networks”, Herring 2001, 612) but they also constitute a community of practice (cf. Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner 2015).

Indeed, the community of food bloggers and their public do constitute a discourse community, in that they fulfil, for instance, all the six characteristics of communities as listed by Swales (2011, 471–473):

1. they have “a broadly agreed set of common public goals” (i.e., sharing information and knowledge about food and preparing the dishes described in the recipes);
2. they also have their own “mechanisms of intercommunication among [the] members”, such as communication via the comments’ sections or forum-like discussions;
3. they use very specific “participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback”;
4. they “utilize and hence possess one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of [their] aims”, that is to say, they not only use the whole blog but, especially, the recipe pages to communicate food-related contents;
5. “in addition to owning genres [in our case the FB], a discourse community has acquired a specific lexis”, which is composed of food-related terminology (as Section 6 will illustrate); and
6. “a discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discorsal expertise” (471–473).

Indeed, the levels of the members of the FB community range from the novice (closer to the minimum threshold level) to the most expert, almost professional, level that is possessed by the food bloggers and the most advanced users.

In addition, the community of FBs can also be defined a community of practice, considering that “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner 2015, 1); this is another characteristic that the community of food bloggers and their visitors share and fulfil both in the recipe pages and in the comments’ sections. Unfortunately, research on the language of FBs, to date, is relatively scarce. However, a contribution especially dedicated to FBs is Diemer & Frobenius (2013) who conducted, both a qualitative and a quantitative investigation of a corpus of FBs of their own compilation with a similar approach to the one adopted in this study and which they label as the FBC (the Food Blog Corpus).

The authors report interesting results about the description of (1) the lexical and syntactic features that might be typical of FBs and (2) the same FBs’ nature of a hybrid genre of CMC, in that they combine the genre of weblogs with that of traditional cook-books, adding a direct interaction with their users. The results discussed in Diemer & Frobenius (2013) will then be compared and contrasted to the findings of the present study in order to infer the most typical features that can be observed in the language of FBs as a kind of “occupational variety” (Crystal 1996, 370, in Diemer & Frobenius 2013, 58).

2.1 General structure of the FBs’ recipe sections

The selection of the FBs to be investigated followed the criterion of their ‘popularity’ on the Web and the activity of posting comments by the food bloggers. In fact, the search for the most popular FBs in the UK did not involve the actual contents of the blogs or reviews by culinary experts; the selection included the most active and the most consulted FBs from a mere statistical viewpoint. This criterion was chosen because, for the purposes of the present study, it was more important to select the FBs in which the authors and the users interact more frequently and, thus, making it easier to analyse when and how the food bloggers position themselves along the ‘expert/non-expert’ border with respect to their public.

For this reason, the source used for the ranking of the FBs was a media database website, namely *Vuelio* (former *Cision UK*), which is a journalist and blogger database, monitoring analytics; indeed, “Vuelio’s blog ranking methodology takes into consideration social sharing, topic-related content and post frequency” (Hodges 2015). Consequently, the consultation of the data from this database issued a ‘UK’s Top 10 Food Blogs’ list, with data that were last updated in June 2015. The most popular FBs in the UK were collected in the list below following the same order as the list provided by *Vuelio*. The corresponding hyperlinks are also provided. It is also worth mentioning the fact that the FBs are all run by native speakers of English residing in the UK, thus issues concerning the food bloggers’ level and mastery of English that could influence their language and discourse-specific narratives were not taken into consideration. The ‘Top 10 UK FBs’ are:

1. *Deliciously Ella*, <<http://deliciouslyella.com/>>;
2. *The Curry Guy*, <<http://www.greatcurryrecipes.net/>>;
3. *Lavender And Lovage*, <<http://www.lavenderandlovage.com/>>;
4. *Honestly Healthy*, <<http://www.honestlyhealthyfood.com/>>;
5. *Tinned Tomatoes*, <<http://www.tinnedtomatoes.com/>>;
6. *A Girl Called Jack*, <<http://agirlcalledjack.com/>>;
7. *The Crazy Kitchen*, <<http://www.thecrazykitchen.co.uk/>>;
8. *Eat Like A Girl*, <<http://eatlikeagirl.com/>>;
9. *Amuse Your Bouche*, <<http://www.amuse-your-bouche.com/>>;
10. *Belleau Kitchen*, <<http://www.belleaukitchen.com/>> .

The authors of the ten FBs are predominantly women: indeed, only FBs number 2 and 10 are run by men. This female predominance can have more than one explanation and many might refer to stereotypical roles and interests still assigned to women in present-day Western societies: first of all, we could argue that women are more interested in cooking because of the traditional, century-old role of the woman as assigned, by a male-dominated view of society, to the kitchen and to household keeping that might still play a role even in modern society. Another explanation could be that women are generally believed to care more than men about healthy lifestyle and diet for them and their family.

A further explanation could lie in what Herring (2000 and 2003) affirms about the participation of women to/in computer-mediated communicative environments, namely that the Internet can provide a source of income – through advertisements and banners – for people who might be excluded from other forms of business. In the case of the eight FBs run by women, we have several examples that fall within this category, such as those who had to take care of a seriously-ill family member and could not achieve career goals, housewives with children of different ages, women who developed intolerances or whose children are born with intolerances or food-allergies and who dedicate their FB to spreading useful recipes and awareness about these problems. Running a FB, then, helps women in these situations to develop their own online business (through advertising banners, self-produced publications and so on) without neglecting their family commitments.

Another reason for FBs being run more by women than by men could be seen in the role that – according to Herring (2008) – women play in asynchronous CMC, namely that “women participate more actively and enjoy greater influence in environments where the norms of interaction are controlled by an individual or individuals entrusted with maintaining order and focus in the group” (209). Running their own FB empowers women with this role of communicative control, making sure that they discuss the topic they love most without the risk of meeting aggressive users who criticise or ‘flame’ and, if this should ever happen, they have full control over the blog, so they can block possible “threats of disruption and harassment” (ibid.).

Despite gender-related differences regarding the food bloggers, the FBs analysed present a common structure that recurs in each one of them; focusing in particular on the sections containing the recipes, these are accessible via the menu bar and are labelled as “Recipes” (in FBs number 1, 2, 4, 5 and 9 in the list above); FB number 3 calls it “Recipe Box”, in line with its old-fashioned, British tradition-oriented style, while FB number 6 labels the section “Recipes and Food”. FBs number 7 and 10 are structured to present their recipes directly on the home page, with other pages left for disclaimers and other food-related topics different than the actual recipes. Finally, FB number 8 labels the section dedicated to recipes as “Cooking”, in contrast to other sections such as the one labelled “Travelling”, for instance.

The recipe pages for the majority of the FBs analysed are accessible through a drop-down menu bar, listing the several sub-sections indicated with labels such as ‘main courses’, ‘appetizers’, ‘bakery’, ‘vegan recipes’, and so forth.

Once s/he has selected the sub-section of interest, the user can also access the recipe of his/her choice; these pages are structured in the same way in all the FBs: namely, they contain the title of the recipe with some comments, usually expressed in one sentence and an optional exclamation mark to emphasise some specific element of the recipes, such as its tastiness, lightness or a particular method of cooking or the time needed for the preparation of the dish. For instance, *The Curry Guy* FB, after the recipe title for “Indian Style Buffalo Wings with a Coriander Raita Dipping Sauce”, adds the phrase “These buffalo wings just plain get it!”, which indicates that the recipe is of easy and fast preparation.

Then, in the recipe pages, a few introductory paragraphs follow, containing the origin of the recipe, the source of information, which might be another food blogger, a family member, a friend, or the product of a particular travelling or life experience; the recipe, indeed, is always contextualised to the blogger’s experience or past history, either personal or of his/her closer family circle. However, these paragraphs might also contain the description of the emotions evoked by the recipe itself, thus making the introduction to the actual recipe as personal and personalised as possible.

The recipes, then, are presented as in any traditional cookbook, i.e. the food bloggers start indicating the number of servings, the time that will be necessary for the whole preparation and occasionally for each of the different stages. That might include the time needed for mixing the ingredients, the time for cooking or baking, the time if the dish needs to be cooled down or heated up before being served, and so forth. Other opening sections always include the recipe’s level of difficulty, the list of ingredients with quantities and, occasionally, alternatives for more seasonal products or in case of allergies and/or intolerances. This information is followed by the preparation procedure, traditionally the core of any recipe, with photos of the process and other steps, as well as some more or less detailed information on how to best serve or enjoy the final result.

The recipe page, then, is concluded by some remarks, which might be expressed through one brief paragraph, one or two short sentences, or some typical formulaic expressions; in the corpus of the FBs examined here it is usually ‘enjoy’, in the imperative tense, that predominates, with some exceptions such as FB number 8 that concludes some recipes with the phrase “Good, eh?”.

The recipe pages are actually concluded by the comments’ section in which the interaction with users takes place, but this is typically indicated as a visually well-defined, separate section at the very bottom of the recipe page. In Diemer & Frobenius (2013, 72), this is the section in which FBs contain the greatest alternation between the professional detachment of the food blogger and a more friendly-like closeness to the users who posted some comments, provided feedback or expressed compliments on the recipe or to the blogger. In this study, the comments’ sections are not the focus of the investigation, since it appeared that indirect interaction already happens in the recipe page, thus priority was given to the latter. However, the former will certainly be the object of future research.

The recipes presented in the FBs are of various kinds, from finger food and appetizers to preserves and liquors, as well as main courses and desserts. The food bloggers try to meet all the possible tastes of their public and even anticipate problems of intolerance or allergy to some ingredients by providing advice and suitable alternatives. A great number of recipes or entire sub-sections are intended for vegans and vegetarians, showing an attention to the demands of their public since the food bloggers openly admit that the vegan/vegetarian recipes or their vegan/vegetarian alternatives were proposed after explicit requests in the comment’s sections, via email, or through forum-like discussions.

Only some of the FBs display personal or profile pictures of the authors, and even when they show the stages of the preparation with photos, the FBs display the tools and food involved and the hands of the person, but never his/her face; these different levels of ‘recognisability’ of the bloggers might in a way influence the more or less immediate, personal contact between the public and the author, but only to a minor extent, since some photos of the blogger are always present even when they are reduced to a minimum, so the users can recognise him/he.

Finally, some FBs contain – in the recipe pages – a few lines dedicated to what could be called ‘disclaimers’ space, in which the blogger specifies that s/he has used specific products, ingredients, kitchen tools or appliances that were sent for testing by the producing companies; however, the bloggers always specify also that they were not paid to test or to provide positive feedback, so their testing and appraisal is independent from any kind of commercial influence. It must be said, though, that references to the products or tools is usually indirect and that priority is given to the recipe, the ingredients (without many specific references to individual brands) and the preparation procedure; appraisals or reviews are only incidental, or are inserted to seem incidental.

3 Methodology and Data

The present study aims at examining the explicit or implicit existence of boundaries between the expert (food bloggers) and the non-expert (the blogs' users) as well as investigating when the food bloggers cross over, i.e. when (and how) they position themselves on either side of the border, as experts or as “an approachable person sharing food-related everyday experiences with likeminded readers” (Diemer & Frobenius 2013, 72). The study takes into consideration the core, as it were, of the FBs, namely the pages dedicated to recipes (henceforth referred to as ‘recipes pages’), in which the bloggers add recipe-specific information and instructions along with personal stories and comments related to the recipe itself or to a particular kind of food.

It is worth underlining that, as Gerhardt (2013, 43) puts it (emphasis added),

recipes are not simple, straight-forward step-by-step instructions that can be successfully used by any novice, but they represent a register containing *presuppositions on many levels, necessary incompleteness* in the steps of preparations or sets of instructions, *assumptions* about cultural knowledge, practical skills, and technical equipments evoking a complex set of practices. Successful cooks need to be able to time their steps, to understand the ever-changing nature of the product as they produce it while putting the text into action.

The elements emphasised in this passage underline the area in which food bloggers are more likely, and are actually called upon, to fulfil their role as experts, i.e. when they explain the procedure and the ingredients they are filling a gap in the non-experts' knowledge of the recipe and its preparation. The aim of this article is to understand how they do this, trying to answer two main research questions: Do the food bloggers distance themselves from their ‘public’ through their role as experts by using expressions and a general style that constantly remind the visitors of the blog of their ‘authoritative’ position? Or do they rather use a more friendly and informal language that puts the food bloggers at the same level as their public?

For the present analysis, the texts of the recipe pages were compiled into a corpus which we could call the ‘Top 10 UK’s FBs Corpus’ (henceforth, T10_UKFBC). A sample of ten recipes from each of the ten FBs listed above was collected, thus producing a total of 100 recipe pages.

The recipes were selected randomly, generally taking one recipe page from each of the sub-sections present in the FBs, since the idea was to analyse the language of FBs in general, thus trying to exclude – for the time being – some possibly biased semantic influence that might derive from the selection of specific categories of the preparations (e.g., all the recipes in the main courses sub-sections, all desserts, etc.) or lists of basic ingredients (e.g., meat, fish or vegan recipes).

The texts collected to form the T10_UKFBC were annotated using the *CLAWS part-of-speech tagger for English* (Rayson 2008). The annotated corpus was, then, investigated

with *WordSmith Tools Version 6* (Scott 2012), a software for linguistic analysis. The corpus search was conducted on the tags for common nouns (both in the singular and in the plural form) as well as for lexical verbs in order to investigate the use of content-specific terminology contrasted to the use of vague and general language. Individuating the extent of the alternation of technical and general terminology could help detect the bloggers' intention to switch from the role of expert (using specialised language) to the role of common user (through the use of more general and/or vague language).

4 Results and Analysis

The analysis conducted on the results of the corpus search is both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis describes features such as the number of words present in a corpus, the number of types and tokens and their standardised ratio as well as mean word length, number of sentences and mean word length in the sentences. These are all values that help describe semantic complexity and lexical variation characterising a corpus. Then, the qualitative analysis examines the use of common nouns and lexical verbs to see if and when the food bloggers employ a more technical or a more general terminology, and vice versa.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis conducted through *WordSmith Tools* produced some interesting results. Table 1 illustrates these results: the central column (T10_UKFBC) presents data from the present study, while the right-hand column (FBC) summarises results from Diemer & Frobenius (2013), using the acronym FBC, which is used by the authors to indicate their Food Blog Corpus.

| | T10_UKFBC | FBC |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Words | 64,940 | 826,073 |
| Tokens/types | 60,221/3,597 | 207,938/8,039 |
| STTR | 28.61 | 69.53 |
| Mean Word Length/Sentences | 3.53/1,303 | 4/4,559 |
| Sentences Mean Word Length | 35.16 | 36 |

Table 1: Quantitative data contrasting the T10_UKFBC and the FBC corpora.

The relatively low Standardised Type-Token Ratio (STTR) of the T10_UKFBC corpus, as revealed by figures in Table 1, indicates that the corpus is lexically quite repetitive. However, the two corpora show similar figures as regards the mean word length and the mean word length in the sentences.

Commenting on their quantitative results, Diemer & Frobenius (2013) affirm that “usually the combination of high [S]TTR, high word, and high sentence length indicates

specialised or possibly even restricted content and elaborated style” (57). This statement drives a more specific interpretation of the quantitative data from the T10_UKFBC, namely that the corpus contains elaborated style – as demonstrated by the high sentence length – but a specialised, or even restricted, content – testified by the low STTR. This can be further interpreted as a reflection of the structure of the blog pages containing recipes, i.e., long introductions and contextual information, explicit instructions, or food-/recipe-related terminology, which is further restricted for the presence of many recipes meant for vegetarian/vegan dietary habits to meet the users’ explicit demands (see Section 4 above).

In conclusion, the quantitative data shows that the FBs in the T10_UKFBC are general in their structure (meeting the requirements of weblogs as a digital genre; on this see, for instance, Giltrow & Stein 2009, Herring et al. 2004, Miller & Shepherd 2004, Myers 2010); however, the FBs are at the same time specialised in their contents since the food bloggers are specialised in, or decide to focus on, specific kinds of recipes (e.g., curry, English countryside, vegan/vegetarian, etcetera).

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

As concerns the qualitative aspect of the present analysis, the FBs included in the corpus show the use of a wide range of terms (both nouns and verbs), that include terms typical of the ‘cooking world’ as also terms drawn from general language with recurrence to some vague language as well.

As for the group of common nouns, we find general food categories with the use of terms such as ‘fish, fruit, pasta’. Some more context-specific food categories are, instead, terms such as ‘cod, duck, halibut, onions’, or basic ingredients such as ‘parsley, oil, paprika, onions’. In this regards, the term ‘onions’ can be used for both categories with its use differentiated when the recipe employs onions as the main ingredient of a recipe (as in the ‘Caramelised Onion, Coconut & Egg Curry’ recipe in the *Eat Like A Girl* FB), or when onions are just employed to provide more flavour (as in the ‘Warming Winter Curry’ recipe in the *Deliciously Ella* FB).

Other specialised terms include names of kitchen tools (‘pan, [kitchen] paper, oven’) and of specific products (‘pudding, pesto, Leerdammer’). The specific lexicon certainly includes also recipe-related measures (‘pinch, palm’) in addition to the usual terms such as ‘grams, ounces, etc.’ and the texture of preparations (‘mousse, puff pastry, puree’).

In addition, we find terms that are strictly connected to the world of blogs in general and of social media, in particular, namely nouns such as ‘comments, post, Facebook’.

The lexical verbs that are used in the T10_UKFBC refer to general actions related to particular cooking processes; these can be divided into more general terms (such as ‘cook, serve, toss, add, turn, repeat, remove, remember, heat, pour’) and of terms indicating more specific cooking or preparation techniques (‘boil, beat, mix, bake, toast, fry, simmer, sprinkle, saut [sic], rinse, stir’).

In addition, we can list verbs indicating actions performed with specific kitchen tools, namely: ‘spoon [v.], blend, chop, drain [with kitchen paper], brush, flatten, slice, peel, grate, squeeze’. These verbs are, not surprisingly, used in the imperative form, since the nature of the recipes is essentially instructional. Other imperative forms are used for what could be defined as ‘imperatives of consumption’ with verbs such as ‘try, enjoy, buy’.

Finally, the category of lexical verbs also includes verbs referring to actions typical of social media, such as ‘[to] Twitter [sic], [to] share, [to] post’.

5 Discussion

The corpus search for common nouns and lexical verbs showed that the food bloggers make a mixed use of both general and more specialised terms, thus testifying to a mixed approach of the bloggers to their blogs’ users: on the one hand they use domain-specific and specialised terminology, thus positioning themselves on the ‘expert’ side of the imaginary border drawn at the beginning of this study. On the other hand, the use of more general and vague terms, even though always referring to the semantic field of food and cooking, signals a parallel tendency of the bloggers to position themselves on the ‘non-expert’ side, together with the visitors of their blogs as food lovers sharing their experiences, but not actually lecturing their public.

This alternation between the two roles, even in the same recipe page, is further confirmed if we have a closer look at the individual recipe pages of the FBs that were included in the corpus. In this respect, the food bloggers show different ‘strategies’ to position themselves on either side of the ‘expert/non-expert’ border.

In some FBs, such as *Deliciously Ella*, there is the alternate use of vague language for measures, lists of ingredients and the state of the preparation during the cooking process to the use of more precise indications, thus the blogger seems to oscillate halfway between the role of expert and the non-expert level. For instance, the sentences in example (1) appear in the same paragraph, separated by just a few words:

1. “1 bag carrots (about 750g) ... drizzle a little olive oil at the end” (*Deliciously Ella*).

In this case the quite specific quantity of the first ingredient is alternated to a very vague reference to a quantity of olive oil that, to a non-expert person, might indicate anything between a few drops and a tablespoon. In this case, however, we might find an instance of what in Gerhardt’s (2013, 43) quote cited in Section 1 was defined as elements typical of the recipe genre, that is to say “presuppositions on many levels, necessary incompleteness in the steps of preparations or sets of instructions, assumptions about cultural knowledge”. More specifically, the food blogger is assuming that her public already knows, because it is part of a shared knowledge in cooking instructions, the

exact quantity of oil to be added at that point of the recipe, thus she leaves that part of her instructions incomplete or, rather, undefined.

In other cases, such as those exemplified in (2) and (3), the cooking instructions might be quite specific in both procedures and terminology, with the bloggers explicitly positioning themselves on the expert side of the border:

2. “Start to build the recipe by adding half of the ingredients to each coddler in this order: smoked fish chopped sorrel, dill, capers, cheese and salt and pepper” (*Lavender and Lovage*);
3. “Make a well in the centre of the sifted flour and crack the eggs into the middle. Add the oil and salt and beat together to form a dough” (*A Girl Called Jack*).

In example (2), for instance, precision is given by providing the exact sequence of the ingredients that need to be added to the recipe; while in example (3) precision and specific language are provided by specifying the technique and the actions described to make the pastry.

In the case reported in example (4) below, there is an interesting mix of cooking instructions containing both general (underlined text, emphasis added) and specific (italic typed text, emphasis added) language in the same utterance; thus, the blogger presents himself as balancing right at the border line:

4. bung the whole lot into a large roasting tin and *roast for 1 hour on 160C turning the heat up to 180C for the last 10 minutes to brown the sausages* serve with a big salad and a smile! (*Belleau Kitchen*).

More often than not, however, the bloggers try to present themselves to the public as “an approachable person sharing food-related everyday experiences with likeminded readers” (Diemer & Frobenius 2013, 72). Indeed, in examples (5) to (7), the commentary text preceding or following the actual recipe presents the blogger as just one among the other food lovers, not as the expert, especially if we look at the use of narratives of personal, private events or experiences:

5. “I’m so excited to feature a recipe from the amazing Sarah at My New Roots, she’s been one of my foodie heroes since the beginning so it’s quite an honour that she wants to share a recipe with us all here!” (*Deliciously Ella*);
6. “Yesterday afternoon I was a bit tired and trying to think of something easy to make for dinner” (*The Curry Guy*);
7. “My mum remembers being treated to freshly cooked lobster served with hot melted butter on her sixteenth birthday; my grandmother used to buy fresh lobster straight from the quayside in Sunderland” (*Lavender and Lovage*).

A case in point is constituted by the blog called *Lavender and Lovage* (see example 7), in which the author puts herself far more frequently in the role of the expert than in that

of the peer, but she occasionally shares personal memories, actually reducing the very distant role that she herself has taken on in her blog.

Some remarks should be reserved to the comments' sections. Even though the comments were not the focus of the present research, the author tried a superficial reading with the aim of exploring, for the purposes of some future research, the area of the food bloggers' direct interaction with the users. Indeed, the preliminary reading of these sections revealed that, first, the food bloggers tend to reply to every single comment, thus establishing a very direct and personal, individual contact with their public; unsurprisingly, they agree with the users' positive comments, providing further suggestions or establishing an emotional bond with users who share their own personal experiences related to similar recipes or memories, but when they do disagree, in reply to some less positive feedback, this is done with recurrence to hedging devices and providing circumstantial replies to the negative comments, thus again balancing their role between the expert and the user side of our 'expert/non-expert' border. This aspect, however, needs to be further investigated especially for implications related to the gender of the food bloggers and the authors of the comments, analysed against the background of existing literature on the role of gender and the pragmatics of politeness in CMC (see, e.g., Herring 1994, Herring & Paolillo 2006, Pedersen & Macafee 2007).

Finally, the interesting results shown in Diemer & Forbenius (2013), combined with those presented in this study, reveal that investigating aspects of expert/non-expert CMC in FBs is particularly relevant to understand the network of relationships that participants to this discourse community reciprocally establish. If contrasted to the roles that we see in other food-related environments, such as TV cooking shows or printed cookery books, we immediately understand the difference between these forms of expert/non-expert communication: while food bloggers are open to comments by the visitors, the persons in the show and the authors of the book establish a monologic relationship with the public (cf. Chiaro 2013); personalities in cookery shows and books unilaterally position themselves in the role of the sole experts, relegating their public to the role of non-experts without any possibility of interaction. It is the dialogic nature of the FBs, and the possibility for the participants to the online, albeit asynchronous, interaction, to switch roles across the expert/non-expert border that makes FBs worthy of further investigation, also in terms of the pragmatics of politeness already mentioned for the gender-related CMC in the FBs comments' sections.

6 Conclusions

The analysis conducted in this paper aimed at individuating the common nouns and lexical verbs that could characterise the language of the FBs composing the corpus under investigation. In particular, the results were analysed to individuate whether and to what

extent the bloggers position themselves as experts, thus above the users of the blog, or as food lovers just sharing their recipes, thus at the same level as their public.

The qualitative analysis showed that the food bloggers prefer to constantly cross the border between their role as experts and their status as general food lovers, perhaps to reduce the distance with their public; this is reflected linguistically through the use of vague and general language in the recipes and, to some extent, also pragmatically in the use of emotive connotations blending in their food-/recipe-related narratives, as it was also revealed by a general examination of the comment's sections.

The quantitative analysis showed that, despite its reduced lexical variation, diversity in the selection of the FBs and the size of the final corpus, T10_UKFBC presents similar results to the larger FBC analysed in Diemer & Frobenius (2013); this can be interpreted as a confirmation of the fact that the language of food blogs as a separate kind of occupational variety is something real that deserves far deeper and more detailed investigation from many perspectives.

These results, indeed, allow generalisations on the nature of the language of FBs as well as the use of the results from the corpus search and of the texts in FBs for the teaching of ESP not only in discipline-specific vocational courses both at secondary school and at University level but also in mainstream EFL courses in order to train students in how to deal, in their professional life, with the variation present in ESP and in various occupational and professional fields. This could help them adapt their linguistic skills more easily to the different professions that they might find after completing school or after graduation (on this see, for instance, Cesiri 2015). In the latter respect, the kind of material provided by the corpus might be of help in the study and in the teaching of topics such as genre variation, discourse variation, context-specific/specialised translation, and so forth.

As already mentioned in the Introduction section of this article, this is an exploratory study, which provided interesting information on the great potential of the kind of material included in the corpus. Further research that will be conducted on T10_UKFBC, then, will involve a more detailed analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively, of the same corpus, such as in its use of modals, hedges and boosters, etc. Further analysis will be conducted also in terms of audience design in both the recipes and in the comments sections, as well as a far more detailed analysis of the interaction between the food bloggers and the users in the comments' section. Finally, the role of the 'non-expert' visitors of the blogs, either presumed by the bloggers or self-assigned by the users themselves, will be investigated for their potential role in influencing the bloggers' use of more or less specific/technical language.

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