A tale of two genres: Engaging audiences in academic blogs and three-minute thesis presentations

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Abstract

This paper reports a cross-genre study of how academics engage their audiences in two popular but underexplored academic genres: academic blogs and Three Minute Thesis (3MT) presentations. Based on a corpus of 65 academic blog posts and 65 3MT presentations from social sciences, we examine how academics establish interpersonal rapport with non-specialist audiences with the aid of engagement resources. The analysis identified new ways of informing and persuading a more diverse audience of their research in both genres. Further analyses revealed more engagement features overall deployed in 3MT presentations, especially those seeking to bring audiences into the discussion by mentioning them explicitly, directing them to think in certain ways, and addressing them with questions. Academic bloggers, in contrast, emphasised shared knowledge and offered more parenthetical commentary. The variations are explained in terms of mode and context especially the time-constrained and face-to-face competitive context of the spoken genre. The findings have important implications for academics to address their audiences in taking their research beyond specialist insiders, and shed light on how engagement works in very different academic contexts with different mode.

Key words: academic blogs; 3MT presentations; engagement; interaction; mode

1. Introduction

Academia, perhaps more than ever before, is a very competitive place. It is no longer sufficient to work hard, gain a research degree and produce a regular trickle of papers. Today, research students are often expected to have published several papers before they graduate and to produce even more to secure tenure and gain promotion. Earning a reputation, however, has never been tougher, with almost 7.8 million researchers worldwide in 2013, (UNESCO, 2017) producing some 3 million articles (Johnson et al, 2018). Universities, moreover, are increasingly anxious to discard their ivory tower image and make research

available to wider taxpaying publics, inevitably passing this responsibility to academics by incentivising 'knowledge exchange' and 'outreach' activities.

These developments have led to the emergence of new genres which both reflect academic competitiveness and embrace the call to take research beyond the narrow realms of specialists. We explore two of these genres in this paper: academic blogs and 3MT presentations. But while both genres carry the unmistakable imprint of the modern academy, they seem to have little in common in terms of mode, contextual constraints and audience. However, both academic blogs and 3MT talks propagate research and promote researchers to wider audiences, requiring scholars to construct alternative ways of presenting themselves and their work. More importantly, both involve generic repurposing, or interdiscursivity (Hu & Liu, 2018; Author 1 & Author 2, 2019). They are both hybrid texts which draw on and exploit features from both scholarly and more informal genres to suit new contexts and audiences. Both, moreover, are members of an unfamiliar category: they are under-explored by applied linguists.

In this paper, we examine how academics establish interpersonal rapport with non-specialist audiences in these new academic genres. Using Author 2's (2005) engagement model, we compare key markers in 65 blog posts and 65 3MT presentations to address the following questions:
> (1) How do academic bloggers and 3MT presenters seek to engage their audiences?
> (2) What similarities and differences are there in the use of these engagement features
> in the two genres?
> (3) How can we account for these variations?
We hope, in answering these questions, to not only shed light on how academics address their audiences in taking their research beyond specialist insiders, but how engagement works in very different academic contexts.

2. Academic blogs and 3MT presentations: Functions, motives and interdiscursivity
2.1 Academic blogs
The blog is now perhaps the most established means by which academics in both the physical and social sciences are able to promote their research and their visibility beyond the narrow confines of disciplinary specialists (e.g., Kurteeva, 2016). In fact, the academic blog is now a key sector of the 'blogsphere' (Perry, 2015). The affordances of the web environment, such as

hyperlinking to related work, filtering tools for searching and accessing material, and reader participation below the post, make an attractive format for academics seeking to put their work out into the wider world and get feedback on it (e.g., Herring et al. 2013).

Motivations for academic blogging are varied, but research shows they include promoting one's research to non-specialists, expressing a perspective on a current issue, and facilitating idea-sharing (Gross & Buehl, 2015; Mahrt & Puschmann, 2014). The feedback channel means that academic blogs offer increased possibilities for promoting dialogue around an issue, giving experts and lay people alike the chance to respond. Writers can therefore interact with other communities, present and discuss their work in progress, and receive comments from their peers (Kuteeva, 2016). As such, they have been described as 'virtual water coolers' (Kouper, 2010) and a type of 'social software' (Boyd, 2003), enabling interactions between experts and interested lay people in co-constructing debates, so facilitating a more egalitarian means of communicating research.

There are also institutional reasons for taking research outside the narrow interests of specialised academics. Most research around the world is publicly funded and so supported by tax-payers who are increasingly seen as having a right to know what's going on in laboratories, on field work and in researchers' offices. Researchers and universities are therefore increasingly requested to translate and proactively communicate their findings to the public. While presentations and blogging are not yet a requirement of national research evaluation frameworks such as the *Excellence in Research for Australia* (ERA), such external measures are expected to become more highly weighted in future. On its website, ERA claims to 'identify and promote excellence across the full spectrum of research activity in Australia's higher education institutions' and about a quarter of impact case studies submitted to the UK's REF in 2014 contained some reference to social media promotion *(*Jordan & Carriganm 2018). This might be accelerated by the recent research which suggests that engaging in public outreach activities is positively correlated to total citations (Kassab, 2019; Pulido et al, 2018).

Another reason why academics are attracted to blogging is the potential they offer for self-expression (Rainie & Wellman, 2012) and rapid publication to a potentially large audience. Writers can offer an alternative version of themselves in blogs which can help increase their visibility and strengthen their reputation (Gregg, 2006). This "academic entrepreneurialism"

Deem (2001, p. 8), whereby researchers use social media to market themselves and their research is especially valued by early career academics looking to accelerate their careers. Blogging, however, is not all plain sailing. Relating academic research to a heterogeneous audience means writers must create a more informal style which makes fewer demands on readers' subject knowledge. The opportunities the genre provides for response can also be challenging for writers. Commenters have a reputation for casual rudeness and Luzón (2011) found extremely adversarial challenges to academic blog posts with disagreement expressed through sarcasm, condescension, challenging questions and insults.

While some academics may be deterred by the potential risk of vitriolic comments, academic blogs remain a genre which appeals to many scholars seeking to widen their readership and broaden their reputations. It has also attracted the attention of applied linguists attempting to describe the place of the blog in the academic firmament. Blogs are interesting to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) researchers as they exhibit interdiscursivity. They co-exist with traditional scholarly genres and resemble popular science journalism while drawing on features of research articles, conference talks and social media discourses (Grafton, 2009; Kuteeva & Mauranen, 2018). This hybridity is a consequence of the particular functions it is called on to perform in a new rhetorical context. As Todorov and Berrong (1976, p. 161) point out:

> 'a new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination.'

By breaking down boundaries between public and private discursive practices, blogs merge and blend different interpersonal strategies which help construe immediacy, affectivity, shared goals, and social support.

Applied linguists have therefore sought to describe the distinctive characteristics of academic blogs, focusing on interactive patterns (Luzón, 2013, 2018), metadiscourse structuring (Author 1 & Author 2, 2020), discourse pragmatics (Herring et al. 2013) and text recontextualisation (Author 1 & Author 2, 2019). Luzón's (2018) study, for instance, found that the use of non-standard language enables research groups to more effectively share information, while Bondi (2018) stresses the importance of intertextuality in conveying information in economic blogs. These studies reveal some of the ways writing in a new

context for a new audience have brought about in reshaping academic interactions for readers outside their professional community.

2.2 3MT presentations

Like academic blog posts, three-minute thesis presentations seek to report research to new audiences outside the speaker's specialism. Originating at the university of Queensland in 2008, it is now held as an annual competition for PhD students in 86 countries and over 900 universities worldwide. As the name suggests, it challenges doctoral students to compress their research into a 3-minute speech that can be understood by an intelligent audience with no background in the research area and with only a single static slide for support.

The idea behind the genre is a desire to correct a perceived overemphasis on post-graduate writing and to better prepare students for future academic or non-academic careers where they will need to interact with non-experts (e.g., Feak, 2016). This, then, is an opportunity for students to cultivate their academic presentation and research communication skills by effectively showcasing their PhD and explaining it effectively to a live non-specialist audience of judges, academics and fellow students. Speakers are advised to deliver their speech with passion and enthusiasm in order to resonate with the diverse audience but without trivialising the topic, reducing it to entertainment, or being condescending (Ferguson & Davidson, 2014; Mewburn, 2012). The 'Three Minute handbook' of the University of Edinburgh[1], for example, counsels students to observe four main judging criteria: comprehension, content, engagement and communication. That is to say, speakers need to present their research clearly and avoid jargon, to be appropriate to a non-specialist audience, and to describe the impact and results clearly and in a logical sequence. The handbook also makes the point that speakers must present their research engagingly with a confident stance, to hook and maintain the audience's attention.

This, then, is a real-world context with consequences for success, as not only are cash prizes and prestige attached to winning, but videos of the performances are often uploaded to university websites and shared by students. The audience itself, especially for finals, is

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[1] The University of Edinburgh Three Minute Thesis Handbook website address:
http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Postgraduate/PhD_researchers/3MT%20Handbook%20_V4.pdf

usually substantial and often fills a hall. The pressures to perform well are considerable, although the context is perhaps less fraught than for bloggers. The 3MT audience is relatively more predictable, less diverse, and more supportive than those who read blogs. Instead of potentially comprising interested lay people as well as a diverse array of scholars, it is made up of an educated group of academics and fellow graduate students without specialist knowledge of the topic. It also lacks the incipient hostility of the anonymous blog audience as the genre lacks a feedback mechanism, with no opportunities for questions or comments after the presentations. We also have to remember that the genre is situated in a formal competition context with judges, announcements and the paraphernalia of institutional seriousness, making this a novel rhetorical context (Hu & Liu, 2018) which encourages speakers to give the best performance they can muster.

Like blog posts, however, 3MT presentations are hybrid texts which seem to embrace features from other academic genres such as seminars, lectures, PhD defences and conference presentations (e.g., Crawford Camiciottoli, 2004; Polo, 2018; Swales, 2004). Unlike academic blogs, however, 3MT presentations have attracted little research attention and we know of only Hu and Liu's (2018) paper on the topic. This sets out the typical move structure of the genre and suggests that the rhetorical patterns reflect the dominant knowledge-making practices of different fields observed in written texts (e.g., Author 2, 2004). These interdiscursive linkages, then, contribute to a genre which is both informational and appealing, disciplinary and popular. For presenters, no less than for bloggers, individuals must assess their audience, what they know, what they are likely to find interesting, and what needs to be done to draw them along with the exposition. The fact that this is a different mode, with different audience characteristics and a different context, means that speakers and bloggers have to find different ways to interact and engage with their audiences.

3. Engaging audiences
Like all texts, academic discourses are structured to evoke affinity and engagement (Author 2, 2004; Swales, 2004). They are the ways writer/speakers' seek to achieve particular purposes, whether to persuade, inform or encourage action, and they can do this only with the consent of their audiences. Text producers need to ensure that their reader/hearers can follow their argument, comprehend the message, and be persuaded by its validity and this requires the willing participation of an active addressee. Academics need to be aware of their

audiences' knowledge and expectations, acknowledge their interpersonal concerns and recognise their possible doubts and processing difficulties. This involves, in part, adopting interactional positions to bring them into the text and head off their possible objections. This set of rhetorical strategies is collectively referred to as engagement (Author 2, 2005) and concerns the ways writer/speakers construe and position their readers. It goes without saying that engaging familiar audiences, from within one's own research group or specialised field, will be easier than addressing one composed outside these groups and becomes harder the more uncertain or heterogeneous this audience becomes.

The online environment in which academic blogs operate allows this unknown audience of experts and lay people to not only read but also respond to the text. Engagement is a crucial feature of this uncertain, and potentially critical, environment as an ability to build a relationship with readers is a key component of successfully managing readers and bringing them to agreement. Some researchers have been drawn to the ways bloggers align with readers in this way. Luzón (2011), for instance, found that both affect and conflict are construed through discursive strategies such as affectivity, in-group cohesiveness, group exclusion and confrontation. She also analysed the strategies used by bloggers to tailor information to specific reader groups (Luzón, 2013). Author 1 & Author 2 (2020) suggest that the ways writers engage their readers in blogs is influenced by disciplinary conventions. Similarly, the engagement choices writers make when recontextualising the content of their previously published research articles as blogs show considerable sensitivity to engaging different types of readers (Author 1 & Author 2, 2019).

This interest in reader relationships, however, is mainly confined to the written mode and has not yet extended to genres such as lectures, seminars or 3MT presentations. This is not to say that research has completely overlooked how speakers deliver presentations to align with a live audience in some monologic academic spoken discourses. Aguilar (2004), for example, found that speakers in peer seminars use knowledge of their audience's expertise in the topic to moderate the degree of informality and how far they adopt a personal tone. Polo (2018) examined conference presentations and found considerable use of the engagement feature *you* compared with research articles. This feature helped speakers to engage hearers by portraying them as equals capable of participating in the discussion. Liu et al (2017) found that sentences with speaker self-mention and second person pronouns are most likely to generate

audience applause in TED talks. To our knowledge, however, no research has focused on engagement in 3MT presentations.

We address this oversight here. As we have noted, the fact that both academic blog posts and 3MT presentations, despite the different modes, genres and addressees involved, seek to take research to a wider audience. This not only makes them challenging genres for writers and speakers, but also interesting arenas for rhetorical research. A comparison of their engagement patterns can shed light on interactive processes in academic communication and illuminate something of the genres themselves.

In this paper, we follow Author 2 (2005) in understanding the term 'engagement' as the ways "writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognising the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to their interpretations" (Author 2, 2005, p. 176).

Engagement, then, is about affiliation and involving readers in the text to both aid comprehension and finesse persuasion. His taxonomy of the features commonly used to achieve this (Author 2, 2005) has been widely used to analyse academic texts such as research articles, student essays, PhD dissertations and academic blogs (e.g. Jiang & Ma, 2018; McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012; Author 1 & Author 2, 2020).

This dialogic awareness is most overtly indicated by explicit reference to readers; asking them questions, making suggestions or addressing them directly (Author 2, 2001). Specifically, the make these connections by the use of:

- **Reader mention**[2] to bring readers into a discourse, normally through second person pronouns *such as you, your* or inclusive *we.*
- **Directives** to instruct the reader, mainly expressed through imperatives such as *let us, note* and obligation modals such as *should, must*.
- **Questions** to invite collusion by addressing the reader as having an interest in an issue and a willingness to follow the writer's response.

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[2] As we have said, engagement research has mainly focused on written texts, but we use the familiar term 'reader mention' here to conveniently refer to all addressees.

- ***Appeals to shared knowledge*** to request readers recognize something as familiar or accepted such as *obviously, of course*.
- ***Personal asides*** to comment on what has been said, adding to the writer-reader relationship *(by the way…)*

Together they reveal something of how writers directly address readers to develop their arguments and build interpersonal solidarity. However, as we have noted, the model has principally been applied to written discourse, and it is unclear whether speech employs the same features. Comparing blogs with the 3MT genre, then, seeks to widen the model to analyse spoken academic discourse and compare use between the two modes.

4. Methods and procedures

4.1 The corpora

To compare how bloggers and 3MT presenters align with their audiences we compiled two corpora of 65 blog posts from the LSE Impact Blog website and 65 3MT presentations, both from social sciences. To avoid the idiosyncrasies often associated with personal websites, the posts were selected from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Impact Blog website[3]. Launched in 2010, this was one of the earliest venues, and is now one of the world's most influential and prestigious academic blogging hubs. Today it is a major forum for scholars seeking to maximise the impact of their research in subjects like policy, society and education. Each post has a limit of 1000 words and submissions are reviewed by the editors to ensure novelty, interest and readability and are generally published on the site within 2 weeks after they revision. The audience, according to the website, is mainly comprised of researchers, higher education professionals, policymakers, research funders, students and the interested public, with more than 70,000 unique readers each week.

We had four criteria for selecting the posts. They:
1) were published between 2013 and 2020 to ensure currency
2) were written in English
3) were written by different authors
4) discussed or reported research rather than addressed social or political issues.

Finally, we reviewed the blog posts chronologically, extracting every nth blog in texts per year in each discipline between 2013 and 2020.

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[3] LSE Impact Blog: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/

The 3MT corpus was transcribed from videos posted on public domain sites such as YouTube, threeminutethesis.org and university websites. We ensured that the selected presentations exemplified the key features of the genre such as the time limit, live audience and the use of only one static slide. Our criteria were that the 3MT presentations

1) were presented between 2012 and 2020 to ensure currency
2) were presented in English
3) were presented by PhD students
4) were the top three finishers of university sponsored competitions to ensure consistency of quality
5) belonged to social sciences fields to ensure consistency with the blogs

The stratified random sampling was used to reduce this to 65 which were then transcribed by the first author.

Overall, 65 blog texts of 69,256 words and 65 3MT presentations of 28,059 words were collected (see Table 1). We believe this difference in the word counts had little influence on our results as the number of texts in each corpus was the same and we standardised the feature counts to 1,000 words.

Table 1. Corpus size and composition

	Number of texts	Total number of words
Academic blog posts	65	69,256
3MT presentations	65	28,059
Total	**130**	**97,315**

4.2 Coding and analysis

The two corpora were searched for Author 2's (2005) list of some 320 common engagement features with the aid of AntConc (Anthony, 2018) and additional items were added after a thorough reading of the data. Next, all retrieved items were concordance and manually checked to ensure that each performed the engagement function it was assigned. Agreement was reached by each author independently coding a 30% sample of each corpus. An inter-rater agreement of 96% was achieved through discussion. Intra-reliability tests were also conducted by the first author re-categorising 20% of the cases two weeks after the initial coding with full agreement between the two. Finally, the frequencies of each engagement

feature were calculated after normalising the results to 1,000 words to allow for cross-corpora comparison. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (version: IBM SPSS Statistics 24) was used to determine the statistical significances of results using a Student's t-test. The results are discussed in the following sections.

5. Engagement: overall results

Overall, we found 793 features in the blog posts and 954 in the - much shorter - 3MT presentations. This amounted to 11.44 engagement items per 1,000 words in the blogs compared with 34 in the 3MT presentations. The details are presented in Table 2. Researchers are clearly conscious of the need to engage with audiences in both genres. It is not surprising to find there are significantly more engagement features in the 3MT presentations than in the blog posts (log Likelihood = 52.98, $p < 0.0001$), with reader mention being particularly favoured with nearly 5 times as many as in the blog posts.

Table 2. Engagement features in the two genres (per 1,000 words and %)

	Academic blog posts		3MT presentations	
	1,000 words	%	1,000 words	%
Reader mention	5.34	46.66	24.02	70.65
Directives	1.80	15.76	2.96	8.70
Questions	2.24	19.55	5.70	16.77
Shared knowledge	1.89	16.52	1.18	3.46
Personal asides	0.17	1.51	0.14	0.42
Total	**11.44**	**100.00**	**34.00**	**100.00**

Table 2 shows that we find more reader mentions, directives and questions in 3MT presentations, although the difference for directives is not significant (log Likelihood = 60.37, $p<0.0001$ for reader mention, log Likelihood = 21.16, $p<0.0001$ for questions and log Likelihood = 2.18, $p< 0.25$ for directives). In contrast, appeals to shared knowledge and personal asides are significantly more frequent in the blog posts (log Likelihood = 22.28, $p<0.0001$ for shared knowledge and log Likelihood = 8.21, $p< 0.02$ for personal asides). These variations can be ascribed to the greater immediacy of the spoken genre and the need to create an urgent sense of affinity and interest in a very short time span. This time

constraint, and the fact academics are trying to attract and connect with a widely disparate audience forces them to employ more interactive language resources, both to highlight the novelty and interest of their research and make it clear to judges. In the following sub-sections, results specific to each engagement feature will be discussed.

6. Reader mention: constructing solidarity

Reader mentions are the most explicit ways of bringing readers into a discourse as they refer directly to them (Author 2, 2005, 2008). They also account for the largest proportion of engagement markers in each corpus. Reference to the reader helps create the proximity of a real and pressing issue and promises to involve the audience in its exploration. In research articles the use of *you* or inclusive *we* is a marked choice and a strong signal of stepping outside the usual boundaries of appropriately formal engagement to make a point (Author 2, 2008). *You*, however, fits more naturally in the faux personal contexts of blogs and 3MT talks where a greater sense of conversational intimacy and solidarity is being sought:

(1) Should **we** be surprised, or concerned? **You** might argue that these situations are what journal editors are for … (BP 40) [4]

(2) How many times have **you** brought groceries home and ended up throwing them out before **you** even have a chance to eat them? (3MT 2)

Table 2 shows that reader mention was far more frequent in 3MT presentations than in blog posts, indicating the higher level of interactivity of the genre, a characteristic consistent with other academic spoken genres such as lectures and conference presentations (Cheng, 2012; Polo, 2018). The real-time, live presentations mean that reader mention plays a more prominent role, creating a sense of shared experience or directing attention to a salient point. There are also differences between the two corpora in the types of reader pronouns used. Table 3 shows that both inclusive first and second person pronouns are significantly more frequent in 3MT presentations (log Likelihood = 35.97, p<0.0001 for we/our/us and log Likelihood= 49.69, p<0.0001 for you/your). Indefinite pronouns are far less common but are more frequent in blog posts (log Likelihood = 5.62, p<0.06).

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[4] BP refers to the blog post corpus and 3MT to the 3MT presentations. The number identifies the text.

Table 3. Types of reader pronouns across genres (per 1,000 words and %)

	Academic blog posts		3MT presentations	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
we/our/us	3.03	56.76	11.01	45.85
you/your	1.78	33.24	12.58	52.37
one/reader	0.53	10.00	0.43	1.78
Total	**5.34**	**100.0**	**24.02**	**100.00**

The greater use of indefinite pronouns in blog posts indicates that some writers prefer a less explicitly direct and personal way of engaging audiences. This sets a more formal and objective tone, perhaps reflecting the fact that academic blogs are heavily influenced by written academic genres (Author 1 & Author 2, 2019, 2020):

> (3) ***One*** can re-analyse existing datasets, ***one*** can collect new data with the same study protocol (a direct replication), or ***one*** can collect new data with a modified study protocol... (BP 30)

As we have said, the preference for both inclusive and second person pronouns in the 3MT genre shows the influence of conversational intimacy, and this is particularly clear in the prominence of second person, with nearly 12 times more cases. Strategic *you*-mentions are more frequent in informal registers (e.g., Biber et al, 1999) and can enhance persuasiveness and strengthen interpersonal bonds by expressing concern with the audience's assumed needs and expectations (Polo, 2018). In blog posts, writers prefer inclusive *we* to *you/your* (see Table 3) as they attempt to involve readers through sharedness to head-off divergent views. Working outside a disciplinary framework and seeking to convince an anonymous and potentially hostile readership, finessing a united approach to matters can be an effective strategy:

> (4) By thinking outside the box, ***we*** can gain important insights into understanding the complexity of policymaking, … (BP 2)

Examining the uses of *you* shows further differences between the two genres. Various functions have been proposed for second person pronouns by those studying conference presentations (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005; Polo, 2018), but we identified 4 main categories in our two corpora. In addition to thanking the audience for attending to their talk,

speakers employed *you* to guide their understanding of ideas and connections in the text, invite the audience to share an interpretation, and to refer to common experiences. Table 4 shows that the uses of *you* to thank audiences, guide understanding, invite a shared interpretation and refer to shared experiences were all significantly more frequent in 3MT presentations.

Table 4. Functions of you across genres (per 1,000 words and %)

Functions of you	Blog posts		3MT presentations	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
Thanking audiences	0.00	0.00	2.10	16.80
Guiding understandings	0.25	13.8	3.64	29.00
Inviting shared interpretations	1.10	61.8	2.17	17.30
Referring to shared experiences	0.43	24.4	4.63	36.90
Total	**1.78**	**100.00**	**12.54**	**.00.00**

The formulaic acknowledgement of the audience and judging panel is obviously restricted to the face-to-face genre and occurred in every text. *You*-mention as a way to guide the audience's understanding, however, was over twice as frequent per 1000 words in the 3MT talks. The face-to-face setting allows for far more explicit forms of audience monitoring than in writing (e.g., Polo, 2018) so we find them used more in the presentations. The speakers in our corpus seemed to do this in three main ways, by spelling out what they are doing (5), by directing and guiding the audience's understanding (6) and by inviting them to join a virtual dialogue (7):

> (5) Let me tell *you* a short story. (3MT 19)
>
> (6) So, *you* can kind of think of DNA like a garden hose wrapped around a
> wheel. (3MT 4)
>
> (7) So, which would *you* choose? (3MT 26)

Together they make the presentation more convincing and engaging, helping the audience see what is salient and bring them to the preferred conclusions.

The third function of reader mention, to invite the audience to share the writer/speaker's interpretation of material is found more frequently in the 3MT presentations, while this function accounts for the largest proposition (54.2%) of uses in blog posts. Here *you*-mention

helps craft agreement and convince the audience of the argument's validity. The underlying message is that the data indisputably support the writer or speaker's views and this should be clear to the audience:

> (8) *As you can **you** see,* there are both structural and cultural factors which contribute to the gendered outcomes of advancement processes. (BP 7)
>
> (9) ***You*** can also use stakeholder analysis methods to identify relevant policy actors, or more simply by asking ***yourself***: … (BP 5)

Readers here are brought to agreement with the writer by the assumption that there is only one possible interpretation that makes sense, building solidarity with them as intelligent co-constructors of the argument.

The presenters overwhelmingly preferred to engage readers with *you*-mention to claim experiences as familiar to both speaker and hearers. Again, this strategy exploits the spoken mode to insinuate information and ideas are shared through everyday experience. There is, then, an assumption that audiences will bring relevant prior knowledge to the event and this can be used to finesse acceptance of the argument.

> (10) For example, ***you*** may have heard recently about Taylor Swift's outrage when the back catalogue of her albums was sold to another label. (3MT 18)
>
> (11) Each one of ***you*** has an identity form throughout the course of ***your*** life based on what ***you*** have experienced, … (3MT 46)

This, then, is a strategy which can arouse the audience's interest as it draws more on general knowledge

7. Directives: instructing readers

The second engagement feature we studied were directives. These instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer: they therefore help manage the readers' understanding and processing of a text (Author 2, 2002a). They are generally expressed through obligation modals (must, should have to), imperatives (note, consider, imagine), and predicative adjectives expressing the writer's judgements of necessity/importance. Table 2 shows that these were slightly more frequent in the blog posts, but with an insignificant statistical difference (log Likelihood = 2.18, p< 0.25).

The relatively low frequencies for directives results from the fact that they are a potentially risky strategy. While they can closely engage the reader and suggest closeness and the kind

of connection that allows one person to advise another, they can come close to violating the conventional fiction of democratic peer relations in academic discourse. This is particularly true in the competition context, where presenters are aware of violating the positive face of a live audience. Directives which instruct the audience to see things in a certain way may be regarded as too bald-on-record to be a useful engagement strategy. It implies an unequal power relation where the speaker claims the right to instruct hearers to do or see things the speaker's way and, with a panel of judges among the audience, they tend to avoid this. For bloggers, however, directives can be a key element of speaking directly with readers to emphasise points and bring readers closer to agreement (Author 1 & Author 2, 2020):

> (12) First, ***think about*** your immediate network: colleagues, collaborators, supervisors, even friends and family. (BP 5)

> (13) That ***we should also carry out*** replication studies in the humanities follows from the conjunction of two relatively simple facts. (BP 30)

Author 2 (2002a) argues that directive instruct readers to carry out one of three possible actions. They guide readers to another part of the text or to another text using *textual act*s (e.g., *see Smith 1999, refer to table 2*); instruct them how to carry out some action in the real world through *physical acts* (e.g., *open the valve, heat the mixture*); or lead them through a line of reasoning to certain conclusions using *cognitive acts (*e.g., *note, concede* or *consider* some argument). Table 5 shows that physical and cognitive acts were more frequent in the 3MT genre, even though the difference in cognitive acts was not significant (log Likelihood = 12.48, $p < 0.002$ for physical acts and log Likelihood = 0.94, $p < 0.38$ for cognitive acts). The spoken mode, the limitation to one static slide, and the absence of any tables, figures, or citations, mean that 3MT speakers had little need for textual acts. These were, however, relatively common in the blog posts (log Likelihood = 20.97, $p < 0.0001$), as here:

> (14) This, in turn, will increase your chances in grant procedures and foster your career potential (the credibility cycle, ***see figure below***). (BP 20)

> (15) The resulting hIa-based ranking of academics in Economics & Business in the Netherlands (***see Harzing & Mijnhardt, in press for details***) is substantially different from the original ranking …   (BP 27)

Table 5. Functions of directives across genres (per 1,000 words and %)

Functions	Academic blog posts		3MT presentations	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
Textual act	0.36	20.00	0.00	0.00
Physical act	0.78	43.20	2.25	75.90
Cognitive act	0.66	36.80	0.71	24.10
Total	**1.80**	**100.00**	**2.96**	**100.00**

Physical attempt to stimulate some action by the audience, and in the 3MT presentations they seem an effective way for speakers to create immediacy and proximity. The use of more physical directives in this genre is a result of speakers trying to give hearers a clearer sense of how research is conducted and offer more personal accounts of research activities. They are a way of encouraging active involvement with the argument rather than performing an action outside the text:

(16) you ***have to read*** the quoting context straight after he tells David this advice, … (3MT 43)

(17) ***Let's*** first talk about how we speak. (3MT 55)

Finally, cognitive directives require audiences to reflect on, recognise or concede some aspect of an argument (Author 2, 2002). They encourage engagement with the writer/speaker's argument to ensure the viewpoint is understood and, hopefully, accepted. Cognitive directives carry the strongest sense of conviction and the greatest degree of imposition on others and the fact they are slightly more frequent in the 3MT talks is probably related to the greater directness of the spoken mode:

(18) ***Imagine*** that you are sending your transcripts to universities, employers, and scholarship committees, … (3MT 8)

(19) Now, ***think back to earlier*** when you were queuing at the boarding gate. (3MT 36)

As we can see, cognitive directive promotes the audience's reflection on their daily lives or experiences as a means of pulling them along with the argument.

8. Questions: creating involvement

Questions, according to Author 2 (2002b) are the main strategy of dialogic engagement, inviting readers into the discourse as participants and leading them to agreement. Questions allow researchers to move away from a monologue and turn a one-sided exposition into a dialogue, so that questions were significantly more frequent in the 3MT talks than in the blog posts (log Likelihood = 21.16, p<0.0001). It is, then, a perfect rhetorical strategy for speakers in the 3MT competition who must hook the audience within the first 20 seconds and then slowly reel them in within 3 minutes. Questions, then, as in conversation, help manufacture immediacy, intimacy and informality, and here this makes the specialised knowledge more interesting, available and easier to digest:

> (20) *Guess what?* (3MT 5)

> (21) *Does gender matter?* (3MT 33)

Questions in academic blog posts, on the other hand, were largely used to express the writer's confidence in shared interests and to foreground assumptions about the audience's likely understandings:

> (22) *What are the outcomes of this process?* (BP 26)

> (23) *Has this interest produced any consensus on how to ensure policy is backed by evidence?* (BP 1)

We also identified genre variations in terms of the functions the questions served. Here we followed Thompson (1998) in identifying three sub-categories, those used to

- Check comprehension – tags to ensure the audience's understanding of the message, e.g. *OK*? *Right*? *Get it?*
- Evoke audience response – engage by changing a monologue to a dialogue e.g. *what would you do?*
- Seek audience agreement – polar interrogative tags (e.g. isn't it? Wouldn't you?).

Table 6 shows that the seek agreement type was only used in blog posts (log Likelihood = 4.57, p < 0.09) and that the check questions predominate in the 3MT talks (log Likelihood = 4.53, p < 0.09). Bloggers, on the other hand, preferred questions which evoked a response (log Likelihood = 21.07, p <0.0001).

Table 6. Functions of audience-oriented questions across genres (per 1,000 words and %)

	Academic blog posts		3MT presentations	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
Check	0.12	5.16	0.25	4.38
Evoke response	2.05	91.61	5.45	95.62
Seek agreement	0.07	3.23	0.00	0.00
Total	**2.24**	**100.00**	**5.70**	**100.00**

The significantly greater use of check questions in the 3MT talks indicates speakers' sensitivity to the potential knowledge gap with the audience and the need to ensure they are following along. It is also a strategy common in more casual spoken encounters and so adds a degree of informality and closeness to the event. Facing an audience with an uncertain knowledge of the topic, speakers continually checked comprehension, or at least affected to, in order to win support an approval. The opportunity to throw in comprehension checks not only offered speakers access to a feedback loop but also a way to intimate a dialogue:

(24) ***It could happen after any type of stimulating course, right?*** (3MT 13)

(25) ***So, you see predictive mapping is cool, right?*** (3MT 52)

The less use of check questions in the blog posts is largely due to the delayed response time of the medium, but they still occurred as writers seek to acknowledge readers' potential lack of familiarity with topic, but also to create a certain informality in the discussion:

(26) How has this come about? ***Get it?*** (BP 25)

Questions which attempt to evoke a response also fit more naturally into spoken discourse. As Bondi (2018, p.4) observes, by explicitly eliciting responses via questions, writers can promote 'not just polylogues or multi-party conversations, but interwoven polylogues'. We also find that questions which seek to arouse a response in the 3MT presentations are often combined with direct reader mention to help construct a more interactive discourse:

(27) ***How do we face climate change?*** (3MT 50)

(28) ***So, what do you do?*** My dissertation explores this problem by examining… (3MT 28)

These examples illustrate how questions can engage the audience and make them feel that their personal experience or views count. This also seems to attract some bloggers, although

this less directly interactive environment means they are far fewer and are more often used to guide readers through the argument, sometimes, as in (30), as sub-heads:

> (29) ***And how are these outcomes achieved?*** (BP 26)
>
> (30) ***How to develop a conceptual foundation?*** (BP 4)

Finally, questions which engage the audience by requesting their agreement with a statement are rare in our corpora and do not occur in the 3MT presentations at all. Essentially, these questions function to pull an audience into the discourse by ostensibly displaying an interest in its position on a topic. However, seeking agreement by following a statement with a tag question is a particularly pushy form of engagement as it represents a direct attempt to influence the reader's thinking. Thompson (1998) points out this type of question applies pressure on the audience to agree with the speaker and so carries a considerable face threat, especially when used to seek agreement for a controversial point. Author 2 (2002b) similarly observes that seeking agreement tags almost never occur in research texts as they can be seen as an overt display of authority. In a face-to-face situation it is particularly invasive and so speakers seem to steer clear of using it. Some bloggers, however, are prepared to take the risk of alienating their audience by gambling on the faux proximity these questions create:

> (31) ***Policymaking is a complex process, isn't it?*** (BP 2)

Here we see writers using questions to bring readers onside by asking them to agree with a statement. The risk of, course, is that the audience will resent the claim for greater authority this move makes and chose to challenge it.

9. Remaining engagement features

The remaining two features have relatively low frequencies in the 3MT corpus and only appeals to shared knowledge make a significant contribution to engagement in the blog posts. The rationale for this strategy is the idea that readers can only be brought to agreement with the writer by building on what is already implicitly agreed, and that by explicitly referring to this agreement writers progress their case. In research articles writers can draw on shared knowledge to construct themselves and their reader as members of the same discipline Author 2, 2001), but in blogs writers are not usually addressing a homogeneous community but intimating sharedness to bring readers on board, flattering their knowledge of the topic, and moving them towards agreement. For many bloggers appealing to the readers assumed familiarity with the background of a topic and wider everyday understandings, helps to

recruit them as cooperative participants:

> (32) That **obviously** means we can identify stakeholders who are affected by
> such topics. (BP 4)
>
> (33) The reason, **of course**, is that these comments are free of the constraints
> and specificities of a closed question. (BP 45)

The strategy thus moves the focus of the discourse away from the writer to shape the understandings of the reader.

This explicit manoeuvring of the reader into acceptance of the claim is perhaps too transparent a strategy in the 3MT competition as it assumes that the audience already knows, or more often, can be led into accepting, something as shared with the speaker. For novice academics this foregrounding of a common frame for seeing the world may be a difficult ploy to pull off. Not only may they misjudge the audiences' ability to recover shared understandings, but a misstep may mean that hearers will refuse to go along with the strategy and see it as a cheap rhetorical ploy. It is also a strategy which takes precious time from the forward momentum of the argument as hearers pause to consider the extent to which they are prepare to accept the assumption as an inescapable fact, and this is time that there is precious little of to spare. So when shared knowledge is appealed to, speakers are less likely to rely on logical reasoning and more likely to refer to the routine conditions under which statements are accepted as valid. Example such as these are more common:

> (34) I find that this effect is driven by **a common perception** of how easy it
> is to move with their device. (3MT 34)
>
> (35) But if you are like me and you spend a lot of time with these around
> worms, you will find this is not **normally** thought to be possible. (3MT 56)

The final engagement feature, personal asides, are interruptions to the argument which allow writers to address the audience directly by offering a comment on what has been said (Author 2, 2005). The inserted comments in parentheses in this example, for instance, are not directly related to developing the ongoing text, but an attempt to pause the discussion and focus on the writer-reader relationship:

> (36) Even if the latter is true (**there are worries here though: why would
> multiple valid answers not count as multiple truths?)**, that doesn't
> disqualify the first point: … (BP 30)

Such asides take a certain amount of panache and confidence to pull off and this may explain why the graduate 3MT presenters were reluctant to use them. When asides did occur, they did not impose on the reader with a witticism or confident commentary, but were succinct and stuck closely to the script:

> (37) ***By the way, I believe my work is important because it directly addresses questions about global food security***. (3MT 3)

Asides, however, are more common in blog posts, although the numbers are still small. Here they borrow from research articles and conference papers, presenting information about the self-confidence of the author as much as evoking a shared frame for understanding, as here:

> (38) Policymaking has, on many occasions, been likened to making sausage ***(you'll like it better if you don't watch how it's made too closely)***. (BP 5)

Academic blogs provide writers with more space for the authors personal views, although the main aim is to create a common bond with the reader.

10. Conclusions

We have explored how academics engage their audiences in two new, but rapidly growing genres which seek to take research to audiences beyond the narrow confines of specialists. To do this, both 3MT presenters and bloggers have to find new ways of informing and persuading a more diverse audience of their research. An important aspect of this recontextualisation process involves making language choices which are both more egalitarian than in conventional academic genres and which exhibit greater sensitivity to the diverse views and background knowledge of their audiences. The engagement devices we have discussed in this paper therefore show how academics' rhetorical choices help create a favourable environment for this, moving away from choices they are familiar with in research articles, conference papers and theses to index very different rhetorical contexts.

The results indicate that 3MT presenters used more engagement resources overall and especially those features which sought to bring audiences into the discussion by mentioning them explicitly, which directed them to think in certain ways, and which addressed them with questions. Academic bloggers, on the other hand, emphasised shared knowledge more frequently and offered more parenthetical commentary. Mode and context help account for these differences. As a spoken genre delivered in a time-constrained, face-to-face competitive

context, 3MT talks encourage a more urgently persuasive and intimate style of argument, drawing on conversational as well as academic registers. Speakers must quickly hook their hearers and then keep them involved throughout. Bloggers are similarly trying to promote shared interpretations and persuade readers that their interpretations are valid, but they are able to take their time to spell out their arguments. They are, moreover, conscious that they are working in a potentially hostile medium where a false step can have serious face-threatening consequences.

Our study is not without limitations, of course. It focuses only on texts from the social sciences and more research can be done by exploring engagement patterns in other disciplines. The fact that bloggers and presenters are members of particular academic communities and are offering their research from those backgrounds would strongly suggest that these genres are likely to reflect disciplinary conventions. An examination of the disciplinary differences has the potential to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of these new academic genres. We are also aware that engagement might be promoted through tone, facial expression, posture and gesture which are not available to us in this paper. There is, however, uncertainty about the extent of this and some research suggests that non-verbal features only temper an audience response rather than sway it (Nagel et al. 2012; Jackob et al. 2016). Future work might extend the engagement framework to incorporate these multimodal elements of spoken genres to provide a fuller picture.

We hope, however, that our work has shed some light on the engagement patterns used in these genres and how interpersonal resources are differently employed to meet different exigencies. We also believe that our description of these resources have implications for graduate students and other scholars who are seeking to take their work to audiences beyond those of research articles and conference papers. As a result, we believe our findings may be of interest to academics wishing to make the transition to public engagement activities such as those working in Professional Services within Higher Education like Researcher Developer Managers and Librarians. We also see benefits for teachers of academic writing and speaking in helping to raise students' genre awareness and providing them with effective strategies to participate in these genres. The results, then, might help teachers scaffold students' analysis of genre exemplars to develop a stronger rhetorical awareness of both blog posts and 3MT talks. By using examples of these texts learners can be guided to focus on salient features and their potential impact of audiences and better understand how it is

possible to create, rather than simply respond to, contexts through language.

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