Stance in academic blogs and three-minute theses

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Abstract:

This paper reports a cross-genre study of how academics show authorial stance in two increasingly popular but underexplored academic genres: academic blogs and Three Minute Thesis (3MT) presentations. Based on a corpus of 75 academic blogs and 75 3MT talks from social sciences, we explore how academics represent themselves and their research to non-specialist audiences in two very different contexts. We found that the 3MT presenters used more stance resources and took stronger positions, largely by indicating certainty and creating a more visible authorial presence. Academic bloggers, on the other hand, preferred to downplay their commitment and highlight affect. The variations are explained in terms of mode and context, especially the time-constrained and face-to-face competitive nature of the spoken genre and the potential for critical feedback in the blogs. The findings demonstrate the salience of stance in the two genres and role of context in academic communication. It has important implications for scholars who are seeking to take their work to new audiences in perhaps unfamiliar genres.

Keywords: academic blogs; 3MT presentations; stance; interaction; context

摘要：本文从跨语类视角系统探究了学术博客和三分钟学术演讲中立场观点元话语资源的使用差异。基于来自社会科学领域 75 篇学术博客和 75 篇三分钟学术演讲的自建语料库，探讨了作者如何在两种截然不同的语境中向非本专业领域受众展示自身立场及研究工作。我们发现：三分钟学术演讲者使用了更多的立场表达元话语资源，增强了话语表达的肯定性，能更鲜明地表明自身立场；学术博客作者则倾向于使用模糊语，突出其情感态度。从体裁及语境角度分析了上述差异产生的原因，例如：特定时间限制、口语体裁中面对面交际的即时性特征、博客中的批评性反馈因素等。研究结果揭示了两种新型学术语篇体裁中作者立场表达的特征以及语境的重要作用，相关成果对研究者利用新型学术语篇体裁向不同背景读者呈现研究工作具有重要的实践指导意义。

关键词：学术博客；三分钟学术演讲；立场表达；交际；语境

1. Introduction

Academic discourse is argumentative. It is not enough for writers or speakers to describe their results as a neutral presentation of facts because science has no voice to speak for itself. Research findings have to be interpreted, explained and argued for by human actors. Writers/speakers, in other words, must take a stance. The way that they present themselves to their audiences and the positions they take to their topics are perhaps as important as the findings themselves in successfully persuading others of their claims. These interactional and evaluative positions are referred to as stance: the writer/speaker's expression of epistemic assessment, personal attitudes, and textual presence (Hyland, 2005, 2006).

The role of stance in constructing social relations is now widely recognised, with a burgeoning literature demonstrating its significance in a range of academic genres from journal articles to research reports and undergraduate essays (e.g., Crosthwaite et al., 2017; Hyland & Guinda, 2012; Lancaster, 2016). How it works in less established textual forms is relatively unknown, however, and this is the gap we address in this paper. Here we turn our attention to two genres which perhaps best represent the modern academy with its dual emphasis on competition and public visibility: the three-minute thesis presentation (3MT) and the academic blog. The former is a spoken genre designed to pit postgraduates against the clock and each other to demonstrate their verbal and oratorical skills; the latter a written form through which academics are encouraged to promote themselves and their work to wider audiences.

Both are hybrid, or interdiscursive, texts, involving generic repurposing of an original (Hu & Liu, 2018; Zou & Hyland, 2019). They both draw on scholarly and more informal genres to suit new contexts and audiences and both require scholars to construct alternative ways to present themselves and their work. However, the distinct modes, purposes, contextual constraints and target audiences lead to different stance positions. In this paper we explore these differences. Using Hyland's (2005) stance model, we compare key stance indicators in 75 blog posts and 75 3MT presentations to address the following questions:

   (1) How do academic bloggers and 3MT presenters manage the presentation of stance?
   (2) What similarities and differences are there in the use of stance features in the two genres?
   (3) How can we account for these differences?

In answering these questions, we hope to shed new light on the phenomenon of stance, its role in academic persuasion and how it is accomplished in very different interactional contexts. This exploration should be of interest to those interested in how scholars build convincing arguments and maintain interaction with new audiences.

2. Academic stance

There is no 'faceless' discourse as we always take some position to what we say, even if we present it in an impersonal and objective way. Presenting a self, by standing in relation to our arguments, community and interlocutors, is central to communication. Successful academic writing, for example, depends on both the writer's personal assessments of the likelihood that something is true, or at least plausible, and the ability to get readers to believe this. Writers seek readers' agreement that claims are significant, original and believable and they do this by positioning themselves in relation to their arguments and audience. That is to say, stance involves positioning towards some content and proximity to the expectations of an audience, displaying personal and community sensitivities. According to Hyland (2005, p. 176), stance includes features by which writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions and commitments. It is a writer-oriented, attitudinal dimension of interaction and concerns how academics stamp their personal authority or perspectives on their arguments.

Stance is not exclusively individual but expresses a writer's socially defined persona, the 'created personality put forth in the act of communicating' (Campbell, 1975, p. 394). Based on the view of writing and speaking as social engagement, Hyland (1999) takes it to have three main components: evidentiality, affect and relation. *Evidentiality* relates to the writers/speakers' expressed commitment to the truth of the propositions they present and indicates the degree of confidence in what is said; *affect* concerns the writers/speaker's personal and professional viewpoint or assessment of matters in the discourse; and *relation* refers to a writer's discursive construction of relations with audiences and the degree of intimacy or remoteness.

Four resources are available for users to adopt these functions and stamp their personal authority onto arguments (Hyland, 2005):
- Hedges withhold complete commitment to a proposition and open a discursive space allowing others to dispute interpretations.

- Boosters help writers/speakers present their work with assurance and shut down alternative voices.
- Attitude markers indicate affective, rather than epistemic, attitudes to propositions, conveying surprise, agreement, frustration and so on.
- Self-mention is the writers/speaker's intrusion in the text through use of first-person to emphasise their contribution.

Together these features reveal how writers elaborate their positions and project an authorial stance to their material and audiences, soliciting support, expressing collegiality and displaying competence.

3. Stance: significance and contextual sensitivity

Stance has been shown to be a key component in various written academic genres such as undergraduate essays (Aull & Lancaster, 2014), theses (Charles, 2006), abstracts (Hyland & Tse, 2005) and research articles (Hyland, 2012) as well as in disciplines as diverse as Geology (Dressen, 2003), pure maths (McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012) and art-history (Tucker, 2003). It has also been proved to play a crucial role in spoken discourses such as TED talks (Scotto di Carlo, 2014), conference presentations (Webber, 2005) and university lectures (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015).

How these stance features are conveyed, and their frequency, varies by context, of course, and a considerable literature has addressed the ways the conventions of author presence differ across time (e.g., Hyland & Jiang, 2016), discipline (e.g. Hyland, 2005; Bondi, 2005), and genre (e.g., Crosthwaite et al, 2017). Stance features are also sensitive to whether the audience comprises experts or lay people, as when research reported in academic papers is recontextualised as popular science articles (e.g. Hyland, 2010), TED talks (Scotto di Carlo, 2014) or blogs (Zou and Hyland, 2019).

In academic spoken texts, Webber (2005) shows that conference presentations in medicine contain significantly more stance markers than the articles in the same field, suggesting that these features help participants to maintain an atmosphere of cooperation and interactivity. Examining TED talks in which authors rework their scientific speeches for a lay audience, Scotto di Carlo (2014) found that speakers used stance features to negotiate their role as experts and establish a closer relationship with their listeners. The

use of evaluative and emotive adjectives, for example, helped demonstrate the involvement of the speaker and inclusive pronouns encouraged the direct involvement of listeners, thus overcoming the 'expert/audience barrier'. Stance features also play an important role in EAP classes and academic lectures (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015), with higher frequencies in the former, where they play a crucial role in negotiating classroom tasks for students still learning the language. Yang (2014) found some disciplinary variation in the use of stance in the British Academic Spoken English corpus of university lectures and seminars while Poos and Simpson (2012) found that hedges, in particular, help speakers negotiate a balance between authority and concession in academic spoken genres.

In sum, stance is a pervasive feature of conventional academic genres, allowing writers/ speakers to demonstrate a collaborative orientation to certain norms of engagement with particular audiences, and varying by time, community, genre, audience and mode. The literature, however, principally concerns itself with a limited number of conventional, mainly written, genres with recognized norms and relatively well-defined audiences. In this paper we seek to extend our understanding of stance by exploring its role in two less established, and certainly less studied, genres. Academic blogs and 3MT presentations fit this bill, moving research beyond specialists to wider and perhaps less defined audiences.

4. Blogs and presentations: stance-taking in two contemporary genres

In many ways, these two genres exemplify key aspects of the contemporary academy. Blogs and 3MT talks can be seen as representing both the new drive to 'democratise' research by sharing it with members of wider society and the competitiveness which infects every level of university life. These are genres where visibility and rivalry predominate, having replaced more virtuous values of modesty and cooperation. More positively, of course, universities are able to promote their brand, researchers their work, and students their presentation skills while academic research is reworked for new audiences who, perhaps, paid for it in the first place through their taxes. So, at the same time institutions are discarding their ivory tower image, scholars are finding new ways to reach wider publics.

4.1 Academic blogs

Blogs are perhaps approaching 'established' status in the constellation of academic genres, with leading sites having been around for some 20 years now. This is a venue which allows academics to promote their research and their visibility beyond the narrow confines of disciplinary specialists (e.g., Kurteeva, 2016). The affordances of the web, such as hyperlinking to related work, filtering tools for searching and accessing material, and the immediacy of reader response, make an attractive format for academics seeking to put their work into the wider world and get feedback on it (e.g., Herring et al. 2013). Blogs have the potential to reach a large and diverse audience and are therefore said to be a more egalitarian means of promoting research to non-specialists (Gross & Buehl, 2015; Mahrt & Puschmann, 2014). In addition, the feedback channel offers greater possibilities for promoting dialogue on an issue, giving experts and lay people alike the chance to respond.

Being more accessible, both rhetorically and financially, than conventional academic genres, academic blogs offer a new venue for researchers to convey their judgements, signal assessments, promote their claims and seek audiences' approval for their arguments. This has attracted discourse analysts seeking to understand the distinctive characteristics of academic blogs, particularly their interactive patterns (Luzón, 2013), metadiscourse structuring (Zou & Hyland, 2020), pragmatic impact (Herring et al. 2013) and recontextualisation (Zou & Hyland, 2019). Luzón's (2011) study, for instance, found both affect and conflict construed through discursive strategies such as affectivity, in-group cohesiveness, group exclusion and confrontation. Mauranen (2016) emphasised the role of metadiscourse in academic blogs to increase readers' reflection on language and sharedness. 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.

Some of these studies have touched on authorial stance in blogs. Zou and Hyland (2019), for example, examine the ways writers use stance features to construct a different writer persona and relationship with their readers when recontextualising research articles as blogs. But we still know little about how mode impacts the ways academics present themselves and their ideas in these relatively new, and very different, public arenas.

4.2 3MT presentations

Like academic blogs, three-minute thesis presentations report research to new audiences outside the speaker's specialism. Having originated 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.

3MT talks are similar to blogs in that they challenge speakers' to extend their academic communication skills and translate their research into a compressed format in a language that a non-expert can understand and appreciate. For the PhD students, however, this is a live audience of judges, academics and fellow students who expect to be both informed and interested by the talk. 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). This emphasis can be seen from the judging criteria listed in the 'Three Minute handbook' of the University of Edinburgh: [1]

1. Comprehension: did the presentation help the audience understand the research?
2. Engagement: did the oration make the audience want to know more?
3. Communication style: was the thesis topic and its significance communicated in language appropriate to a non-specialist audience?

This is a real-world event with real consequences. Cash prizes and prestige are attached to winning and the best presentations are uploaded to university websites and shared by students. It is conducted 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. Speakers need to 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 audience itself is generally large and less diverse, and more supportive than blog audiences.

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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

Instead of an unpredictable array of lay people and scholars, it is comprised of an educated group of academics and fellow graduate students without specialist knowledge of the topic. It also lacks the potential hostility of the anonymous blog reader as the genre lacks a feedback mechanism, with no opportunities for questions or comments.

This is a genre, then, which despite some similarities with blogs, employs a different mode, occurs in a more tightly constrained environment, and has different audience characteristics, a different purpose, and a different interactional context. As a result, speakers have to find new ways to express their stance and convey the importance, interest and plausibility of their research. Despite their rhetorical distinctiveness, however, 3MT presentations have attracted little research attention. Hu and Liu's (2018) move analysis of 142 presentations, for example, suggests that the presentations exhibit a conventional expository structure and Carter-Thomas and Rowley-Jolivet (2020) show how speakers draw on a stable cluster of features to recontextualise to tailor information to the audience's knowledge and interests.

Both academic blogging and presenting a thesis in 3 minutes therefore confront scholars with very different rhetorical contexts than those they are familiar with. Because successful academic communication involves taking a position to shape texts to the expectations of particular readerships, we are likely to find stance expressed in very different ways in these genres. A comparison of these stance-taking patterns might illuminate a dimly lit corner of scholarly interaction and contribute to our knowledge of these emerging academic genres.

5. Methods and procedures

5.1 The corpora

To compare how bloggers and 3MT presenters manage their presentation of stance, we compiled two corpora of 75 blog posts and 75 3MT presentations, comparable in size to other studies and large enough to provide sufficient examples of the target features. The corpora were selected from social sciences disciplines to eliminate broad disciplinary influences. The posts were selected from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Impact Blog website[2]. This was established 20 years ago and is now one of

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

the world's most influential and prestigious academic blogging hubs, providing a forum for scholars to maximise the impact of their research in policy, society and education. Each post has a limit of 1,000 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 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.

Four criteria guided our selection of the posts. They:
1) were published between 2013 and 2021 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 2021.

The 3MT corpus was transcribed from videos posted on public domain sites such as YouTube, threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au 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 slide. Our selection criteria were:
1) they were presented between 2012 and 2021 to ensure currency;
2) they were presented in English;
3) they were from competitions sponsored by prestigious universities to ensure consistency of quality;
4) they belonged to social sciences fields to ensure consistency with the blogs.

Simple random sampling was used to select the text following these criteria and 75 3MT presentations were then transcribed by the first author.

Finally, 75 texts from each genre were selected as shown in Table 1. Selecting the same number of blogs and 3MTs and standardising counts to 1,000 words nullifies any influence of the differences in word length. It is worth noting that the difference in the word counts of the two corpora are likely to have little influence on our results as the number of texts in

each corpus was the same. More crucially, we were not looking for discourse organising features such as interactive resources (e.g., 'we now turn to' or 'in the next section') which vary according to the length of the text. Instead, we focused on interactional resources in the recontextualization process which are less influenced by text length.

Table 1. Corpus size and composition

	Number of texts	Total number of words
Academic blog posts	75	79,360
3MT presentations	75	32,358
Total	**150**	**111,718**

5.2 Annotation and analysis

The two corpora were searched for Hyland's (2005) stance features using AntConc (Anthony, 2018). The search inventory comprised a general list of common stance features and additional items were added after a thorough reading of the data. Next, all retrieved items were concordanced and manually checked to ensure that each performed the stance function it was assigned (as listed above). A 25% sample was independently coded by each author independently, with an inter-rater agreement of 95% achieved through discussion. Intra-reliability tests were also conducted by each author re-categorising 20% of the cases two weeks after the initial coding with full agreement achieved between the first and second categorisations. Finally, the frequencies of each engagement feature were calculated after normalising the results to 1,000 words to allow for cross-corpora comparison. Statistical significance of the results was determined using a Student's t-test in SPSS (version: IBM SPSS Statistics 24). The results are discussed in the following sections.

6. Stance: results and discussion

Overall, we found 4,995 devices in the blogs and 2,201 in the - much shorter - 3MT presentations. This amounted to 62.94 stance items per 1,000 words in the blogs compared with 68.02 in the 3MT presentations. The details are presented in Table 2. Researchers are clearly aware that they need to convey a stance towards their topic and audience in both genres and that genre influences how they should present their material. It is not surprising, therefore, to find there are more stance features in the 3MT talks than in the blog posts (log Likelihood = 4.86, $p < 0.08$), with self-mention occurring two times more in the talks. This

corresponds with Biber's (2006) finding that academic spoken genres are more heavily stance laden.

Table 2. Stance features across genres (per 1,000 words and %)

	Academic blog posts		3MT presentations	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
Hedges	22.45	35.68	16.16	23.76
Boosters	11.09	17.62	12.27	18.04
Attitude markers	19.42	30.85	16.63	24.44
Self-mention	9.98	15.86	22.96	33.76
Total	**62.94**	**100.00**	**68.02**	**100.00**

Table 2 shows that 3MT speakers generally took a stronger stance, particularly using far more self-mentions (log Likelihood = 37.32, $p < 0.0001$) and slightly more boosters (log Likelihood = 1.52, $p < 0.32$). In contrast, expressing epistemic judgements and attitudes were more frequent in the blogs and the differences were both significant (log Likelihood =21.32, $p < 0.0001$ for hedges, log Likelihood = 7.60, $p < 0.05$ for attitude markers). These variations can be ascribed to the greater immediacy of the spoken genre and the need to present a confident and assured authorial position, conveying strong and definite characterisations. The time constraint and spoken mode thus encourage a relatively more succinct and informal communication, drawing on language to make the speaker' position prominent and indicate greater investment in the value and plausibility of the content. We elaborate on each feature in the following sub-sections.

6.1 Hedges

Hedges are a key feature of academic communication as they function to downplay a writer's commitment to a proposition, modifying its scope, relevance or certainty (Hyland, 2005). The deployment of hedges signals the writers/speaker's explicit intrusion into a text to take a stance by offering an assessment of what is being discussed. They are thus a prudent option which indexes the communicator's willingness to concede to the possible alternative views of the audience. Here, for example, we see how writer/speaker can involve the audience to participate in the judgement being made:

(1) This explains, ***to some extent***, why young women ***would be less likely to***
    study STEM subjects, but not why more advantaged young women seem

to be more resilient to these effects. (BP 6)[3]

(2) The chances are ***probably*** not high this will happen. (3MT 3)

Hedges are significantly more frequent in academic blogs (log Likelihood =21.32, p < 0.0001) and are the most frequent stance resource for bloggers. This is because academic blogs are a more interactive arena than 3MT talks, offering a space to debate issues with an unknown and heterogeneous audience of specialists and outsiders alike, and this interactivity demands caution. The affordance of instant feedback, where readers can respond, publicly, immediately and anonymously, below the post, makes for a potentially fraught environment. Disagreement and hostility are commonplace in online contexts and responders can use impoliteness to convey group allegiance and construct identities which support the position of one group against another (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010). Luzón (2013a), for example, discovered a high incidence of conflictual acts in academic blog responses, extending from mild criticism to sarcasm and more severe bald-on-record disparagement and Zou and Hyland (2020) note a corresponding use of mitigation in academic blogs as a consequence.

In this context, then, hedges signal an awareness of opposing viewpoints and seek to minimize potential criticism; they are a necessary survival strategy:

(3) ***To my knowledge***, no one has asked or answered this question in any discipline, and yet it is an important question. (BP8)

(4) it ***seems*** pointless to focus on assessing how much impact can be attributed to science. (BP 10)

The greater use of hedges in the blogs thus helps avoid the potential risks of over-assertion and attracting critical responses and disagreement. It is difficult for writers to predict the likely response of a heterogeneous readership and so they err on the side of caution and pull their punches by hedging their arguments.

3MT competitions, in contrast, lack this interactive element and the audience is generally supportive, attending as friends, classmates, eliminated 3MT participants and interested others. While often a tense and challenging experience for speakers, the occasion lacks the critical edge of blogging. Speakers use hedges mainly to express speculative judgements

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

and offer some deference to the audience, claiming a suitably restrained and modest demeanour when evaluating statements:

> (5) This *might* explain why more than 30% of the girls in my study
> reported updating their statuses at least once per day. (3MT 6)
> (6) This *may* be a dangerous assumption. (3MT 11)

It is interesting to note that these results differ to those in academic lectures (Hyland, 2009) where hedges tend to be very common. In that context, they help instructors display caution and uncertainty in the information they present. Again, this difference perhaps shows the hybridity of the 3MT talk as a new academic genre.

6.2 Boosters

While hedges tone down commitment or assertiveness, boosters indicate certainty, and perhaps surprisingly given what we have just said, were more frequent in the 3MT presentations. Boosters help remove any doubts about claims and upgrade propositions to emphasise their significance, uniqueness or originality (Hyland, 2005). Therefore, the use of boosters is a valuable rhetorical strategy for speakers in the real-time competition context with a live audience. The spoken mode provides a licence for stronger assertions, enabling the speaker to encourage an implicit analogy with conversational strategies, and is crucial in highlighting importance to an audience which may be unfamiliar with the topic, and unable to recognise the significance of information without the speaker's help:

> (7) So, my research is a *very* practical implication to improve human
> resource management policy and make changing… (3MT 47)
> (8) *Undoubtedly*, we *must* work to fully appreciate the profound value of
> its historic places. (3MT 58)

Boosters therefore play a crucial role in hooking the audience, convincing them of the significance of the research and validity of the arguments.

On the other hand, however, boosters are also a potentially hazardous strategy which runs the risk of attracting criticism and losing the support of an audience. This is particularly so in academic blogs. As we have noted, bloggers are vulnerable to immediate and potentially caustic criticism and so closing down opportunities for disagreement with boosters is often avoided. Bloggers are not only more cautious of using this feature, but also prefer to use what Vassileva (2001) calls 'belief boosters' (9 & 10). These express a higher degree of personal commitment but avoid attributing beliefs to the audience through the shared

assumptions invoked by solidarity boosters (e.g., *in fact, obviously*):

> (9) Although ISI listing is seen by many to imply a quality stamp, ***in our view*** it should not matter where research is published. (BP 27)

> (10) I'm talking about citizen science, and ***I think*** it could transform the terms on which science and society meet. (BP 24)

Belief boosters in these examples allow the writer to state unequivocally that he/she is absolutely convinced of what he/she is saying. They help emphasise the writer's personal commitment but avoid attributing beliefs to the audience shared background knowledge.

We also found both genres were dominated by intensity boosters, which amplify the emotive strength of a statement (e.g., *extremely, amazing*). They comprised three quarters of all boosters in the blogs, for example, where they act to reinforce the importance of the topic or aspect of an argument, rather than the certainty of a claim. As we have noted, bloggers cannot assume that their relatively undetermined readership will go along with them and so are reluctant to always push their assertions too firmly. Rather than use certainty boosters, then, they increase the intensity of their arguments: a strategy in line with their greater use of hedges, particularly plausibility types.

> (11) The results of these studies ***could*** be ***extremely*** useful in closing the gender gap in access to STEM subjects as a whole. (BP 6)

> (12) ***Perhaps*** it has become a central locus of attention in an ***extraordinary*** competitive environment. (BP 58)

3MT speakers are also more inclined to use intensity boosters. For these speakers this helps to highlight their affective response to what they are discussing by drawing on a less formal register, employing the emotional investment of face to face conversation to express their commitments and to connect with listeners so they see the issues as real and vital. This is perhaps more easily achieved because the speakers are, generally, young, enthusiastic and devoted to their topic, carrying the excitement of youth without the burden of disinterest and objectivity expected of more senior scholars. These emotive devices, then, both enhance persuasion through a committed and involved attitude and create greater proximity through conversational rapport with listeners.

> (13) This use of the algorithm promotes individual flexibility because personal support services will ***extremely*** closely match the level of need. (3MT 27)

(14) Robots are designed to push these buttons and when they do it is ***exceedingly***

difficult for us not to feel that is something is actually as someone. (3MT 19)

As we will see in the next section, intensity boosters are often combined with attitude markers, to enhance arguments.

6.3 Attitude markers

Attitude markers express the writer's personal thoughts towards propositional information, conveying surprise, obligation, agreement, importance etc. (Hyland, 2010). Researchers convey an affective appraisal of what they are discussing more often in academic blogs than in 3MT presentations. Both genres are more densely affective than research articles (Zou & Hyland, 2019) where we find the use of affect has fallen in the last 50 years (Hyland & Jiang, 2016). Unlike research papers in many fields, however, the credibility of the writer/speaker and material they present is not constructed through adherence to norms of authorial reticence and the avoidance of explicit affect. Instead, asserting significance through affect helps construct a relationship with readers and strengthens the argument.

In academic blogs the personal and the public are more closely integrated, allowing writers to voice their individual opinions and offer evaluation and commentary (Luzón, 2013a). Bloggers may conceive that their audience may have neither the background to recognise the significance of the material being presented or the willingness to accept it even if they do. The explicit marking of strong attitude helps to correct this, conveying significance and adding weight to judgements. These are not passive mediators disseminating scientific knowledge to a wider audience; they are actors supporting their own positions to shape those of others:

(15) First, it's ***important*** to identify why you want to engage with policy,

and articulate the impacts you hope to achieve. (BP 5)

(16) This is a very ***positive*** finding given the current gender

imbalance found in many aspects of the discipline. (BP 8)

In 3MT presentations, on the other hand, attitude markers had a similar density but represented a smaller proportion of stance overall, largely because of a preference for self-mention. Again, affect was deployed to highlight importance and promote significance to encourage audiences to engage with the topic in a limited time:

(17) The purpose of my research is to provide ***insightful*** data, produced

by easily teachable methods, … (3MT 5)

(18) And my study is *significant* because it addresses the current gap and research literature. (3MT 10)

Once more, this finding contrasts with that in academic lectures. Unlike the 3MT speaker, the lecturer takes a clear stance toward information and often conveys an affective position with the aid of attitude markers (Hyland, 2009).

Our findings show, however, that bloggers and 3MT presenters used attitude markers a little differently. In Table 3 we present the distribution of attitude markers according to the functional categories suggested by Dueñas' (2010). These are used to modify:

- assessment (i.e. acuity, novelty, interestingness, validity, quality)
- significance (i.e. relevance, importance)
- emotion (i.e. emotional judgements).

We can see that assessment (log Likelihood = 16.08, $p < 0.001$) and emotion types (log Likelihood = 3.08, $p < 0.18$) are more frequent in blogs although emotion difference is not significant. In contrast, significance markers are significantly more frequent in 3MT talks (log Likelihood = 6.32, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Functions of attitudinal markers across genres (per 1,000 words and %)

	Academic blog posts		3MT presentations	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
assessment	15.07	77.61	11.47	68.96
significance	2.91	14.99	4.17	25.09
emotion	1.44	7.40	0.99	5.95
Total	**19.42**	**100.00**	**16.63**	**100.00**

The assessment type is overwhelmingly the most frequent, accounting for the largest proportion of attitude marker in both genres. This is because it most clearly conveys the writer/speaker's personal stance and reaction to content which they hope will resonate with the audience. The fact they are statistically more frequent in blogs reflects again the hybridity of the genre, as bloggers juggle academic conventions with a more informal register for non-specialists, striking a balance between detached information, subjective evaluation and interpersonal negotiation. The face-to-face nature of the spoken interactions, with a judging panel watching from the side-lines, on the other hand, may help account for a smaller proportion of evaluation.

(19) Nonetheless, our review did point to some ***promising*** themes and possible ways forward. (BP 1)

(20) Taken together, our results have several ***interesting*** implications, and we conclude with just two. (BP 28)

Both genres are littered with attitude markers assessing information, indicating the writer/speaker's evaluation of the research they are presenting and pointing out to a non-specialist audience what they might find interesting, unusual or valuable. The 3MT presenters are under an added time pressure to get their listeners aligned with the argument and the fascination of the topic. Assessing information with these markers can generate a certain enthusiasm to the live audience by conveying the speaker's excitement. This both attracts them to the topic and helps establish interpersonal rapport:

(21) My research will lead to more ***effective*** and ***efficient*** financial literacy resources targeted to when people need them because… (3MT 43)

(22) So, then it is ***worth*** considering the data on Millennial employees has shown that they're highly educated. (3MT 10)

The bloggers also made more use of the emotion attitude markers to stir the same sentiment in readers as felt by the writer, often to underline what was unusual or unexpected. This also links blogs to more conventional academic genres by creating a gap for the writer's research, although using a different mechanism to that commonly employed in research articles:

(23) But ***strangely***, universities have not explained their operations very well to members of the public. (BP12)

(24) First, the finding that OA can help to negate the gender citation advantage is ***surprising*** in light of previous research on gendered citation effects. (BP 8)

Finally, attitude markers expressing significance were statistically more frequent in the 3MT presentations, again quickly reinforcing the importance and value of the research to non-specialists.

(25) Taken together these findings provide ***important*** implications for charities and their mission to help those … (3MT 34)

(26) And my study is ***significant*** because it addresses the current gap in and research literature and it aims to bridge that gap… (3MT 10)

In the competitive context of the 3MT, the PhD candidates need to highlight the value and rationale of their research to not only persuade hearers, but also impress the judges. The 3MT talks are scripted and well-rehearsed so the use of these significance attitude markers is no accident. They are not careless throwaways but an essential strategy to highlight the implications of the research.

6.4 Self-mention

How we understand writers/speakers and their attitudes to their arguments and readers is heavily influenced by their choice of authorial presence: the extent they intrude into their texts using first person (Hyland, 2004). Table 2 shows that self-mention was far more frequent in the 3MT talks than academic blogs and the difference is statistically significant (log Likelihood = 37.32, p < 0.0001). It is worth mentioning that self-mention **accounted** for the largest proportion (33.76%) of total stance features in 3MT talks and the least in academic blogs (15.86%).

Self-mention, of course, helps scholars to strengthen their credibility and reinforce their role in the research, demonstrating a personal contribution or decision to intervene at a certain point in the argument. It also helps add a reflective dimension to communication and allows the researcher to speak directly to the audience in an unmediated way. With its direct contact and focus on issues of immediate concern to participants, first person is obviously far more common in conversation, with *I* over 16 times more frequent than in academic prose (Biber et al, 1999: 334). It is, then, a key marker of immediacy and informality and its role in creating a sense of proximity helps explain why it is nearly 8.4 times more frequent (per 1,000 words) in the 3MT talks (log Likelihood = 69.31, p < 0.0001).

> (27) *I* want you to think about this. (3MT 41)
>
> (28) How do people just have sex with complete strangers? *I* can't even
> order pizza over the phone. (3MT 6)

The presenters were often adept in reaching out with a personal projection or brief anecdote, creating a climate of relaxed attention which they could then build on to secure attention and perhaps agreement.

I is therefore a good fit for the 3MT context where PhD candidates are seeking to make their presence felt in the discourse to stamp their authority onto their arguments, engage with listeners and present material through personal experience. These results, moreover, are in

line with studies of business presentations (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005), university lectures (Fortanet, 2004) and seminars (Hyland, 2009). Here we see the effect of authoritative reliability which can create where speakers highlight their research role:

(29) And *I* coded these status updates according to the strategies... (3MT 6)

(30) During the past few years, *my* lab is involved through a support from NIH grant to find a new treatment. (3MT 55)

Self-mention was also commonly used to good effect to emphasise the researchers' own contribution to the research and gain credit for taking on an exciting, difficult or important piece of research:

(31) And so, *I* am developing a theory. (3MT 53)

(32) By studying ancient placemaking, *my* project extends our knowledge of human land relationships in the Arctic beyond recent encounters… (3MT 51)

Bloggers also used self-mention but more circumspectly and less than other stance features. We might expect a strong authorial presence in the blogs but we discovered that a personal voice is more likely to be conveyed through other devices, most notably attitude markers, and a judicious use of hedges to soften claims and reduce the chance of critical repercussions. As in academic blogs, disagreement escalates and exchanges get more heated, with a higher frequency of anti-social features (Luzón, 2011; 2013b). The high incidence of conflict in academic blogs stimulates writers to adopt a less intimidating or forceful presence and avoid the potential for personal criticism below the line. Often then, self-mention was not used to assert the truth or usefulness of ideas, but to introduce the actor of the research:

(33) *I* surveyed over 600 students across several disciplines and universities to systematically explore the impact of consuming education on academic achievement. (BP 31)

(34) Consequently, *we* developed a detailed storyline where *we* described the meaning of a specific scene. (BP 4)

We should also mention that the plural forms of self-mention (*we, our, us)* were unexpectedly frequent in academic blogs (see Table 4) and the genre differences are significant (log Likelihood = 16.05, p < 0.001). These account for three quarters of all forms in the blogs, where writers are often reporting jointly conducted research and co-authored

papers, enabling the use of plural self-mention:

> (35) In the context of *our* own research, *we* have recently published
>
> a comprehensive review article that deals with halophytes… (BP4)
>
> (36) Based on *our* findings, *we* argue that replication efforts could be
>
> incentivised by reducing the cost of replication… (BP 29)

3MT presenters, however, stand alone on stage and speak for their own work, so perhaps this form suggests the sense of involvement of supervisors, mentors or peers in their postgraduate programme.

Table 4. Forms of self-mention across genres (per 1,000 words and %)

	Academic blog posts		3MT presentations	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
we/our/us	6.82	68.39	2.91	12.65
I/my/me	2.38	23.89	19.96	88.94
Other	0.77	7.71	0.09	0.40
Total	**9.97**	**100.00**	**22.96**	**100.00**

Importantly, however, this is also a rhetorical decision. Plural forms allow authors to create more distance between themselves and their reporting than *I* and so they soften a more invasive stance. It is possible, then, that bloggers are also following a trend observed in research articles (Hyland, 2001) to use the '*singular we*' as a strategy to claim recognition for work without taking the risk of being criticised.

7. Conclusions

We have explored how academics represent themselves and their work in two new, but significant, genres designed to take research to audiences beyond the boundaries of specialists. To do this, both 3MT presenters and bloggers have found distinctive ways to express their epistemic assessments, personal attitudes, and self-presence. Forced by the demands of specific contextual constraints, these researchers have found new ways of creating interest, conveying conviction, crafting arguments and presenting a persuasive persona. By making careful, and more accessible, language choices, these successful writers/speakers are able to exhibit sensitivity to the diverse views and background knowledge of their audiences.

We found that the 3MT presenters used more stance resources and took stronger positions, largely by indicating certainty and creating a visible authorial presence. Academic bloggers, on the other hand, preferred stance markers which downplayed their commitment and highlighted affect. Mode and context help account for these differences. As a spoken genre delivered in a heavily time-constrained, face-to-face, competitive environment, the 3MT genre encourages a more visible and author-invested stance to align with a disparate audience and convince sceptical judges. Bloggers are also trying to express a distinctive and believable stance but do so with the knowledge that the bar for criticism and intolerance is set very low on the internet. They are conscious of opposing viewpoints and the potential for hostile criticism, which means their stance choices reflect a desire to present views in a less forceful way.

Our study is not without limitations, though. While we hope to have revealed something of stance-taking by social scientists, the study has little to say about the authorial choices of natural scientists. Further research is needed to confirm the disciplinary variations in stance observed in other genres. Nor have we said anything about the potential role of prosody and gesture in conveying stance in these presentations. This is partly due to a desire to use the same analytical framework to compare the two genres and our decision to explore a large number of example texts. Equally, however, we are aware of the uncertainty surrounding the importance of paralinguistic elements in spoken academic genres. While Biber et al (2014) found evidence of prosodic marking in some stance features in a general spoken corpus, most of what we know about the role of prosody comes from experimental research on pairs of speakers (e.g., Roseano, et al, 2016; Mauchand et al, 2020) rather than naturally occurring formal monologues. Other studies suggest that non-verbal features only temper an audience response rather than sway it (Nagel et al. 2012; Jackob et al. 2016). So while the extension of our framework to incorporate these multimodal elements would obviously add detail to the description of 3MT talks, it is unlikely that this would substantially change our results.

Our study, however, has shed light on how academics' rhetorical choices help create a particular stance in these two new genres, offering a comparison with previously studied expert-to-expert discourses. We believe, therefore, that our discussion has implications for those interested in the role of context in academic communication and the possible influence of local variables and constraints on language choices. The study has also shown how the

growth of these new genres has led to a blurring of clear boundaries between scientific and popular registers and, perhaps, also in the borders between members of academic and public audiences (cf. Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2020). By expanding our understanding of the ways academics interact with lay audiences in both spoken and written modes, we hope to have contributed to the literature on stance, on academic interaction, and on the sensitivity of successful language users to new contexts. These contexts, moreover, whether word or time constrained, high-stakes or interpersonally risky, are significantly different from those generally encountered in academic life and demand a heightened awareness of both audience and language.

Finally, we believe our findings may have a pay-off for scholars who are seeking to take their work to new audiences. In advanced level ESP classes, for instance, comparative tasks may be useful, identifying the ways writers seek to achieve particular goals in different contexts, perhaps comparing the two genres we have explored here. Alternatively, teachers might ask students to identify the rhetorical effects of specific forms on our reception of arguments, and then determine how successful these goals were. However our findings are used, we hope to have provided learners and teachers with analyses which can inform strategies for successful participation in new and unfamiliar academic genres.

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