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**CULINARY RECIPES IN ENGLISH AND IN ITALIAN:
AN UPDATE ON THE STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE GENRE
BETWEEN STABILITY AND CHANGE**

ABSTRACT. The ‘culinary recipe’ genre has been investigated in a consistent number of synchronic and diachronic studies. Most of current research believes that they are now a stable genre, especially as regards their generic structure, despite the affordances offered by digital and social media. The present study seeks to address this perspective by comparing two sub-corpora of recipes from food blogs in English and in Italian. The study conducts a quantitative investigation on the generic structural features of the recipes using a version of Swales’ (2004) CARS Model adapted to the purpose. Results show that recipes in both languages show elements of innovation brought by the digital and social media, contradicting claims on the stability of the genre.

KEYWORDS: Culinary recipes. Food discourse. Culinary linguistics. Corpus linguistics. CARS Model.

1. Introduction

Culinary recipes are one of the most studied genres in linguistics. As Section 2 will show, they have been investigated from a wide range of perspectives for their lexico-grammar, their structural and generic characteristics. Scholars agree that since their first attestations in ancient texts, it seems that the genre ‘recipe’ has never encountered much of an evolution mainly due to its prototypical function of giving «instructions on how to prepare a meal» (Görlach, 1992, p. 745). Recipes in English have enjoyed the fortune of having a long strand of

written records in texts since at least the Anglo-Saxon age (cf. Görlach, 1992), to the point that Carroll (1999, p. 27) claims that recipes have always been a «“text-type” for English speakers». This has led scholars to investigate recipes in this language as a genre and to codify their defining generic features and structure. However, if the long-standing tradition of written recipes recorded in manuscripts might be paralleled in other languages as well (e.g., Italian), it is not so for the systematic investigation of the genre, which has so far encountered a limited interest, as is the case of the genre in Italian, as we will see in Section 2.

The present study seeks to address the issue of the actual stability of the genre in the two languages, namely, English and Italian: it aims to assess whether the genre shows the same features already ascertained by the literature, by comparing two sub-corpora of culinary recipes taken from food blogs in the two languages considered. To do so, by means of Swales’ (1990, 2004) CARS model and the UAM Corpus Tool (O’Donnell, 2008), the study examines the structural features of the recipes in the two sub-corpora, one for each language. Results from the quantitative analysis conducted are discussed in order to ascertain if culinary recipes are indeed a stable genre, as believed by existing literature, or if they show some variation depending on the language in which they are written and/or the channel and medium where they are published.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the existing literature which has investigated recipes as a genre in English and in Italian; Section 3 describes the model adopted for genre analysis (Swales' CARS model) and how it has been adapted to the purposes of the present investigation. Section 4 presents the dataset and method of analysis, while Section 5 and Section 6 offer the results of the corpus search and the discussion of the significance in terms of distribution of Moves and Steps in the two sub-corpora. Finally, Section 7 concludes with some final remarks on the limitations of the study and future research.

2. Recipes as a genre: the state of the art

The 'culinary recipe' genre in English has been investigated in a consistent number of studies, considering it from synchronic as well as diachronic perspectives, in historical and contemporary texts and media. The number of studies that have been published on recipes is indeed so large that an exhaustive account would be impossible in the limited space of this paper. However, some of the most relevant contributions to be cited here, because they provide a clear overview of the defining generic structure of recipes, are Norrick (1983) and Norrick (2011) who contribute to the characterisation of recipes not just as

instructional texts but in their storytelling function. Then, Cotter (1997) also helps to understand that some variation in the structure of recipes is due to the author's attention to differences in the audience and the community to which the recipes published in different cookbooks were addressed. Both Carroll (1999) and Görlach (2004) are relevant in their diachronic overview of recipes as text types evolving along with the history of the English language, while Garzone (2017) conducts a study on a number of digital recipes taken from several online sources (food blogs, YouTube, etc.), albeit not organised in a corpus and observed with a more general look at genre theory than the present study; she employs an approach to recipes as 'semi-specialised texts' (cf. Garzone, 2017, p. 40), concluding that – regardless of the channel through which recipes are distributed – the genre shows elements of stability with the generic structure illustrated in Figure 1:

<p><i>Titolo</i></p> <p><i>Introduzione:</i>* offre informazioni concrete su tempi e porzioni, propone osservazioni su ingredienti e procedure, contestualizza la ricetta storicamente, contestualizza la ricetta in situazioni e stagioni.</p> <p><i>Lista degli ingredienti:</i> elenca gli ingredienti semplici o semi-lavorati occorrenti per la preparazione.</p> <p><i>Procedure:</i> elenca le azioni da compiere per preparare la vivanda.</p> <p><i>Informazioni aggiuntive:</i>* offre indicazioni per il servizio, la conservazione e la preparazione in anticipo, dà informazioni nutrizionali e dietetiche, dà indicazioni sul costo della vivanda.</p>
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Figure 1. Generic structure of recipes according to Garzone (2017, p. 45)¹

¹ Lit.: Title/Introduction: it offers practical information on time and portions, it offers observations on ingredients and methods, it contextualises the recipe historically, it contextualises the recipe depending on the situation and the season./List of ingredients: it lists ingredients, raw or semi-processed needed for the recipe/Procedure: it lists the actions to be

The recipe genre is also investigated in translation studies due to the popularity of food-related genres as texts to be translated for professional reasons (Desjardins et al., 2015) or used in translation courses (Baer, 2016). These studies have then concluded that these texts contain not just the instructions for the preparation of a dish, but they are also enriched with personal comments on the preparation by celebrity chefs or food bloggers, who also share their preferences, memories connected to the dish or other kinds of narrative. Therefore, the genre recipe is becoming “a mixed type of informative and expressive text” (Paradowski, 2018, p. 55). Moreover, these studies agree with other linguistic studies believing that – also thanks to the affordances of the new digital and social media – the genre recipe is becoming less conventionalised and increasingly multimodal (Cesiri, 2020).

Unlike the same genre in English, recipes in Italian have received a more limited attention, despite the popularity of the genre as language teaching material as well as in traditional and digital media, as is testified by today’s plethora of cookbooks, TV shows, food blogs, YouTube channels and dedicated social media pages. Cortelazzo (1994) mentions recipes as instructional genres in his overview

performed to prepare the dish/Extra Information: it offers serving information, meal prep and storage, it provides nutritional information, it gives information about the cost of the dish.

of specialised texts, while Miličević et al. (2014) use recipes as case study for the semi-automatic compilation of corpora. Dalla Chiesa (2017) deals with the names of dishes in Italian recipes, and Nitti & Ballarin (2020) use recipes to investigate the use of verbs by learners of Italian as L2. More frequent are studies of recipes as accounts of Italian historiographic periods such as Redon et al. (1998) and Helstosky (2003). However, studies that match the long list of genre theory studies and discourse analyses of recipes in English of the Anglophone tradition could not be found by the present author, not even from a comparative or contrastive perspective with other languages.

3. Genre Analysis: Applying the CARS Model to non-academic texts

The conceptualisation of genre dates back to the 1980s to indicate «a distinctive type or category of literary composition» (Swales, 1990, p. 33). In the following decades, various scholars have applied this notion to non-fictional works. One of these is certainly Swales (1990, 2004), whose seminal contributions have indeed been fundamental in developing what has been called ‘genre theory’ and its application to the investigation of non-literary genres. The concept of genre is now – and in the present study – used to indicate a «distinctive

category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations» (Swales, 1990, p. 33).

The work of Swales has also been fundamental to identify genre systems, their features and development. In particular, the application of the model he developed in the 1990s and revisited in the early 2000s (see Swales 1990, 2004) has enabled researchers to systematically investigate the structural and rhetorical features of new or unfamiliar genres as well as to offer insights into already familiar ones.

In Swales's (1990, 2004) CARS (Creating a Research Space) Model, a text is considered formed by various units ('Moves') and sub-units ('Steps'), which are defined as «discoursal or rhetorical unit[s] that perform a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse» (Swales, 2004, pp. 228-229). Moves and Steps are the sections and sub-sections that constitute the rhetorical structure of a text, in which they perform a specific communicative function. The investigation of recurrent Moves and Steps in a group of texts that share the same communicative purpose might allow accurate definitions of new genres or the assignment of new texts to already established genres.

The basic structure of the CARS model that is most frequently used for investigation and identification of genres can be pictured as found in Swales (2004, p. 141) as follows:

- Move 1. Establishing a territory.
 - Step 1. Claiming centrality,
 - Step 2. Making topic generalization(s),
 - Step 3. Reviewing items of previous research.
- Move 2. Establishing a niche.
 - Step 1A. Counter-claiming,
 - Step 1B. Indicating a gap,
 - Step 1C. Question-raising,
 - Step 1D. Continuing tradition.
- Move 3. Occupying the niche.
 - Step 1A. Outlining purpose,
 - Step 1B. Announcing present research,
 - Step 2. Announcing principal findings,
 - Step 3. Indicating research article structure.

This kind of Move-Step analysis can be applied to any other text, and to Moves and Steps can be assigned different names according to the rhetorical function they have in the corresponding text. This flexibility in how Moves and Steps of a text can be named has determined the great efficiency of this model, now mostly used in the analysis of academic genres (e.g., Choe & Hwang, 2014; Cheng, 2015; Dulgheru, 2022, to name a few), even though the only application to non-academic texts is to be found only in Cesiri (2020) who applied it to other

food-related genres, namely, the About Pages and the Recipes Sections of a corpus of food blogs.

A reinterpretation of the model (Askehave & Swales, 2001) has included the concept of medium of communication and communicative purpose in the analysis of genres, thus accounting for a more complex, multidimensional nature of web-based genres. Therefore, making the model apt to investigate the generic, distinctive features that characterise the rhetorical structure of digital texts. For this reason, the CARS Model has been considered suitable for the analysis of the corpora of recipes in English and in Italian, which are present in food blogs. However, a revised version of the basic model needed to be used. This version was already devised in Cesiri (2020). The study then annotated a corpus of recipes from food blogs in English using a similar methodology to the one employed in the present study and the same software (UAM Corpus Tool; O'Donnell, 2008). The investigation of the structural features of the Recipes Pages allowed the identification of the following Moves and Steps:

- Move 1. Introducing the recipe
 - Step 1. Naming the recipe
 - Step 2. Promoting the recipe's value
- Move 2. Contextualizing the recipe
 - Step 1. Presenting the dish
 - Step 2. Recollecting memories
 - Step 3. Presenting the dish's story
- Move 3. Providing details
 - Step 1: Listing ingredients and essential details
- Move 4. Preparing the dish
 - Step 1. Describing the method of preparation
- Move 5. Providing further details
 - Step 1. Providing serving information
 - Step 2. Describing alternatives
- Move 6. Concluding the recipe
 - Step 1. Taking leave from the readers
 - Step 2. Proposing follow-ups on other media

Figure 2. Revised CARS Model for Recipes (Cesiri, 2020)

This model and the results from the previous study for the recipes in English were used as starting points to investigate the recipes in Italian considered here. The aim was to ascertain whether the same Moves and Steps could be found in these recipes and, if so, whether this is indicative of a new genre, which might, in turn, indicate the evolution of what is otherwise believed to be a stable genre, at least in its generic features.

4. Dataset and methodology

The recipes to be investigated in the present study were extracted from the food blogs listed in Table 1. The left-hand side column lists the food blogs in

English already investigated in Cesiri (2020), while the right-hand side column contains the list of food blogs in Italian purposely considered for this study.

FOOD BLOGS IN ENGLISH	FOOD BLOGS IN ITALIAN
The Curry Guy https://greatcurryrecipes.net/	Fatto in Casa da Benedetta https://www.fattoincasadabenedetta.it/
Lavender & Lovage https://www.lavenderandlovage.com/	Giallo Zafferano https://www.giallozafferano.it/
The Pink Whisk http://www.thepinkwhisk.co.uk	Chef in Camicia https://www.chefincamicia.com/
Tinned Tomatoes https://www.tinnedtomatoes.com/	Le delizie di Uccia https://www.wilmondodiantonella.blogspot.com/2014/12/il-mio-libro-le-delizie-di-uccia.html
Belleau Kitchen https://www.belleaukitchen.com/	55Winston55 https://www.55winston55.it/

The Petite Cook https://www.thepetitecook.com/	Ho Voglia di Dolce https://www.hovogliadidolce.it/
Eats Amazing https://www.eatsamazing.co.uk/	Misya https://www.misya.info/
Easy Cheesy Vegetarian https://www.easycheesyvegetarian.com/	Chiara Maci https://chiaramaci.com/
A Life of Geekery http://www.alifeofgeekery.co.uk/	Chiara Passion https://www.chiarapassion.com/
Ms Marmite Lover https://msmarmitelover.com/	Marco Bianchi https://www.marcobianchi.blog/
Deliciously Ella https://deliciouslyella.com/	Sonia Peronaci https://www.soniaperonaci.it/
Honestly Healthy http://www.honestlyhealthyfood.com/	Vale Cucina e Fantasia https://blog.giallozafferano.it/valeriaciccotti/

A Girl Called Jack https://cookingonabootstrap.com/	Maghetta https://maghetta.it/
The Crazy Kitchen https://www.thecrazykitchen.co.uk/	Csaba Dalla Zorza https://www.csabadallazorza.com/
Eat Like A Girl http://eatlikeagirl.com/	Le 1000 e una Bontà di Franci https://www.lemilleeunabontadifranci.it/
Baking Queen74 https://bakingqueen74.co.uk/	The Foodellers https://thefoodellers.com/it
The Baking Explorer http://thebakingexplorer.com/	Vasa Vasa Kitchen https://www.vasavasakitchen.com/
The Little Blog of Vegan http://www.thelittleblogofvegan.com/	Dulciss in Forno https://blog.giallozafferano.it/dulcisinforo/
The Little Loaf http://www.thelittleloaf.com/	Dolci senza Burro https://www.dolcisenzaburro.it/

Baking a Mess https://www.bakingamess.co.uk/	Cucino per Passione https://blog.giallozafferano.it/cucinoperpassione/
The Bearded Bakery http://www.thebeardedbakery.com/	GnamBox https://gnambox.com/
Phil's Home Kitchen (formerly Baking Fanatic) https://bakingfanatic.wordpress.com/	Rafano e Cannella https://blog.giallozafferano.it/rafanoecannella/
Kerry Cooks https://kerrycooks.com/	Anna Creazioni in Cucina https://blog.giallozafferano.it/annacreazioniincucina/
Forever Baking https://www.foreverbaking.co.uk/	Farina Lievito e Fantasia https://farinalievitoefantasia.it/
Baking with Granny https://bakingwithgranny.co.uk/	Juls Kitchen https://it.julskitchen.com/

Elizabeth's Kitchen Diary https://www.elizabethskitchendiary.co.uk/	Pistacchissimo https://www.pistacchissimo.it/
Hungry Healthy Happy https://www.hungryhealthyhappy.com/	Cook the Look https://www.cookthelook.it/
A Mummy Too https://www.amummytoo.co.uk/	Anice e Cannella https://www.aniceecannella.com/
My Fussy Eater https://www.myfussyeater.com/	Mirtillo Blu https://mirtilloblu.blogspot.com/
Pinch of Nom http://pinchofnom.com/	Le Ricette di Libellula https://blog.giallozafferano.it/ricettedilibellula/
Fab Food 4 All https://www.fabfood4all.co.uk/	La nostra politica in cucina https://blog.giallozafferano.it/renatabriano/
Veggie Desserts https://veggiedesserts.co.uk/	Timo e Lenticchie https://blog.giallozafferano.it/timoelenticchie/

Table 1. Food blogs used to extract recipes for the study.

The food blogs in English were chosen on the basis of both their ‘popularity’ on the Web and the food bloggers’ posting activity by consulting Vuelio (<http://www.vuelio.com/>), a media database, which monitors analytics and produces rankings based on “social sharing, topic-related content and post frequency” (Hodges, 2015, p. 1). The food blogs in Italian were selected with the same criteria but, to do so, several ranking databases had to be consulted to check whether data provided in one database were reliable, since for Italian blogs there is no systematic review of analytics as the one provided by Vuelio. The databases and sources consulted to create the list of Italian food blogs were Blogmeter, Inseo, and Forbes.

The bloggers were selected only in terms of their ranking, hence regardless of their gender or age group. As for the food blogs in English, since Vuelio is a UK-based database, it offers rankings based on British data. Thus, all the food blogs are UK-based, and the food bloggers are all native to Britain with two exceptions: «The Curry Guy», who was born in California but has lived in the UK since 1993, and «The Petite Cook» who is Italian but has lived in London since the early 2000s. She runs a blog of Italian recipes written in English for an

exclusively Anglophone audience. The Italian food blogs are run exclusively by Italian nationals, with Italian as their mother tongue.

Ten recipes were selected for each food blog, for each language. Then, the recipes were collected into two sub-corpora, one for each language. In order to avoid a biased selection based on a subjective, albeit involuntary, preference for the recipes to be investigated, the first recipes were selected from each section used by the food bloggers to categorise their posts (e.g., ‘Main Course’, ‘Appetizers’, ‘Desserts’, etc.). When the recipe appeared in more than one category, the second post occurring in the section was selected. It must be noted that the second food blog in the Italian sub-corpus, «Giallo Zafferano», is more a repository than a food blog *per se*. It works as a hosting site for other food blogs and, in fact, several of the food blogs included in the list in Table 1 come from it, as testified by their hyperlink. However, it also works as a large food blog, which collects recipes from its sub-food blogs, so it was possible to collect recipes from its several sections. In this case, if a recipe appeared to be hosted in the food blogs included in the list in Table 1, the recipe was excluded from the selection and the recipe immediately following was selected. This allowed the inclusion in the Italian sub-corpus of recipes from a wider collection of food blogs, which could in turn allow for sounder generalisations on trends observable in the genre. The

result of the collection is a corpus of 640 recipes organised in 320 recipes in the English sub-corpus and 320 in the Italian sub-corpus. Each recipe was then annotated using the UAM *Corpus Tool* (O'Donnell, 2008), which «allows the user to define any number of layers, and to provide a hierarchically-organised tagging scheme for each layer, using a graphical tool» (O'Donnell, 2008, p. 1434).

5. Results

Results from the corpus annotation and distribution of Moves and Steps can be summarised in Table 2. Move 3 (Step 1) and Move 4 (Step 1) are not included in the graphs since they occurred in 100% of cases in the two sub-corpora. Namely, they are «Providing details (Listing ingredients and essential details)» and «Preparing the dish (Describing the method of preparation)», respectively. They are clearly the defining Moves and Steps of recipe as a genre, so they were purposely excluded from the presentation of the results, while Table 2 presents data on sections that might indicate other kinds of contents and, therefore, point to structures of recipes as published on channels/media different than the traditional cookbook.

English Sub-Corpus		Italian Sub-Corpus
Move 1		
Step 1	85,49%	98,89%
Step 2	14,51%	89,79%
Move 2		
Step 1	71,11%	98,79%
Step 2	6,22%	69,56%
Step 3	22,67%	15,67%
Move 5		
Step 1	39,29%	42,38%
Step 2	60,71%	39,24%
Move 6		
Step 1	50,53%	1%
Step 2	49,97%	15,68%

Table 2. Distribution of Moves and Steps in the two sub-corpora.

The same data are organised in Figure 3 and Figure 4, which allow to better visualise the differences in terms of the distribution of Moves and Steps in the two sub-corpora.

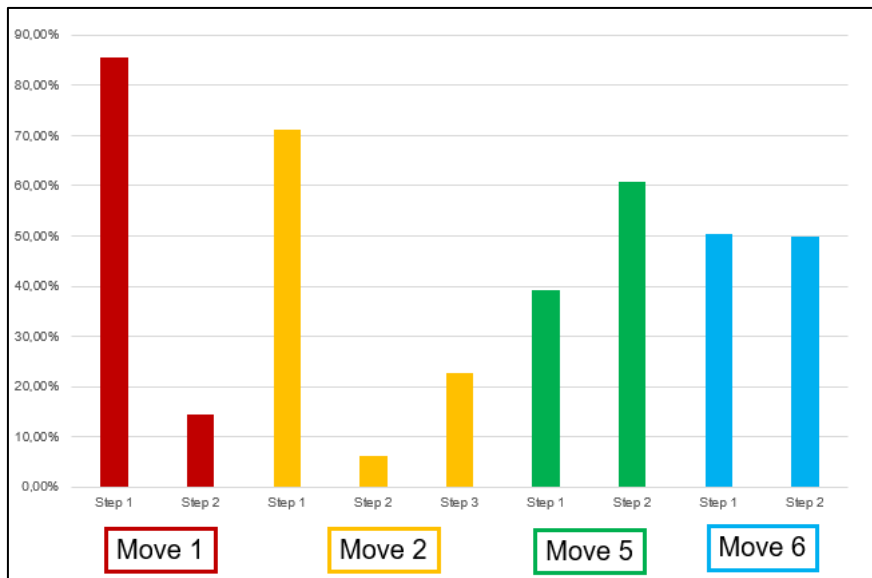


Figure 3. Distribution of Moves and Steps in recipes in English.



Figure 4. Distribution of Moves and Steps in recipes in Italian.

The data clearly reveal that the same Moves and Steps occur in the recipes in both sub-corpora, albeit with different frequencies. In the English sub-corpus, a more relevant role is played by Move 1 (Step 1, while Step 2 has a rather low

occurrence) and Move 2 (Step 1, with Step 2 and 3 showing a marginal recurrence), followed by Move 5 (Step 1 and 2), and Move 6 with Step 1 and Step 2 sharing an equal distribution. In the Italian sub-corpus, instead, Move 1 is still significant with both Steps having almost the same frequency of occurrence, while Move 2 shows a prevalence of Step 1 and Step 2 and a very low presence of Step 3. On the other hand, Move 5 shows a lower but still significant presence of Step 1 and Step 2, while Move 6 ranking last with an almost insignificant presence of Step 1 and slightly more frequent occurrence of Step 2.

6. Discussion

In the adapted version of the CARS Model presented in Figure 1, the Moves and Steps identified as recurring with specific frequency in the two sub-corpora also correspond to specific rhetorical functions performed in the text by each section and by each section with respect to the text as a whole. To facilitate consultation, the adapted version of the CARS model is proposed again in Figure 5:

- Move 1. Introducing the recipe
 - Step 1. Naming the recipe
 - Step 2. Promoting the recipe's value
- Move 2. Contextualizing the recipe
 - Step 1. Presenting the dish
 - Step 2. Recollecting memories
 - Step 3. Presenting the dish's story
- Move 3. Providing details
 - Step 1: Listing ingredients and essential details
- Move 4. Preparing the dish
 - Step 1. Describing the method of preparation
- Move 5. Providing further details
 - Step 1. Providing serving information
 - Step 2. Describing alternatives
- Move 6. Concluding the recipe
 - Step 1. Taking leave from the readers
 - Step 2. Proposing follow-ups on other media

Figure 5. CARS model adapted to the genre recipe.

More specifically, from the data of the sub-corpus, recipes in English seems to prefer the sections that focus on the background information to be provided on the dish and its preparation, but they are also keen on sharing personal memories connected to the dish itself. However, these sections are followed by the sections that give information on alternatives to the main ingredients and the preparation. Recipes in this sub-corpus are also particularly focused on recipes as places for social interaction since Move 6 is also quite frequent, namely, the Move that is dedicated to «Taking leave from the readers» and «Proposing follow-ups on other media», i.e., engaging them to the food blogger's other social media, thus creating a sense of in-group identity (see Cesiri, 2020; 2024). This is in line with previous research (Paradowski, 2018; Cesiri 2020) and confirms that the genre in English is evolving towards more hybrid generic forms. Not only are recipes showing

signs of hybridisation between instructional/informative texts and narrative texts, but they are also showing elements of ‘contamination’ with other social media as they are typically found in recipes in food blogs, such as reference to the other media run by the same person, to the point that we might coin for this recipe the new term for the new sub-genre of ‘narrative social recipe’.

As for the recipes in Italian, the Moves and Steps analysis reveals that they show more traditional preference for sections that describe the dish with no additional details or personal information given, but the ‘social’ element is present as in the recipes in English. Therefore, as for the recipes in Italian, while they demonstrate a structure that is more stable and traditional – meaning, more informative and less narrative – than the English counterparts, we might still conclude that they show signs of change in the reference to social media, therefore the sub-genre identifiable for recipes in Italian might be that of an ‘informative social recipe’.

7. Conclusions

The present study has conducted a corpus-based quantitative investigation of two sub-corpora from a sample of 640 recipes in English and Italian taken from food blogs run in the corresponding languages. The purpose of the analysis was

to examine their generic features and to ascertain whether it is true, as believed by most of the literature available on the subject, that recipes have reached a certain degree of stability and do not enjoy any of the affordances of digital or social media. Results showed that this is only partially true and, on the contrary, recipes show a certain degree of development because of the digital and social channels of communication. In particular, recipes in English show more evident signs of change with the presence of personal details and additional information about the history of the dishes or personal memories connected to them, while the Italian recipes do not show this preference in this sense, showing a more traditional structure. However, recipes in both languages show the presence of sections dedicated to engagement with the audience (salutations sections at the end of the recipes) and to the other media run by the same food blogger. This has allowed the classification of the recipes in the corpus in two distinct sub-genres, which were named the ‘narrative social recipe’ for the recipes in English, and the ‘informative social recipe’ for recipes in Italian.

The present study obviously presents some limitations, such as the use of recipes from only one kind of digital medium (the food blog) and the comparison between recipes in English and in Italian, i.e., between two languages. Therefore, we cannot represent the characteristics in terms of ‘universality’ of the genre, but

we can focus on the characteristics of the genre in English and in Italian, respectively.

Future research might certainly use this study as a starting point to confirm whether recipes in other social media (e.g. YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, etcetera) contain the same structure, i.e., whether they show the same generic features, thus confirming the evolution towards a new sub-genre of the ‘social recipe’ and whether other languages might be more similar to English or to Italian, namely, they might favour the more ‘narrative’ or the more ‘informative’ type of recipe.

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