

Larissa D'Angelo / Stefania Consonni (eds.)

New Explorations in Digital Metadiscourse

CERLIS Series

Series Editor: Stefania M. Maci

Assistant Editors: Patrizia Anesa, Stefania Consonni, Larissa D'Angelo

Editorial Board

Ulisse Belotti
Maria Vittoria Calvi
Luisa Chierichetti
Cécile Desoutter
Giovanni Garofalo
Davide Simone Giannoni
Maurizio Gotti
Dorothee Heller
Michele Sala

Each volume of the series is subjected to a double blind peer-reviewing process.

CERLIS Series
Volume 10

Larissa D'Angelo / Stefania Consonni
(eds.)

New Explorations in Digital Metadiscourse

CELSB
Bergamo

This ebook is published in Open Access under a Creative Commons License
Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

You are free to share - copy, distribute and transmit - the work under the following conditions:

You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.



CERLIS SERIES Vol. 10

CERLIS

Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici

Research Centre on Languages for Specific Purposes

University of Bergamo

www.unibg.it/cerlis

New Explorations in Digital Metadiscourse

Editors:

ISBN: 9788897253051

© CELSB 2021

Published in Italy by CELSB Libreria Universitaria

Via Pignolo, 113 - 24121, Bergamo, Italy

Contents

LARISSA D'ANGELO / STEFANIA CONSONNI

Dissemination, interaction and negotiation: Exploring digital
metadiscourse (*cont'd*) 11

PART 1

DIGITAL METADISOURSE AND THE DISSEMINATION OF
SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE 23

MICHELA GIORDANO / MARIA ANTONIETTA MARONGIU

Metadiscourse, rhetoric and the pandemic: A verbal-visual
analysis of public information posters 25

STEFANIA CONSONNI

Cross-semiotic metadiscourse in science: Visual and verbal
epistemicity in digital vs. analogue media 57

CARMEN SANCHO-GUINDA

From free rhetoric to the tripartite model: Metadiscourse
trends in graphical abstracts 83

PART 2

DIGITAL METADISOURSE AND THE PATTERNING OF SOCIAL INTERACTION 113

ELENA MANCA

Australian and US wineries on Facebook: Analyzing interactive and interactional resources 115

GIROLAMO TESSUTO

Medicine and biology science communication blogs: Investigating stance patterns for gender identity construction 143

MICHELE SALA

First things first: Engaging readers through Google hyperlink titles 167

PART 3

DIGITAL METADISOURSE AND THE CULTURAL NEGOTIATION OF EXPERIENCE 195

WILLIAM BROMWICH

Metadiscourse and the gamification of ride-hailing in the platform economy 197

CINZIA SPINZI

Voicing otherness: A metadiscoursal analysis of digital campaigns across English and Italian 219

LARISSA D'ANGELO

Teaching effective poster design to medical students using eye-tracking technology 241

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 263

WILLIAM BROMWICH

Metadiscourse and the gamification of ride-hailing in the platform economy

1. Introduction

The advent of the sharing, gig or platform economy, in particular the spread of ride-hailing firms such as Uber and Lyft, has given rise to new forms of digital communication. According to the drivers, the use of sign-up bonuses, ratings, promotions, competitions and non-monetary rewards is intended to provide incentives to work longer and longer hours while Uber and Lyft (the main rival to Uber in the US and Canada) progressively cut pay rates, with the online discourse intended to manage relations with the drivers primarily for the benefit of the platform. The result is what has been characterised as the “gamification” of ride-hailing, with the terminology of hiring, employment contracts and wages being displaced by the discourse of video game techniques, graphics and non-cash rewards.

Research into metadiscourse has so far focused predominantly on academic discourse, whereas the present study, based on insights provided by Mauranen (1993), Hyland (2005, 2017), Ädel (2006) and Ädel/Mauranen (2010) is intended to examine the ride-hailing discourse in terms of the use of metadiscourse devices such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mention, casting light on their pragmatic functions.

Although in methodological terms exchanges between the platform and the drivers constitute an occluded genre, not in the public domain, some insights into this discourse can be obtained indirectly from driver critiques of working conditions. In particular, online driver discussion forums can serve to cast light on gamification in the digital economy.

2. The gamification of ride-hailing in the platform economy

In order to contextualise the gamification of ride-hailing, it is necessary to outline the structural features of this online community since they have a significant bearing on the discourse. A recent study (Bromwich 2020) examining legal discourse in the platform economy (the gig or sharing economy) highlighted the fact that platforms such as Uber and Lyft systematically deny the drivers the status of employees. Terms such as “partners” or “driver partners” are adopted to resemanticise the relationship, with the result that the drivers are deprived of the rights typically granted to employees in bricks-and-mortar companies.

This resemanticisation was found to be a deliberate policy adopted by “gig economy” firms to enable them to evade their responsibilities as employers, with the result that employee benefits such as medical insurance, accident and injury insurance, sick leave, parental leave, training, annual leave, and pension contributions are not granted. Collective representation, collective bargaining and agreements, and the right to refer cases of discrimination or unlawful dismissal to an employment tribunal are similarly eliminated. Drivers work as independent contractors, paying their own medical and insurance contributions. This misclassification has inevitably encountered considerable resistance, with the drivers taking action in the courts, particularly in the US and the UK, for their status as employees to be recognised. The Employment Tribunal in London was highly critical of this misclassification:

Uber tribunal judges criticize ‘fictions’ and ‘twisted narratives’ [...]

The employment tribunal judges who ruled that the Uber drivers are not self-employed and should be paid the “national living wage” were scathing in their assessment of the company. Among the most unequivocal sections of the judgment:

Any organisation ... resorting in its documentation to fictions, twisted language and even brand new terminology, merits, we think, a degree

of scepticism. The notion that Uber in London is a mosaic of 30,000 small businesses linked by a common ‘platform’ is to our minds faintly ridiculous. We are satisfied that the supposed driver/passenger contract is a pure fiction which bears no relation to the real dealings and relationships between the parties. (Hickey 2016: 1).

Employment Tribunal cases are not the focus of the present study but it is important to highlight this resemanticisation of the employment relationship since it has implications in terms of the discourse within the digital enterprise. In particular, the absence of an employment contract specifying the terms and conditions of employment, including working hours and pay rates, means that the platform is not in a position to determine working hours, in a sector where timing is crucial for the delivery of services. The strategy adopted by the management is to provide incentives for the “driver partners” based on psychological tricks or “gamification”, offering the chance to win prizes for reaching certain goals. The drivers are encouraged to continue driving at the end of their shift in the hope of receiving extra, with no guarantee that the incentive will be paid. The messages between the “platform” and the “driver partners” are not in the public domain so they are not available for research purposes, but the role played by this discourse strategy has been highlighted in press reports, (Scheiber 2017; Weil 2018) including this first-hand account by a “driver partner”:

High score, low pay: why the gig economy loves gamification

Using ratings, competitions and bonuses to incentivise workers isn’t new – but as I found when I became a Lyft driver, the gig economy is taking it to another level. Lyft [...] is a car service similar to Uber, which operates in about 300 US cities and expanded to Canada [...] last year. Every week, it sends its drivers a personalised “Weekly Feedback Summary”. This includes passenger comments from the previous week’s rides and a freshly calculated driver rating. It also contains a bar graph showing how a driver’s current rating “stacks up” against previous weeks, and tells them whether they have been “flagged” for cleanliness, friendliness, navigation or safety. (Mason 2018: 1)

In contrast with workers in a spatially defined workplace, such as a factory, office or retail space, rideshare drivers are free to choose their working hours, and the areas they intend to cover. However, this apparent freedom gives rise to a challenge for the platform, due to the need to provide services on demand with minimal waiting times. This requires “driver partners” to be managed by means of aggressive but subtle methods, i.e. with gamification.

This overview of the status of ride-hailing drivers may appear at first sight to be a digression but it is important to characterise the context in which the driver-to-driver discourse takes place. In the platform economy the “crowdworkers” who are subject to aggressive micromanagement by means of gamification respond with bewilderment when they are unable to make sense of their ratings or pay rates that are not fixed in advance, and turn to other drivers for advice. The drivers set up alternative channels of communication, under a cloak of anonymity, and metadiscourse plays a key role in this peer-to-peer discourse. The discourse under examination consists of over 100 pages of material taken from the Uber People discussion forum (Uber People 2018), set up by the drivers to combat the isolation and alienation associated with working as a ride-hailing driver.

3. Uber people and Hyland’s metadiscourse model

The first part of Hyland’s model of metadiscourse concerns *interactive* resources, by which the writer seeks to guide the reader through the material, with the focus on written texts. Although the comments on Uber People are in writing, they present a range of features commonly found in spoken texts, since the aim of the forum is to promote online discussion replicating informal conversation, albeit asynchronous. On a cline between formal written discourse and informal spoken discourse (Halliday 1989), the forum positions itself

close to the spoken end, due to the informality of tone, the brevity of the comments, rarely exceeding a total word count of 100, the reliance on colloquialisms, contracted forms and occasional expletives, the limited lexical range and low lexical density, along with the grammatical intricacy that Halliday identifies as typical of the spoken language. Hyland/Jiang (2017: 3) note that one of Biber's key findings (2006) was that spoken registers are heavily stance-laden, and evidence will be presented in this connection in relation to the driver discussion forum. This is not discourse that is "written to be spoken" like a political speech on autocue, a news broadcast or academic paper, nor "spoken to be written" as in the case of a courtroom verdict, but rather "written as if spoken". Hyland has noted that "[t]he overwhelming majority of metadiscourse research focuses on written genres, although spoken discourse has attracted increasing attention in recent years" (Hyland 2017: 26), whereas the present study is intended to focus on this "written as if spoken" hybrid genre. The range of *interactive* and *interactional* resources in Uber People, the Uber Driver Discussion Forum, will now be examined, applying the model outlined in Hyland (2005, 2017) and Hyland/Jiang (2016).

3.1. Metadiscourse: interactive resources

Transitions, i.e. expressions showing the semantic relations between main clauses, are infrequent in the driver discussion forum. *Moreover*, *What's more*, *Thus*, *Consequently*, and *As a result* were not found, whereas *and* and *but* are frequently used between main clauses, with just one instance of *In addition*, and only one of *Therefore*, as shown in the following examples, with emphasis added in italics here and in all excerpts hereinafter:

- (1) I don't do any free advertising for rideshare companies, *and* if I were to participate in this "contest," all I'd do would be to activate my amp, then throw it in the glove compartment where it can illuminate, *but* where nobody can see it.
- (2) I don't know that I would have gone for this offer *but* I might have in order to score a quick \$100.

- (3) *In addition*, drivers must be paid MORE for rides where they take people out of the city and have to deadhead back.
- (4) Uber is required to pay them \$17.22 per hour, *therefore* a driver will be expected to take every single ping. Expect massive deactivation.

Predictably, frame markers referring to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages, that are essential for the organisation of texts of the length of an academic paper, are almost entirely absent in the discussion forum, with no occurrences of *my purpose is*, *my intention is*, *my aim is*, *to conclude*, *in conclusion*, *finally* or *to sum up*. The brevity of the comments appears to make frame markers largely redundant, although the following excerpt shows they do occur occasionally:

- (5) *As a side note* rematch on Lyft hits waaaaay less often than Uber. Lyft also will autoque [autocue] an airport ride if you do not have DF active or last ride turned on.

In some instances, a frame marker is used to refer to a speech act, to clarify the intention of the speaker or writer:

- (6) *Not that I'm complaining* at all.

Since endophoric markers refer to information in other parts of the text, the brevity of the comments in the forum make such markers largely redundant. In the following, *aforementioned* is used for comic effect, with a stark contrast between the colloquial expressions preceding it and the formal register denoted by the endophoric marker:

- (7) This is something I cannot care less about.
 No. Why not? Because no.
 Do you have water?- No.
 Can I smoke in your car? -No
 Can I puke in this?-No
 Why?-Because EfU!
 Learn to say "no" without any explanation or apology.
 I was referring to passengers with violent reactions, nothing to do with saying "no" to any of *the aforementioned fun activities*.

In the following, endophoric markers are used to refer to a previous post by the driver:

- (8) *As I said in another thread*, New York City Uber drivers are now employees.
- (9) If one looks at the whole picture, *like you said* “it’s completely unprofitable, you get the ugly, the bad, the good and the great rides, if you do enough rides, then you will have the ****ty one and the good one, and that includes the destination filter.

This brings other voices into the discourse and creates a sense of community and commonality of interest.

Evidentials, which are devices referring to the source of information from other texts, clearly play a key role in academic writing. While they are not well represented in the Uber People, they do in fact make a number of appearances, particularly as a link to an electronic source, as shown in the following excerpt:

- (10) NYC passes minimum pay for Uber and Lyft drivers
<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.engadget.com/amp/2018/12/04/nyc-minimum-pay-wage-uber-lyft-drivers/>

In one instance, the drivers disagree about whether a claim about a company constitutes defamation, while pointing out that political speech in the United States is protected under the First Amendment:

- (11) *Lmao. You cannot sue people for sharing opinions. Ever heard about the Constitution? Freedom of speech?*
- (12) *Political speech, publishing false statements someone committed a crime is illegal and carries automatic damages. There are four other statements that carry automatic damages, can’t remember them all but I think they are: falsely publishing a person’s business is bad, a woman is barren and a woman committed adultery. These categories of false statements do not require the element of malice for damages. And they are certainly not political speech which is guaranteed under 1A.*

At one point a driver requests evidence in support of a claim made by another driver, a request that might be considered to be an evidential:

- (13) True, but *state where the rule specifically establishes* that drivers are employees rather than just establishing a minimum wage.

Finally, what might be called a *negative evidential* is to be found, with the authority of the driver's claim resting on a reference to *this rule*:

- (14) Castaneda7189 said:
Definitely have to agree with you. No longer considered IC.
 There is nothing in *this rule* that states that we are employees.

Code glosses provide guidance for the reader in grasping ideational meanings, including *e.g., such as, in other words, this means*, are not well represented in the discussion forum, even though a painstaking reading of the data does produce isolated instances:

- (15) If you're not concerned about the scammer getting mad and attacking you in the car, you could Long haul them over the city by pretending that your card doesn't work in every ATM you try. *In other words*, turn the scam back on them.

In the following exchange a code gloss is used to correct a misunderstanding on the part of another driver:

- (16) *There is nothing in this rule that states that we are employees.*
 The word WAGE *means* employee.

To sum up this overview of *interactive resources* as outlined in Hyland's model, in the driver forum they do not appear to be well represented at all, bringing to mind Biber's finding that spoken genres are more heavily stance-laden (Biber 2006). Since the comments posted are "written as if spoken" then it is not surprising that they make scant use of textual references and devices intended to guide the reader through the text. A far more fertile field of investigation in terms of metadiscourse in this genre is that of *interactional resources*, intended to involve the reader in the argument and to build a

relationship between reader and writer, and the discussion now turns to these resources.

3.2. Metadiscourse: interactional resources

Writers and speakers use hedges to withhold full commitment to a proposition, with a range of terms such as *might*, *possibly*, *possible* and *about*.

In the following excerpt the driver is discussing the fate of other drivers falling victim to a scam that is giving rise to a heated debate. To shield himself from charges of being heartless or failing to show support for his fellow drivers, he includes the hedge *kinda* that is intended to soften the blow he is about to strike:

- (17) I *kinda* feel like these drivers deserved to get their money taken from them. If they'll fall for that, they may, in fact, fall for anything!

In the next excerpt the driver uses two hedging devices to highlight the degree of uncertainty arising from how to deal with the scam:

- (18) I would *probably* have said I never carry a wallet when I drive for Uber makes not getting robbed easier that way, but the poverty thing *sounds like* it would work just as well.

As regards Uber/UberEats, the drivers are acutely aware of a lack of reliable information, leading them to engage in speculation and guesswork, giving rise to the need for a range of hedging devices:

- (19) Uber charges the restaurant 30% off every order, the driver takes a 32-33% service fee off the top of every piece of the fare (time, distance, drop-off, & pick-up fee), and they charge the customer a flat rate. Other than all the lawsuits, *I don't see them* losing much. *I'd imagine* they are raking it in hand over fist with those charges.

Due to the asymmetrical information that the drivers are dealing with, when figures are given, they are often accompanied by the hedging device *probably*:

- (20) You are looking at a worst case scenario, long trip on highway, you lose 20%. What about a four-mile trip in heavy traffic during rush hour? when all is said and done, *probably* more like a 5-10% cut on average, still terrible but not 20%

The gamification strategy adopted by the company means that the drivers are given the chance to win a prize if they provide an unpaid service such as displaying an amp (an illuminated sign on the vehicle with the Lyft logo that greets the passengers by name as they get in) but the drivers have no idea of the odds of winning, nor of the cost to the company:

- (21) *I think* your "odds of winning " is too low. *Probably* 2X the odds of winning the lottery would be more accurate. They cut my pay \$10 per 100 miles of paxs in car and then offer this ridiculous program and in Los Angeles, 100 miles is nothing. What they spend in cash prizes is *probably* less than they would pay an advertising company and more people will be exposed to a Lyft car picking up a person.

In some cases, the risk of picking up unidentified passengers is pointed out in the driver forums:

- (22) Yeah you're never getting a tip from third party ordered rides, least I haven't. I don't take those any more, those are all rider no shows because the rider on the account doesn't show unless it's a good fare then I'll take it *probably*. That's a *security risk* taking those riders.

The uncertainties and insecurities that pervade the world of Uber drivers are reflected in the use of *probably* along with the nominalised form, *security risk*.

Boosters emphasise writer commitment to a proposition: *it is clear, in fact, definitely*.

- (23) Lol. You think Uber will pay \$17.22 to drivers who game and cherry pick? *Definitely* have to agree with you. No longer considered IC they will be required to play by Uber's rules in terms of cancellations and acceptance rates. You can't be expected to get paid 17.22 an hour by just sitting there declining every ping [...] *Definitely* 17.22 per driver per hour is no joke.

Boosters can be used to distinguish serious comment from jokes, though in this case the driver is making a joke at the customers' expense:

- (24) *Seriously*, people that order delivery of McDonald's should have their info, address and profile photo on a site dedicated to Sloth.

The use of boosters may co-occur with engagement markers, aimed at bringing the reader into the discourse and eliciting a response, as in the case of this highly problematic question:

- (25) Do you discriminate based on name?
I *absolutely* do...if you have some BS fake name on Lyft, auto time out.

Once again in the following a booster co-occurs with an engagement marker, expressing a strong opinion while eliciting an active response:

- (26) *Obviously* you don't understand residual income. I'm not with Bounce, but residual income is awesome. *Should look into it* before throwing out the ignorant term "pyramid scheme".
- (27) *You should stop publishing false and harmful comments* about a business. A pyramid scheme requires cash payments from recruits this is *ABSOLUTELY NOT* the case with BOUNCE.

In some cases, boosters convey a sense of despair and despondency on the part of the driver:

- (28) This is *by far* my worst day in the last four years of doing ride share in beautiful San Diego.

Boosters are not necessarily encoded as lexical items but may take the form of punctuation, in this case, capital letters:

- (29) I say prove it's a pyramid scheme. I can prove it is *NOT*. In fact it's a good company starting without globalist venture capital only local in-house start-up funds.

Boosters can also take the form of colloquialisms pertaining to the spoken language:

- (30) This day sux *big time* still out grinding and anting [slaving away like an ant] cause there's nothing else to do just lucky to get a ping at all.
- (31) Rematch on Lyft hits *waaaaay* less often than Uber.

Attitude markers, such as *unfortunately*, *surprisingly*, and *I agree*, express the writer's attitude to the proposition and are important for building relations between writer and reader. Metadiscourse devices of this kind can be used to show familiarity with the audience, while reinforcing shared values, membership of a group, and commonality of intent.

In numerous instances in the forum, attitude markers are used to express anger, contempt or criticism, and are almost invariably associated with negative comments:

- (32) While I agree *the new rates suck* and will be cut, your analysis is very one sided. You are looking at a worst case scenario, long trip on highway, you lose 20%. What about a four mile trip in heavy traffic during rush hour? When all is said and done, probably more like a 5-10% cut on average, still terrible but not 20%.
- (33) The *idiocy and greed* has killed my market.

In this case *Uber* has been replaced with a pejorative form, *Goober*, clearly an attitude marker. The parting shot also expresses contempt:

- (34) I decide to open the Uber Eats App to see if it was working and - lo and behold - I found the answer. *Goober* had increased their service fee so high that no one was ordering. I mean really, would you order an \$8.00 dollar burrito and then pay *Goober* \$7.99 to have it delivered?? *Unbelievable*.

Attitudes to the company are overwhelmingly negative and strongly worded:

- (35) So, the plan is to push rates lower for UEats drivers and see how UEats drivers respond while company saves money. Plus, when there is a need, i.e. delay in pickup, force delivery to UberX driver who is waiting long

desperately for a ping by showing a guarantee which is still lower but saves money. Uber is *a ruthless company*.

Attitude markers can perform the dual function of expressing disdain towards both the company and the customer:

- (36) I wonder why people don't tip? I bet customers think the driver gets the full delivery fee. *Hah*.

An attitude marker may consist of a sequence of negative terms tightly bundled together into a crescendo of disdain, leaving the reader in no doubt about the writer's stance:

- (37) I'm off 9 deliveries from yesterday in the same amount of time. I guess *Goober* is counting on the higher service fees over volume. Also had two eaters *complaining* about the increase. *It amazes me how stupid Uber is. They consistently piss off their drivers and now they've decided to piss off their customers. They'll never make money at this rate.*

This excerpt is characterised by a blend of propositional content, such as the drop in the number of deliveries, the higher service fees and the complaints, together with evaluative content, intended to make the text more persuasive, such as the claim that Uber is stupid and that they antagonise their drivers and customers. The propositional and evaluative content is so closely intertwined as to be inextricable.

Criticism of the company is evident also in the following post, that provides both propositional and evaluative content:

- (38) Decided I didn't like providing free advertising any more for a company that *cuts my pay randomly* and treats me in a *passive-aggressive manner*.

In the section above examining boosters it was argued that punctuation can be used for the purposes of metadiscourse. This appears to be true also in the case of the following attitude marker, with the driver using triple curly brackets to distance himself from the claim, as if ostensibly denying that it is true, while quietly acknowledging the veracity of the statement. The meaning expressed in spoken interaction by means of intonation

and tone of voice is encoded here typographically. An account of metadiscourse considering only lexical items would most likely overlook this kind of subtle comment.

- (39) Some would argue that it makes it easier for pax to find me.--
Most would argue that we don't want the pax to find us. {{{shuffle}}}

Punctuation is also used in the place of spelling where the writer wishes to use an expletive but is aware that a filter is in operation to eliminate terms deemed to be offensive:

- (40) I don't know man, in Toronto [Lyft] could use help winning ridership over Uber and I don't mind supporting that and they seem to keep offering us \$30 from time to time to have it paired with our phones though they are terrible at paying the incentive when they say they will. it always involves *two ****ing calls to Lyft* to get a decent rep who will [pay] out that bonus

In some cases, attitude markers are used in response to a post deemed to be inaccurate or misleading:

- (41) *Your post* said it eliminates anyone who doesn't do 125 rides. *That's misinformation and not correct*, if you do 1 ride you get 1 entry, if you do 125 rides you get 125 entries. It's all up to you on increasing your odds of winning. No one is forcing you one way or the other. So it is fair to all drivers and if course it's better for anyone who drives exclusively Lyft.

Engagement markers explicitly refer to or build up a relationship with the reader, such as *consider*, *note that*, *you can see that*. In extract (42), the driver begins with a self-mention, then outlines an argument, and concludes with an engagement marker, expressing concern for other drivers:

- (42) (Boston driver) I did my calculation on the new rates and I came up with this final decision we all gonna lose 20% of earnings over the year and if you make \$50000 year 20% lost is gonna be \$10000. That a lot of money.
Good luck people.

In the next extract the engagement marker is not just a means to engender feelings of solidarity but also to actively draw other drivers

into the discussion, asking for advice that would enable the driver to use the system to his or her advantage:

- (43) *So has anyone done a comparison on what the various food delivery apps charge a person? I could then focus on the app that charges customers the least. Should be more jobs that way.*

An engagement marker in the form of a request for advice is to be found in the following post, highlighting the fact that the drivers are subject to asymmetrical information:

- (44) *For a while there, I was getting a rematch on nearly every airport ride I did, but all week and three times today I have not gotten a rematch. Does anyone know if they changed their policy or something? Thanks.*

The following engagement marker is realised by adopting a familiar tone while paying a compliment to the other drivers:

- (45) *So I've always gone to Jiffy Lube for my oil changes for \$79 a pop. Being that I drive as much as I do for this gig, oil changes are frequent and adding up. Do any of you fine people have any good, yet inexpensive, recommendations on where to go for one? Thanks.*

Drivers who anticipate and respond to imagined objections raised by other drivers show an awareness of the reader and an insight into the values of the discourse community.

- (46) *Some would argue that it makes it easier for pax to find me. I counter that with the experiences I have had, I have an average of 1-2 Lyft no-shows per week, versus 1-2 Uber no-shows per DAY. Uber is the one that needs an amp.*

In the following excerpt, the driver responds to an objection that was raised by another driver, rebutting the claim albeit in a non-aggressive manner, as shown in the parting shot intended to soften the caustic tone of his or her comments:

- (47) *The odds for me to win this is higher than the Calif. Lottery. You bring up a trivial issue and totally ignored the main subject ---- Since you missed my point, I will explain again. The so called contest is not fair to all drivers. It is*

another waste of funds. Give the drivers a fair way to make extra money. The bonuses are excellent for that. Wasting over \$25,000 on a nationwide contest that I have NO CHANCE of winning. Lyft wants the amp used for advertising. This is their way of accomplishing that. What they spend in cash prizes is probably less than they would pay an advertising company [...]. *Just saying.*

Another kind of engagement marker in the driver discussion forum consists of the widespread use of *insider meanings*. As pointed out by Hyland (2017: 17), communities have their own insider understandings of specific terms that carry insider meanings, reinforcing a sense of group membership. Here are two separate extracts to illustrate this point:

- (48) Only way I could get my *X revenue* up to *pre EATS* was *to have the hub remove the option completely* from my app. Sounds like you are one of the drivers that gets *the closest car ping* ...congratulations,
- (49) I would even say the *Uber Pro Program* is a lot more manipulative to saying that you are an employee than what went down in New York. If you damn near don't accept every ride *you get downrated on tiers* and once *you hit partner* don't be surprised that eventual *deactivation* doesn't occur... that's the real one trying to manipulate drivers as being more like employees.

Only an Uber or Lyft driver would be able to explain the meaning of these terms but the salient one is *deactivation*, that is really a resemanticisation of *dismissal*.

In cases in which engagement markers reach a certain density, this may be indicative of a full-blown argument, as in the following excerpt in which the driver attempts to elicit a response by using a range of metadiscourse devices including engagement markers, attitude or stance markers, and boosters:

- (50) *Read this just so you fully understand* the residuals are very similar to insurance sales, so are America's insurance companies pyramid schemes? *You should stop publishing false and harmful comments* about a business. A pyramid scheme requires cash payments from recruits this is ABSOLUTELY NOT the case with BOUNCE. *Please prove* BOUNCE is a pyramid scheme...*prove it*, if you going to harm a company. *The article I want to post*

contains banned words. So find it yourself just search BOUNCE rideshare San Diego.

Narrowly construed, self-mentions consist of references to the author(s) (*I/we/my/our*) but more broadly construed they can be taken to cover first-person narratives of some length. Hyland (2017: 17) argues that “metadiscourse can be realised in a variety of ways and by units of varied length, from individual words to whole words or clauses”. The important thing is for analysts to be transparent in their judgements and consistent in their coding, taking the discourse function as the object of analysis. Hyland also refers to “category overlap” in the sense that a given utterance may be characterised as self-mention, as an attitude marker, and as an engagement marker. In the framework of Uccelli et al. (2012: 5) these first-person narratives may be placed in the category of “personal genres”:

The progress in mastering new genres or types of texts has been characterized by Martin (1989a) and Schleppegrell (2004) as moving progressively across three categories: (1) personal genres, such as narratives and recounts; (2) factual genres, such as procedures and reports; and (3) analytic genres.

In this instance, self-mention takes the form of a continuous narrative intended to bring the reader into the discourse, establishing a connection with the personal experience of the narrator:

- (51) For only the second time in 7,000 rides, *I kicked passengers out of my car* last night. The ride was 2.2 miles long and we didn't even make it a mile before *I pulled over and told them to get out. I then immediately reported them* to Uber and they are currently under investigation. *I knew I was in trouble when they made me wait* for five minutes and then one of them came into my car carrying a cup of wine that was filled to the brim. Thing quickly went downhill from there once *I instructed her to get rid of it. It amazes me how shi**y some of these people treat us: I don't think they have any idea that we are paid like peasants.* Anyhow, avoid that white trash loser at any cost!

This post elicited responses from other drivers that included self-mention, engagement and attitude markers, constructing a “them and

us” dichotomy between passengers and drivers (*these pax / their nonsense / they learn their lesson*):

(52) *Thanks for the heads up and sorry you went through that. "Jimi" won't be riding with me anytime soon--not that I do much business in Vista anyway.*

(53) *These pax are so f'n entitled. Kudos on putting your foot down on their nonsense. Hopefully they learn their lesson.*

First-person narrative is used in at least one other instance to provide pointers on how to deal with risks. Since the regulatory framework for ride-hailing is unclear, constituting a grey area of the law, the driver in this case is wary of the regulatory authorities. In this case the self-mention is extended to identify also the particular location, rather than just the individual, as otherwise it would not be possible for other drivers to provide any input. As a result, the driver makes use of self-mention, including a screen name (*Socals Land Shark*, a reference to Southern California), credentials, attitude markers (with a self-deprecating reference to *ants*, used by Uber drivers to refer to each other), then engagement markers such as *dear sandiegan ants*:

(54) *To my dear sandiegan ants, let me introduce myself, I'm an ExGypsy ExTaxi Current Gray area one-man Livery Driver with extensive knowledge & experience on all local state and federal transportation for hire regulations (and anti-regulation "maneuvers") But only drop off experience in San Diego Airport. Coming up I have to do a Pick up on your turf. My gut instinct tells me to park in the furthest part of the parking or garage then walk my customers back from the terminal. Any input is much appreciated. Yours Truly: Socals Land Shark*

This broadly construed conceptualisation of self-mention may be applied to other posts on the forum, warning Uber and Lyft drivers of common scams. Once again self-mention co-occurs with attitude markers (*really shady fellow* and *Fuber*) and engagement markers (*I luv u all*), with an exchange of personal experiences and warnings:

(55) *I read on one of the threads how a pax tried to get the driver to give them cash and the pax would give them money via a huge tip in the app. I picked up a really shady fellow today named 'Brandon' In South Dallas. He gets in and*

sez 'Yeah so I kinda got a favor to ask you man'. He said he lost his wallet and has no money and needs a couple of hundred dollars for an emergency. He wants me to go to an ATM and hook him up and in return he will give me that plus \$100 more in the app. Firstly, *I learned from UP that this is a common scam*. Secondly, *I learned from UP that Fuber limits the amount of tip a pax can give us. I don't know that I would have gone for this offer but I might have in order to score a quick \$100. It might not have occurred to me that a credit card on file with Uber might not be any good. So thanks. I luv u all.*

The engagement markers turned out to be effective, as other drivers joined in the discussion with their own experiences and suggestions for how to deal with the dangers inherent in this scenario:

- (56) How did you end up turning it down? *I've had it happen twice, the first time I called the guy out on the scam and he jumped out of my car at a stoplight. The second time, the guy was much larger and not someone I wanted to make upset, so I claimed poverty and told the guy I didn't have any money in the bank - hell that's why I'm doing rideshare. I'll do the same next time should it occur.*

In pragmatic terms a discussion of this kind can perform an important function in helping drivers to ensure their own safety, bearing in mind that they are driving alone at all hours of the day and night, and less likely to be able to rely on the kind of face-to-face interaction between drivers waiting at a regular taxi rank.

4. Concluding remarks

The metadiscourse on the driver discussion forum, enabling the drivers to establish their credentials, create a sense of community, negotiate a stance with their readers, give and seek advice, and make an attempt to deal with the situation of asymmetric information in which they find themselves performs a number of pragmatic functions and these functions have been the primary focus of this study, in a qualitative and ethnographic (Bhatia 2015: 9) rather than quantitative perspective.

Moreover, “The fact that metadiscourse is a pragmatic category also means that all items should be examined in their sentential contexts to ensure they are performing metadiscourse functions” (Hyland 2017: 18). As argued by Hyland (2017: 19), “[t]o have any descriptive and explanatory power at all, metadiscourse must be rhetorical and pragmatic, rather than a formal property of texts”. Rather than adopting a narrow *text-centred* view of metadiscourse, in connection with the driver discussion forum, a broader more *interpersonal* conceptualisation (Mauranen 1993) is undoubtedly more fruitful, providing insights into the dynamics embedded in the discourse, showing how the writer uses metadiscourse devices to “bracket the discourse organisation and the expressive implications of what is being said” (Schriffin 1980: 231, quoted in Hyland 2017: 19).

A close reading of the forum posts revealed that the *interactive* or text-organising features that are predominant in academic papers played only a minor role in the discourse, mainly due to the brevity of the posts, that replicate features of conversational exchanges, albeit in asynchronous mode. On the other hand, the study highlighted the constant use of *interactional* resources, to the point that the discourse could be considered to be stance-laden, in Biber’s terms. The “ants” as they choose to describe themselves, bringing to mind Durkheim’s concept of *anomie*, working in isolation and high-risk situations, dealing with the fact that *these pax are so f’n entitled*, while being denied the status of employees by *Uber/Goober/Fuber*, and subject to a wide range of gamification techniques, respond to their sense of isolation by seeking to construct an online community where they can exchange views and recount their experiences to other like-minded drivers. This digital forum gives them the chance to warn other drivers of work-related risks, while asking for practical advice on a range of issues, and seeking to deal with the situation of asymmetrical information in which they find themselves. Metadiscourse appears to provide a range of devices by which they seek to build relations with other drivers, at times giving rise to argument and disagreement, but also to a climate of trust and solidarity.

References

- Ädel, Annelie 2006. *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ädel, Annelie / Anna Mauranen 2010. Metadiscourse: Diverse and Divided Perspectives. *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9/2, 1-11.
- Bhatia, Vijay 2015. Critical Genre Analysis: Theoretical Preliminaries. *Hermes* 54, 1-12.
- Biber, Douglas 2006. *University Language. A Corpus-based Study of Spoken and Written Registers*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bromwich, William 202. The Sharing Economy: Resemanticising the Enterprise. In Tessuto, Girolamo / Bhatia, Vijay / Breeze, Ruth / Brownlees, Nicholas / Solly, Martin (eds) *The Context and Media of Legal Discourse*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 118-135.
- Halliday, Michael A.K. 1985. *Spoken and Written Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hickey, Shane 2016. Uber Tribunal Judges Criticise “Fictions” and “Twisted Language”. *The Guardian* 28 October.
- Hyland, Ken 2005. *Metadiscourse. Exploring Interaction in Writing*. London: Continuum.
- Hyland, Ken 2017. Metadiscourse: What is it and where is it going? *Journal of Pragmatics* 113, 16-29.
- Hyland, Ken / Jiang, Feng Kevin 2016. Change of Attitude? A Diachronic Study of Stance. *Written Communication* 33/3, 251-274.
- Martin, James R. 1989. *Factual Writing. Exploring and Challenging Social Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mason, Sarah 2018. High Score, Low Pay: Why the Gig Economy Loves Gamification. *The Guardian* 20 November.
- Mauranen, Anna 1993. *Cultural Differences in Academic Rhetoric. A Textlinguistic Study*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

- Scheiber, Noam 2017. How Uber Uses Psychological Tricks to Push its Drivers' Buttons. *New York Times*, 2 April.
- Schiffrin, Deborah 1980. Meta-Talk: Organizational and Evaluative Brackets in Discourse. *Sociological Inquiry* 50/3-4, 199-236.
- Schleppegrell, Mary J. 2004. *The Language of Schooling. A Functional Linguistics Perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Uccelli, Paola / L. Dobbs, Christina / Scott, Jessica 2012. Mastering Academic Language: Organization and Stance in the Persuasive Writing of High School Students. *Written Communication* 30/1, 36-62.

Digital resources

- Uber People. www.uberpeople.net Uber Drivers in San Diego, April 2018. Last accessed 20 December 2018.
- Weil, David 2018. *Gig Economy is No Excuse for Lax Protections for American Workers*.
- http://thehill.com/opinion/finance/383334-gig-economy-is-no-excuse-for-lax-protections-for-american-workers?amp;__twitter_impression=true