

# Serving suggestions in English and Spanish: A corpus-based contrastive study in online promotional discourse

**Noelia Ramón & Belén Labrador**

Universidad de León (Spain)

noelia.ramon@unileon.es, belen.labrador@unileon.es

## Abstract

Globalization in trade and industry has led to the need for writing specialized texts in English as an international language. Non-native speakers often find difficulties in the production of specialized texts, including online promotional discourse. In the food industry, the description of manufactured products is often followed by serving suggestions written in an attempt to appeal to the consumer/buyer and make them visualize different ways in which they can present the product. Because of the importance of this key section for marketing purposes, we have analyzed the language employed in serving suggestions. The main pragmatic functions found are instruction and persuasion, and this paper explores the expression of these functions cross-linguistically in English and Spanish texts promoting the consumption of cheese. The empirical data have been extracted from a comparable corpus of cheese descriptions in the two languages, which has been rhetorically tagged to isolate the move of serving suggestions. The main findings have revealed that, in both languages, the instructive function tends to be conveyed through syntactic structures, whereas the persuasive function is mainly expressed through phraseological patterns and specific lexical units with positive connotations. This paper contributes to the international expansion of local companies providing an inventory of linguistic resources for the successful writing of promotional texts in English or Spanish as a foreign language. The results are also useful in translation and foreign language writing, both for professionals and students, especially in the field of marketing.

**Keywords:** Online promotional discourse, serving suggestions, English-Spanish comparable corpus, foreign language writing, marketing.

## Resumen

### *Sugerencias de presentación en inglés y en español: Estudio contrastivo basado en corpus del discurso promocional en línea*

La globalización del comercio y la industria requiere la redacción de textos especializados en inglés como lengua internacional. Los hablantes no nativos suelen encontrar dificultades al escribir textos especializados, por ejemplo, en el discurso promocional en línea. En la industria alimentaria, la descripción de los productos suele ir seguida de sugerencias de presentación para atraer al consumidor/comprador y hacerle ver diferentes maneras en las que puede presentar el producto. Dada la importancia de esta sección en el mundo del *marketing*, hemos analizado el lenguaje de las sugerencias de presentación. Las principales funciones pragmáticas que hemos encontrado son la instrucción y la persuasión. Este artículo contrasta la expresión de estas funciones en sugerencias de presentación en inglés y en español. Los datos empíricos se han extraído de un corpus comparable de descripciones de quesos en los dos idiomas, que se ha etiquetado retóricamente para identificar el movimiento de las sugerencias de presentación. Las principales conclusiones indican que, en ambas lenguas, la función instructiva tiende a expresarse a través de estructuras sintácticas, mientras que la función persuasiva se expresa principalmente mediante patrones fraseológicos y unidades léxicas específicas con connotaciones positivas. Este trabajo pretende contribuir a la expansión internacional de las empresas locales mediante la confección de un inventario de recursos lingüísticos para redactar con éxito textos promocionales en inglés o español como lengua extranjera. Los resultados también pueden ser de utilidad en el ámbito de la traducción y de la redacción en lenguas extranjeras, tanto para profesionales como para estudiantes, especialmente de *marketing*.

**Palabras clave:** Discurso promocional en línea, sugerencias de presentación, corpus comparable inglés-español, escritura en lengua extranjera, marketing

## 1. Introduction

In our global economy, companies from many different sectors often need to promote their products worldwide to expand their business. For this purpose, these companies have to produce accurate and idiomatic texts in English, considering it is the main vehicle for international communication in trade, to convince potential customers to buy their products or hire their services. Promotional texts constitute a substantial genre within professional discourse (Bhatia, 2004), and being competent in writing this type of text is becoming increasingly important for small and medium-sized companies

that want to engage in international business. Promotional discourse has been the object of study of a considerable amount of research (Biber & Zhang, 2018; Hahn, 2010; Janoschka, 2004; Suau-Jiménez, 2019). This genre is informational and persuasive at the same time, as promotional texts describe a particular product or service to be sold, and additionally provide positive evaluation of the products with the general aim of persuading potential customers to buy them. The ACTRES Research Group at the University of León, Spain, has compiled several comparable corpora of different promotional texts in the food and drink industry to investigate cross-linguistic differences in this genre and construct second-language writing software (Labrador et al., 2014; Labrador & Ramón, 2020; Sanjurjo-González et al., 2019).

This paper addresses specific needs in foreign language writing in professional fields, focusing on the subgenre of online promotional texts in the cheese industry. In the food industry, online descriptions of manufactured products usually include a section labelled with the heading *serving suggestions*. This section is meant to appeal to the consumer/ buyer by describing a particular food in the most positive or appetizing way, including other foods and/or drinks that go well with it (but that the package does not contain), and also giving instructions about how best to prepare and serve the product. From a pragmatic perspective, this means that serving suggestions have two main functions: a) the persuasive function (praising the food mentioned in the serving suggestions with the use of positive evaluation), and b) the instructional function (giving recommendations or suggestions to the consumer). In this paper, we will describe and compare in detail how these two pragmatic functions are linguistically realized in English and Spanish serving suggestions in online cheese descriptions.

The empirical data have been extracted from Online Cheese Descriptions (OCD), an English-Spanish comparable corpus of promotional texts in the dairy industry. OCD contains 150 cheese descriptions in each working language and was compiled, tagged and explored using software specifically designed for our purposes. The rhetorical tagging (see Section 3) was carried out following the move-step method put forward by Swales (1990, 2004). Nine different moves were identified, one of which was serving suggestions. This move contains five different steps: temperature, presentation, food-pairing, drink-pairing and best season and age. We used an *ad hoc* browser (see Section 3) to unveil similarities and differences in English and Spanish in the formal expression of instruction and persuasion in this particular

move. This browser provided quantitative data on the frequency rate of the different steps in the move of serving suggestions. The qualitative analysis of the concordances was carried out manually following a general functional approach in the classification of syntactic and phraseological patterns.

By syntactic patterns, we refer to grammatical elements or structures at different levels, like clauses (e.g., to-infinitive clauses) or phrases (e.g., imperative forms). On the other hand, we will use the term phraseological patterns for strings of recurrent lexical items and their collocates. Some of these patterns constitute fixed expressions or collocations (“lexical items occurring [...] with a greater frequency than the law of averages would lead you to expect” (Krishnamurthy, 1987, p. 70)), such as *room temperature*. However, other phraseological patterns admit variation that can be expressed through metalanguage, for example, ‘NP of time + *before serving*’. In this example, different possibilities can fill the slot of NP of time, and combine with the collocation *before serving*: *an hour before serving*, *30 minutes before serving*, etc.

The findings reveal the syntactic and phraseological conventions associated with the main pragmatic functions in serving suggestions in English and Spanish. This detailed knowledge of how to express particular pragmatic functions in a specific domain is especially important in the globalized world of business. The appropriate use of a foreign language is essential to avoid misunderstandings or utterances that could be considered impolite or unfriendly, but it is also crucial to be successful in promoting and selling the products advertised. This paper serves the social purpose of assisting small and medium-sized companies in writing more effectively to convince potential customers of the high quality of their products and, as a result, increase their sales.

The inventory of patterns compiled in this study can be used to teach technical writing in business, especially to students in Marketing degrees, and professionals in the field of the food industry who need to write promotional texts for the products they are selling in a foreign language, either English or Spanish. In addition, translators and translation students can also benefit from these cross-linguistic results. Contrastive studies like the present paper contribute to enhancing the linguistic, communicative and pragmatic competences of non-native speakers in various professional settings involving intercultural communication (Aijmer, 2011; Kádár & House, 2020).

## 2. The pragmatic functions of promotional discourse

Pragmatics refers to the use of language in context to convey particular functions, and speech acts are often regarded as the minimal unit of linguistic communication. The concept of speech acts was first coined by Austin, who classified them into verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives and expositives (Austin, 1989). A speech act is “the production of the sentence token under certain conditions” (Searle, 1979, p. 39). Later, Searle, put forward a new classification into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. For our purposes in this paper, we will focus on serving suggestions, which can be considered to belong to the speech act type named “directives” (Banerjee & Carrell, 1988; Li, 2010; Marmaridou, 1990; Schmidt & Richards, 1980). Directives are “attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle, 1979, p. 13), as in the case of serving suggestions, where we find instructions about how to prepare and consume the food product.

In addition, in promotional texts such as those included in our corpus, another important pragmatic function that cuts across the whole text is persuasion, as this genre is written by manufacturers who present their products in a positive light to persuade the reader to buy their particular cheese. Promotional texts can be considered “descriptions-with-intent-to-sell” (Biber & Zhang, 2018, p. 104). A lot of research has explored promotional discourse and, in recent years, several studies have focused on promotional texts in digital genres or cybergenres: websites, blogs, social media, etc. (Calvi & Suau-Jiménez, 2023; Mur-Dueñas & Pascual, 2023; Sanmartín Sáez, 2014; Shepherd & Watters, 1998).

The pragmatic function of persuasion can be related to the category of expressives in Searle’s classification of speech acts, which convey attitudes about objects and facts of the world (Vanderveken & Kubo, 2002). The move of serving suggestions has previously been studied from a marketing perspective because of its impact on the public as a persuasive strategy (Rebollar et al., 2016).

Summing up, from the point of view of pragmatics, serving suggestions display a clear instructive function about how to proceed to consume the food product, and an underlying persuasive function mostly actualized by means of the positive evaluation of the food product itself, which is also present in all the other moves of promotional texts, not only in serving suggestions.

## 2.1. The pragmatic function of instruction

In the literature on the pragmatic function of instructions, suggestions have been defined as utterances “that the speaker intends the hearer to perceive as a directive to do something that will be to the hearer’s benefit” (Banerjee & Carrell, 1988, p. 319). Within the speech act of directives, several studies have pointed out different degrees of illocutionary force, ranging from weaker suggestions to stronger advice (Holmes, 1983; Richards, 1985; Schmidt & Richards, 1980). In addition, other authors have included the speaker as the possible agent of the future action who can also benefit from it, just as much as the hearer (Li, 2010; Marmaridou, 1990). Weisser distinguishes two related speech acts: one of them proposing joint or interlocutor’s potential action (suggest), and the other eliciting the interlocutor’s non-verbal response (direct) (Weisser, 2018, p. 284).

In the serving suggestions in cheese descriptions, we find suggestions but also instances of stronger advice and recommendations, although in this case, only the reader is the addressee of the suggestion, not the writer. However, we believe there is a connection between the manufacturer of the cheese and the potential customer, encouraging two-sided commitment: the cheese company offers high-quality products and the most adequate suggestions for the consumption of each type of cheese, and then expects the reader to purchase the product, and eventually perform the actions suggested for preparing or cooking the cheese.

As for the linguistic structures associated with the expression of instructions, the expected forms in Spanish are infinitives, present tenses, imperatives and modal periphrases (Díaz Rodríguez & Enríquez, 2020). In English, previous studies on instructive text types (Chiavetta, 2006; Colina, 1997) have identified imperatives as the most common way to give instructions to readers.

## 2.2. The pragmatic function of persuasion

As stated by Martin and White (2005, p. 92), every communicative event is dialogic. In other words, every text is written expecting a particular reaction from the readership, as it raises the attention of the reader and/or encourages action (Háhn, 2010, p. 12). The concept of ‘engagement’ is based on this tenet; it presupposes “the author’s intention to establish a connection with potential readers of the text with the aim of reaching

certain communicative goals” (Suau-Jiménez, 2020, p. 77), and was first studied in academic discourse (Hyland, 2005).

In the field of business studies, research on persuasion and promotion as pragmatic functions in digital genres includes different types of ‘engagement’. Several studies have analysed consumer brand engagement in social media (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Medina et al. (2023) explored how professionals and managers of media companies define and measure engagement. Casado-Molina et al. (2022) examine how emojis generate engagement on the social medium Twitter in the beer industry. Other authors study engagement in the tourism industry, in promotional websites (hotel websites, tourist guides, etc.) (Suau-Jiménez, 2019, 2020). Suau-Jiménez and Ivorra-Pérez (2023) also studied the expression of engagement on Instagram in English and Spanish conversational threads dealing with tourism. Verbal and non-verbal engagement devices have also been studied, for example in elevator pitches from TV programs (Díez Prados, 2019). Engagement with prospective consumers is closely related to persuasion since writers tend to include evaluative propositions to convince the readers to carry out a particular action.

The pragmatic function of persuasion is common in most discourse types, “although advertising and political discourse are the two persuasive registers *par excellence* (i.e., their main function is to convince)” (Díez Prados, 2019, p. 220). In the field of online promotional texts, such as the cheese descriptions in our corpus, the pragmatic function of persuasion can be said to pervade the whole text. The final aim of this subgenre is to convince potential buyers to purchase the food product, and different strategies will be employed to achieve this aim, mainly through the positive evaluation of the product, which is part of the object of study of this paper.

Evaluative discourse includes both self-praise and complimenting:

Self-praise has often been compared to the speech act of complimenting. The main difference between both acts is that, in the case of self-praise, the speakers’ positive evaluation comes from the speaker themselves whereas in the case of compliments, the positive evaluation comes from a different interlocutor. (Maíz Arévalo, 2021, p. 108).

In online promotional texts of food products, self-praise is dominant as it is the manufacturers who praise their products; there is implicit or explicit positive evaluation *of* the speaker *by* the speaker (Dayter, 2014). Previous

studies have found that self-praise is more frequent in online interaction than in face-to-face communication, and different social media have been explored to find instances of self-praise: Twitter (Dayter, 2014), Whatsapp (Dayter, 2018), Instagram (Matley, 2018), LinkedIn (Tobback, 2019), Facebook (Van Dijk, 2013), and Weibo (Ren & Guo, 2020).

Previous studies on the lexico-grammatical devices employed to express positive evaluation in persuasive discourse have identified lexical rather than structural resources, in particular, positive adjectives, verbs, nouns and modal verbs in English (Biber & Zhang, 2018, p. 106). In the case of Spanish, similar results have been found in promotional discourse. Both languages “resort to explicitly evaluative lexis, with no statistically significant differences” (Pérez Blanco & Izquierdo, 2022, p. 55).

### 3. Materials and method

The data used for this paper were extracted from an English-Spanish comparable corpus of Online Cheese Descriptions (OCD). This corpus contains two subcorpora of 150 online cheese descriptions in each language, with a total number of 23,034 words in English and 25,094 words in Spanish. The average number of words is 154 per text in English and 167 per text in Spanish. All the texts were downloaded from freely available British and Spanish websites of cheese manufacturing companies, retailers and general websites describing different types of cheese. For more information, see the complete list in Appendix 1. These websites were selected because they offered longer cheese descriptions than other websites, where only the pictures and a list of ingredients were included. From each website a variable number of texts was downloaded, generally between 7 and 10. Different types and brands of cheeses were chosen to show a wide range of different products and ensure representativeness.

The first step in the analysis of this corpus was rhetorical annotation following Swales’s move-step method (Swales, 1990, 2004). According to Biber et al. (2007, p. 23), a move “refers to a section of a text that performs a specific communicative function. Each move not only has its own purpose but also contributes to the overall communicative purpose of the genre.” A move can be divided further into steps and substeps to go into greater detail.

We annotated and later explored the corpus using two tailor-made tools which have been specifically developed for this purpose: a tagger and a



browser<sup>1</sup>. After analysing a small number of texts, we decided on a provisional list of rhetorical tags. These labels were implemented into the ACTRES tagger<sup>2</sup> by computer engineers so that we could annotate every single text in the corpus, one by one (see Figure 1).

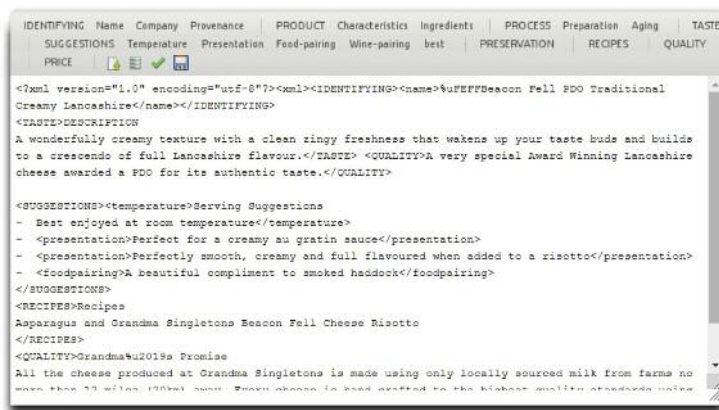


Figure 1. Example of an English cheese description coded for rhetorical moves with the ACTRES tagger.

The final list of moves obtained in our corpus included 1) the identification of the cheese, 2) one or more pictures, 3) the product description, 4) the manufacturing process, 5) the subjective description of the smell and taste, 6) serving suggestions, 7) preservation suggestions, 8) recipes and 9) quality standards.

The move of serving suggestions (Move 6) tends to occur towards the end of the cheese descriptions in both languages. This move has been subdivided into five different steps: 1) temperature (recommendations about how to achieve the adequate temperature for the consumption of the cheese), 2) presentation (suggestions about how to cut and serve the cheese), 3) food-pairing (advice about good combinations with other foods) and 4) drink-pairing (advice about good combinations with specific drinks), and 5) best season and age (indications about the best time of year and degree of aging to consume the cheese). Not all the serving suggestions contain all the different steps, and the order of these steps can vary. The serving suggestion of one particular cheese, the Mature Blue Stilton, is shown below fully annotated with the corresponding rhetorical tags:

<SUGGESTIONS><presentation>Uses: Serve on a cheeseboard with a selection of other English cheeses such as Cheddar, Lancashire and Cornish Brie.</presentation> <foodpairing>Serve in crusty rolls with a sweet, fruity chutney or crumble and toss with crisply cooked bacon, cooked pasta and a little olive oil. </foodpairing> <temperature>To eat: If serving on a cheeseboard remove the cheese from the fridge an hour before serving, to allow it to come to room temperature and to develop its full texture and flavour. </temperature></SUGGESTIONS>

In this example, we can see that three out of the five possible steps occur: step 2) presentation, followed by step 3) foodpairing and step 1) temperature.

After the rhetorical tagging, the ACTRES browser<sup>3</sup>, designed for this purpose, was used to retrieve the concordance lines of the relevant keywords in the different moves and steps (see Figure 2). For more information on this software, see Labrador and Ramón (2020).

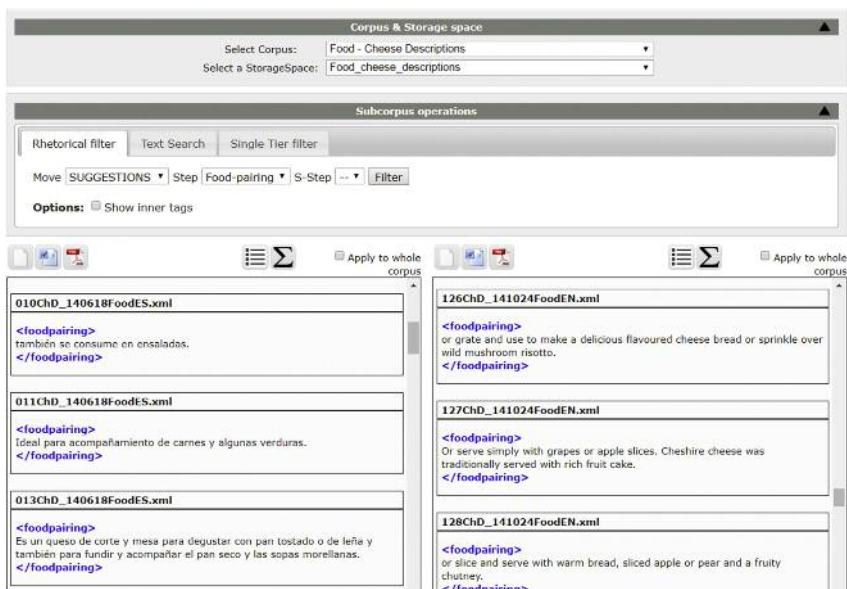


Figure 2. Example of Move 6: Suggestions, Step 3: Food Pairing in the ACTRES browser.

The second step in the procedure restricted the analysis exclusively to the subcorpus of serving suggestions. This is a small, but manageable and

representative subcorpus of a very specific and highly specialized domain: serving suggestions in cheese descriptions. As shown in Table 1, the English subcorpus is slightly larger, and also the number of words in most steps is higher in English, except for drink-pairing, which is higher in Spanish.

SERVING SUGGESTIONS	Spanish	English
Step 1: temperature	666	1,368
Step 2: presentation	931	1,127
Step 3: food-pairing	523	864
Step 4: drink-pairing	811	598
Step 5: best season and age	322	519
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,253</b>	<b>4,476</b>

Table 1. Number of words in each step of serving suggestions in English and Spanish.

A quantitative analysis was carried out to investigate the frequency of occurrence of each step in each language through the number of texts displaying that particular step. Then, a detailed qualitative lexico-grammatical analysis of the five steps included in the move of serving suggestions was carried out using our browser to identify the linguistic resources that convey the two pragmatic functions studied: instruction and persuasion. These linguistic resources have been grouped into two categories: syntactic patterns, mainly verb phrases, and phraseological patterns like recurrent collocations.

## 4. Results and discussion

The analysis of the comparable corpus of serving suggestions reveals several interesting results in the comparison between English and Spanish cheese descriptions. Serving suggestions constitute an important move in online cheese descriptions, as they occur in around 60% of the texts in our corpus (90 texts in Spanish and 85 in English, out of the total of 150 in each language), with a similar frequency in both languages. There are slightly more texts containing serving suggestions in the Spanish subcorpus; however, as for the number of words, the English serving suggestions amount to nearly 20% of the running text in the corpus and the Spanish percentage is 13.15%. So, if they occur, serving suggestions tend to be longer in English. This fact might indicate that British companies consider it convenient to provide more detailed advice about how to consume their products. The mere existence of

a move dealing with serving suggestions contributes to the overall persuasive function of online promotional texts of the food industry: “writing and speaking, acts of meaning-making, are never neutral but always *engaged* in that they realize the interests, the positions, the perspectives and the values of those who enact them” (Hyland, 2005, p. 4).

Table 2 shows that the most common step in the move of serving suggestions in English is presentation, which appears in 55 texts, closely followed by food-pairing, included in 49 texts. In contrast, the most common step in the Spanish subcorpus is drink-pairing, which is found in 49 texts, followed by presentation (42 texts). This may be considered a culture-bound feature of the Spanish cheese descriptions, as more importance is given to the type of drink that matches each particular cheese, especially wine. Wine is a drink traditionally associated with Mediterranean cultures, including Spain. In contrast, in English, the combinations suggested to go with cheese are more often different types of food (32%), rather than drinks (20%), for example different types of bread, crackers or fruit; in addition, cheese is more often added as an ingredient to recipes. The two remaining steps —temperature and best season and age— show lower frequency rates in both languages, especially in Spanish.

	Spanish			English		
	Nº of texts	% of texts	Nº of words	Nº of texts	% of texts	Nº of words
Temperature	29	19.33%	666	43	28.67%	1,368
Presentation	42	28.00%	931	55	36.67%	1,127
Food-pairing	26	17.33%	523	49	32.67%	864
Drink-pairing	49	32.67%	811	31	20.67%	598
Best season and age	11	7.33%	322	23	15.33%	519

Table 2. Distribution of the steps in serving suggestions in Spanish and English.

The move of serving suggestions is usually preceded by a particular heading in both languages: “Consumo”, “Recomendación de consumo”, “Sugerencias de degustación”, “Periodo de consumo preferente” in Spanish and “Serving suggestions”, “To eat:”, “USES”, “Best enjoyed:”, “Best age & season” in English.

The following subsections present the contrastive results of the linguistic resources used to express directive and persuasive functions in each of the steps in this move, and the discussion of the findings.

#### 4.1. Step 1: Temperature in English and Spanish

In a prototypical serving suggestion move of a cheese description, the first step recommends the best temperature for consumption, usually achieved by removing the cheese from the fridge before. The analysis revealed that certain circumstantial features were particularly relevant: a) time (the hours or minutes the cheese should remain outside the fridge before its consumption: “45 minutos antes de su consumo”, “an hour before serving”), b) place (usually outside the fridge: “atemperar fuera del frigorífico”, “remove from the fridge”), and c) purpose (“para conseguir la máxima cremosidad”, “to develop its full texture and flavour”). The recurrent syntactic and phraseological patterns identified in our corpus in this step are listed in Table 3.

Spanish	English
Syntactic patterns	Syntactic patterns
Infinitive: <i>Atemperar/ degustar/ extraer / mantener / consumir</i> Se-passive: <i>se deja/ se aconseja/ se corta / se extiende</i> Para que + subjunctive/ para + inf.: <i>para que alcance/ para conseguir</i> Hay que + inf.: <i>hay que retirar</i>	Imperative: <i>remove</i> -ed clause: <i>Best enjoyed/ best served</i> To-inf. clause: <i>to allow / to eat / to develop</i>
Phraseological patterns	Phraseological patterns
<i>Extraer del frigorífico/ atemperar fuera del frigorífico</i> <i>Dejar/ consumir/ degustar/ mantener a temperatura ambiente</i> NP of time + <i>antes de su consumo/ antes de consumirlo: 30 minutos antes de su consumo</i>	<i>Remove from the fridge</i> <i>Enjoyed at/ served at/ come to room temperature</i> NP of time + <i>before serving: an hour before serving</i>

Table 3. Syntactic and phraseological patterns in Step 1: Temperature.

To give indications to the consumer about the best temperature to consume the cheese, Spanish texts make use of infinitives (“Degustarlo a temperatura ambiente”), the *se-passive* (“Se aconseja atemperar el queso fuera del frigorífico al menos durante una hora, antes de su consumo”), purpose clauses (“para que alcance una temperatura cercana a los 20 °C”), and ‘hay + que periphrases’ (“hay que retirarlo del frigorífico y de su envoltorio 15 minutos antes de consumirlo”). Traditionally, infinitives and *se-passives* are associated with the instructive text type in Spanish, in particular regarding instructions related to food as in recipes (Colina, 1997, p. 342). In English, the main linguistic resources identified are imperatives: “remove from the fridge” and -ed clauses: “Best enjoyed and Best served”. One reason why imperatives are not found here in Spanish might be because in the imperative there are two morphological forms to choose from: informal *tú* and formal *usted*. Not using the imperative allows the writer to avoid having to make this choice, as infinitives and *se-passives* are impersonal syntactic structures.

Table 3 also shows a much wider range of lexical verbs to express the instructions in Spanish, whereas in English fewer verbs have this directive function. This ties in with previous cross-linguistic analyses which have shown the preference for lexical variety in Spanish in contrast with more repetition in English, for example in adjective patterns (Llorens Simón, 2022). It must be noted that specific verbs tend to occur with specific structures, for example, the verb *atemperar* is always used in the infinitive form, and the verb *enjoy* always occurs in *-ed* form: “best enjoyed”.

In addition to these syntactic patterns, the analysis revealed several common phraseological patterns, some of which are strong collocations like *temperatura ambiente* and *room temperature*; other patterns allow for more variation, as in *dejar/ consumir/ degustar/ mantener + a+temperatura ambiente*; *enjoyed at/ served at/ come to + room temperature*.

In this step, all the resources contribute to the instructive function; there are no instances of persuasive elements or positive evaluation.

## 4.2. Step 2: Presentation in English and Spanish

The directive function expressed in this step includes suggestions about how to cook or present the cheese for the most savoury experience. The main circumstantial features found in this particular step are a) purpose (“para rallar/untar”, “para ensaladas”, “en tortas”, “en repostería”, “utilizado en alta cocina”, “to top baked potatoes”, “to make cheese on toast”, “to make cheese scones”, “for a rich, tasty result”), b) shape and presentation (“en forma de dados”, “en finas lonchas”, “en virutas”, “en tarrinas de barro”, “cortado en lonchas muy finas”, “en piezas cilíndricas”, “en aperitivos”, “curado en aceite”, “rallado”, “in chunks”, “in cooking”, “in soup”, “in sandwiches”, “in prepared food dishes”, “in salads”, “on a cheeseboard”), and c) time of the day/meal (“como” + “postre/ tapeo/ picoteo/ aperitivo/ acompañamiento”, “en tapas”, “as a starter”, “as a quick snack”). The syntactic and phraseological patterns identified in our corpus in this step are listed in Table 4.

Spanish	English
Syntactic patterns	Syntactic patterns
Infinitive: <i>añadir/ untar</i> Se-passive: <i>se recomienda/ se utiliza/ se aconseja/ se consume</i> Deber/ poder/ soler/ permitir + inf.: <i>debe utilizarse/ se puede degustar/ puede servirse/ podemos catarlo/ puede consumirse/ puede incorporarse/ se suele utilizar rallado/ su textura nos permite usarla como</i>	Imperative: <i>Crumble and add/ serve on a cheeseboard</i> Passive: <i>is used as</i> Can + inf. <i>Can be used/ incorporated/ served/ grated/ cooked</i>  -ed clause: <i>Crumbled over salads/ served warm/ Cubed on tomato and onion salad</i> Non-verbal clauses: <i>a great addition/ a classic cheese board cheese</i>
Phraseological patterns	Phraseological patterns
(Muy)+positive adj.+ para: <i>muy adecuado para la cocina/ perfecto para elaborar salsa/ excelente para comer extendido sobre pan tostado/ muy apto para preparar todo tipo de salsas/ indicado para salsas y gratinados</i>	Positive adj.+ for: <i>It is suitable for grating and grill in/ suitable for use on cheeseboard/ superb for crumbling/ ideal for slicing/ ideal for sandwiches/ perfect for a creamy au gratin sauce</i>  Subj + makes + NP: <i>It makes an excellent dessert cheese/ Meldon makes a tasty addition to a cheeseboard</i>

Table 4. Syntactic and phraseological patterns in Step 2: Presentation.

Regarding the syntactic patterns chosen, Table 4 shows again that infinitives are commonly used in Spanish for instructions, whereas in English we often find imperatives for the same purpose: “Añadir una cucharada sopra de yogurt”; “Crumble and add to salads or pasta dishes”. In English, imperatives have been classified as direct strategies of suggestions in the taxonomy proposed by Martínez-Flor (2005). This author also considers conventionalised strategies (including modal verbs) and indirect strategies. Other options include the passive voice in both languages (“se consume con una cuchara”, “can be used in hot or cold recipes”), modal periphrases in Spanish with *deber*, *poder*, *soler*, *permitir* (“Se puede degustar como una crema ligera”), in English *-ed* clauses (“Cubed on tomato and onion salad”) and non-verbal clauses, mostly NPs: “A great addition to any cheeseboard”.

The Spanish modal periphrases clearly indicate a cline in the instructive function, from strong recommendation to weaker suggestions, in line with previous studies on promotional discourse (see Pérez Blanco & Izquierdo, 2025). These authors have found that the Spanish verb *poder* is closely associated with suggestions, whereas *deber* and *soler* tend to express a stronger recommendation.

The last two patterns listed in English are both non-finite constructions and these structures have not been found in the Spanish subcorpus, where only full sentences are used. This result points towards a more informal style in English cheese descriptions. A similar trend towards informality has been identified in previous studies on promotional discourse, where advertisers try to convince prospective consumers by imitating informal conversations

(Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Janoschka, 2004; Labrador et al., 2014). As can be seen in Table 4, all these structures in both languages are associated with the pragmatic function of instruction.

Regarding the phraseological patterns, we have identified common combinations found in both languages formed by a positive evaluative adjective followed by the preposition *para/ for* to suggest different options for presenting the cheese: “Es perfecto para preparar cualquier variante de salsa de queso azul”; “It is superb for crumbling into salads, pastas and soups”. Additionally, in English we found a specific lexical construction with the verb *make* + an NP containing a positive evaluative reference in the modifier, as in “Shropshire Blue makes an impressive-looking table cheese”.

These lexico-phraseological patterns are clearly linked to the pragmatic function of persuasion, tying in with previous results about the expression of positive evaluation through “the dense use of evaluative vocabulary” (Biber & Zhang, 2018, p. 118). In addition, these positive adjectives used in both languages are a clear example of self-praise, which has been found to be more common in digital genres than in other types of promotional texts (Dayter, 2014, 2018).

### 4.3. Step 3: Food-pairing in English and Spanish

In this step on food-pairing we will list the syntactic and phraseological patterns to offer suggestions to the consumer about the most suitable foods to eat with each particular cheese. The main semantic feature involved is pairing: “se aconseja en platos al horno con verduras o bien con huevos”, “The cheese is a spreading cheese well partnered by crusty bread, biscuits, a jacket potato or stirred into pasta”. Additionally, purpose is also expressed usually by means of the prepositions *para, for, as*: “Es un queso de corte y mesa para degustar con pan tostado o de leña y también para fundir y acompañar el pan seco y las sopas morellanas”; “as part of a ploughman’s lunch for a quick lunch”. Also, classifying modifiers have been found with this purpose function in both languages: “a spreading cheese”, “un queso de corte y mesa”. The syntactic and phraseological patterns in this step are listed in Table 5.



Spanish	English
Syntactic patterns	Syntactic patterns
Infinitive: <i>servir</i> Se-passive: <i>Se combina/ se consume/ se utiliza/ se acompaña/ se aconseja/ se recomienda</i> Poder/ permitir + inf: <i>puede mezclarse/ puede tomarse/ permite ser usado</i>	Imperative: <i>grill/ serve/ use/ include</i> Passive: <i>was served</i> -ed clauses: <i>Sliced/ scattered/ grated/ served/ grilled</i> Non-verbal clauses: <i>Classic cheese on toast; Every day eating in sandwiches or with pasta.</i>
Phraseological patterns	Phraseological patterns
Ir muy bien + con: <i>va muy bien en aperitivo con frutos secos</i> Acompañar/ combinar + (ADV) + con: <i>acompañan muy bien con</i> Complementar + ADV + NP: <i>complementarán a la perfección</i> ADJ + acompañante/ (para) acompañamiento + PREP: <i>buen acompañante para/ ideal para acompañamiento de</i>	Subj. + works + well + PP: <i>It also works well with sauces and dressings</i> Well partnered by: <i>well partnered by</i> A+ ADJ + accompaniment/ complement + to: <i>A piquant accompaniment to/ A beautiful complement to</i> Our + suggestion + is: <i>Our suggestion for this one is</i>

Table 5. Syntactic and phraseological patterns in Step 3: Food-pairing.

The same syntactic patterns as in the previous steps have been identified here to express suggestions or recommendations regarding food-pairing in both languages: infinitives in Spanish vs. imperatives in English (“Servirlo sobre galletas o crackers blancos o integrals”; “Grill on crusty bread with sliced pear and a pink peppercorn and honey dressing”). The passive voice is also employed in both languages: “Se recomienda untar en tostas artesanas extra-crujientes”; “Cheshire cheese was traditionally served with rich fruit cake”. Additionally, in Spanish modal periphrases with *poder* and *permitir* are used: “puede tomarse como queso salado o dulce”. In English, non-finite clauses have been found: *-ed* clauses as in “sliced on a summer burger”, and non-verbal clauses like “Classic cheese on toast”.

As expected, the most relevant phraseological patterns in Spanish contain lexical items belonging to the semantic field of pairing, with different combinations of pre- and post-modifiers adding positive evaluation. This includes fixed collocations in each language with the prepositions *con/with* and the verbs *ir, acompañar* in Spanish and *work* in English, in both cases with positive evaluative adverbials: “va muy bien en aperitivo con frutos secos”, “Also works well in Yorkshire rarebit”. Other resources in Spanish are the verbs *acompañar, combinar* and *complementar*, the nouns *acompañante* and *acompañamiento*. Examples are: “Acompañan muy bien con frutas del bosque”; “Combina perfectamente con alimentos dulces y salados”. Other English phraseological patterns found in this step are: “well partnered by” + food: “The cheese is a spreading cheese well partnered by crusty bread”; “a + adj + accompaniment/complement + to” (e.g., “A piquant accompaniment to pork pie or ploughman’s lunch”); “our + suggestion +

is” (e.g., “Our suggestion for this one is on top of a slab of rich fruit cake”).

These findings corroborate previous results highlighting the variety of lexical resources expressing positive evaluation —positive adjectives, verbs and nouns— (Biber & Zhang, 2018). As in step 3 above, all these positive phraseological patterns in both languages illustrate self-praise (Maíz Arévalo, 2021), as it is the voice of the manufacturing companies praising their cheeses.

Again, we can see that the instructive function is conveyed by syntactic patterns, whereas the persuasive function is actualized by lexical and phraseological resources.

4.4. Step 4: Drink-pairing in English and Spanish

The semantic relation in this step is similar to the one found in the previous step, food-pairing, but it refers to different types of drinks that are suggested to accompany a particular cheese. Therefore, the semantic references present here are the same, namely pairing (“marida muy bien con vinos tintos”, “it goes very well with either a glass of beer or red wine”) and purpose (“para endulzar el paladar”; “as an accompaniment”). The syntactic and phraseological patterns identified in our corpus in this step are listed in Table 6.

Spanish	English
Syntactic patterns	Syntactic patterns
Infinitive: <i>unir</i> Imperative: <i>No dejes</i> Se-passive: <i>se combina/ se recomienda/ se consume/ se prefiere/ se aconseja/ se marida/ se requiere</i> Non-verbal clauses: <i>Queso ideal para</i>  -ed clause: <i>Recomendado/ servidos</i>	Imperative: <i>try/ enjoy/ serve</i>  Passive: <i>is traditionally served</i>  Non-verbal clauses: <i>A wonderful companion to</i>
Phraseological patterns	Phraseological patterns
<i>Es + positive adj. + maridaje + con: es un buen maridaje con</i> <i>Maridar + positive adv.+ con: marida muy bien con/ marida perfectamente con</i> <i>Acompañar/ regar/ degustar/ casar/ saborear + con: Se podría acompañar con/ puede ser regado con/ puede degustarse con/ casarlo con/ saborear con</i> <i>Perfecto/ ideal + para + inf.: perfecto para acompañar/ ideal para degustar</i>	<i>Our suggestion + is: Our suggestion for this one is go + positive adv. + with: it goes splendidly with</i>  <i>Subj. + is worth trying with</i>  <i>Subj. + is the perfect partner</i>  <i>Perfect/ delicious + with: This cheese is perfect with/ It is also delicious served after dinner with</i> <i>A match made in heaven: Cheese and wine are a match made in heaven.</i>

Table 6. Syntactic and phraseological patterns in Step 4: Drink-pairing.

As in the previous sections, the main resources used in English and Spanish for expressing suggestions regarding which drink to have with a particular cheese are infinitives in Spanish and imperatives in English; these are the unmarked syntactic structures for instructional purposes in each language. Examples are “Lo mejor, unirlo a vinos fuertes, espirituosos, sidras y orujos”; “Enjoy with a traditional pint of Lancashire bitter or a full-bodied glass of red wine”. Exceptionally, an imperative has been found in this step in Spanish too, although in the negative form: “No dejes de probarlo acompañado de un blanco verdejo de Rueda”. Again, the passive voice is an important resource in both languages, with several verbs engaged in this construction in Spanish, and only one verb (*serve*) in English.

This ties in with the wider lexical variety found in Spanish as compared with English, as found in other steps above, and also in previous cross-linguistic studies with these two languages (Llorens Simón, 2022). Examples are: “se combina bien con vinos blancos afrutados”; “is traditionally served with Port at Christmas”. As for non-finite clauses, in this step we found two instances of *-ed* clauses in Spanish (“Recomendado con vinos blancos de alta graduación o con vinos blancos de fermentación en barrica, pero servidos bien fríos”), and non-verbal clauses in both English (“A wonderful companion to Mead, Port, Cabernet Merlot or Sweet Cider”) and Spanish (“Queso ideal para degustarlo con sidra”).

Regarding the phraseological patterns involved in the expression of drink-pairing in Spanish, we found one outstanding lexical resource, namely the verb *maridar* and the corresponding noun *maridaje*, with positive evaluative modifiers in both cases: “Marida muy bien con vinos tintos de la Ribera del Duero y también con blancos secos pero afrutados”, “es un buen maridaje con un rioja joven”. These lexical units are specialized terms in the domain of food and drink used exclusively with the meaning of combining a particular drink (mainly wine) with a particular food. Additional lexical verbs used with this function in the Spanish subcorpus include *acompañar*, *regar*, *degustar* and *casar*: “puede ser regado con un tinto joven o de crianza”, “se puede degustar con vinos de la región”, “No es desdeñable casarlo con un buen brut o un cava”. We have also found positive evaluative adjectives (*perfecto* and *ideal*) used here to express how well a particular cheese combines with a particular drink: “Jumilla y Yecla, que son de alto extracto seco y con muchos taninos, son los perfectos para acompañar este tipo de queso”, “Ideal para degustar con un vino tinto de la zona”. The importance of adjectives for the expression of positive meanings in

promotional texts has been acknowledged by other authors (Biber & Zhang, 2018; Manca, 2010).

In the case of English, we have identified recurrent phraseological patterns to express drink-pairing, as listed above, e.g., “Our suggestion for this one is a dry Riesling”, “it goes splendidly with a Rioja”. Positive connotations are conveyed here by means of adjectives (*perfect, delicious*) and adverbs (*splendidly*). A curious example found in the English subcorpus is the use of the fixed expression ‘match made in heaven’. The use of idioms is another strategy that shows the informal style of promotional texts in English, such as cheese descriptions: “Cheese and wine are a match made in heaven”.

As in steps 2 and 3, in the drink-pairing section, the syntactic patterns illustrate the instructive function, whereas the lexical and phraseological resources are more closely linked to the persuasive function, again conveying self-praise on the part of the cheese manufacturers.

4.5. Step 5: Best age and season in English and Spanish

In this step, the cheese descriptions recommend the best time of the year and the best stage of ageing to eat a particular cheese. As for semantic references, the main meaning expressed in both languages is time: “13 días desde la fecha de elaboración”, “en un plazo muy corto”, “at four weeks of age”, “when young at 3 or 4 weeks of age”. The syntactic and phraseological patterns identified in our corpus in this step are listed in Table 7.

Spanish	English
Syntactic patterns	Syntactic patterns
Deber/ poder + inf.: <i>debe consumirse/ puede consumirse</i>	Can + inf.: <i>it can be enjoyed</i> Passive: <i>is eaten/ is matured</i> -ed clause: <i>best eaten</i> Non-verbal clause: <i>Available throughout the year</i>
Phraseological patterns	Phraseological patterns
<i>Periodo/ fecha de consumo preferente</i> Consumir + adv/ adj.: <i>consumirse en un plazo muy corto/ consumirse frescos</i> <i>Está en su punto</i>	<i>Best age and season</i> <i>Available + adv time: available throughout the year</i> <i>Production season</i>

Table 7. Syntactic and phraseological patterns in Step 5: Best age and season.

As this is a short step in cheese descriptions in terms of the number of words in both languages (see Table 1), there is little variation in the syntactic patterns employed to convey directive force, even less in Spanish. In Spanish the modal periphrases are the preferred option to express the

recommendation of when to eat a particular cheese according to the degree of ageing, again ranging from strong recommendation (“debe consumirse ni muy blando ni muy seco”) to weaker suggestion (“puede consumirse como una Torta del Casar o de La Serena”) (Pérez Blanco & Izquierdo, 2025). In English, we have identified cases of the modal verb *can* to indicate suggestion (“it can be enjoyed all year round”) and cases of the passive voice (“the cheese is best eaten between 4 and 6 weeks”). Additionally, non-finite clauses are used here too: *-ed* clauses (“Best eaten at four weeks of age”) and non-verbal clauses (“available throughout the year”).

The phraseological patterns are few but recurrent because they include the actual headings of this step in both languages: “Periodo de consumo preferente” and “Best age and season”. In addition, in Spanish the verb “consumir” is frequently used in this step, followed by an adverbial of time or an adjective describing the texture of the cheese at a particular moment in the ageing process: “consumirse en un plazo muy corto”, “consumirse frescos o medianamente enjutos”. In order to refer to the optimal moment for the consumption of a cheese, in Spanish we find the fixed expression “está en su punto”, as in “cuando está en su punto, alrededor de los dos, tres meses”. In English, the heading for this step is usually “Best age and season”. Two expressions have been found in English to indicate the time of the year when the cheese is produced: *available* + ADV of time and the collocation *production season*: “Available throughout the year due to the readiness of Swaledale goat’s milk”, “Lambing is the start of our production season for Swaledale ewes cheese PDO.” In step 5, the resources contribute only to the instructive function, not to the persuasive one.

The detailed analysis of English and Spanish serving suggestions has revealed differences with respect to the degree of engagement in the five rhetorical steps of this subgenre. Step 1: Temperature and Step 5: Best age and season both focus on providing the consumer with objective information and instructions on how and when to consume the cheese, but do not build a rapport with the intended reader. In contrast, Step 2: Presentation, Step 3: Food-pairing and Step 4: Drink-pairing present some elements of engagement with prospective consumers in the form of positive evaluation and self-praise. This is closely related to the pragmatic function of persuasion, since writers tend to include evaluative propositions to convince the readers to carry out a particular action. In addition, steps 2, 3 and 4 also display features of the instructive function. This trend in the distribution of

the instructive and the persuasive functions across the move of serving suggestions has been noticed in both languages.

Within the digital genres, previous studies on social media and different types of websites have found a stronger degree of engagement because these texts allow for interaction with the user/consumer in the form of reviews and comments (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Casado-Molina et al., 2022; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Medina et al., 2023; Suau-Jiménez & Ivorra-Pérez, 2023). In our corpus of cheese descriptions, the texts are unidirectional, in the sense that the manufacturing companies describe their products with an intent to sell, but the consumers do not reply. Their expected response is non-verbal: buying the cheese. This justifies the fact that there is less engagement in this corpus.

## 5. Conclusions

The text type analysed for this paper is part of the genre of promotional discourse: online cheese descriptions written to persuade the reader to buy a particular product. Within this subgenre, one of the moves found, serving suggestions, displays two clear pragmatic functions: a) they are used to recommend how to cook or eat the cheese, and b) they include positive qualifying modifiers that contribute to the overall function of persuasion in cheese descriptions. The degree of engagement in this corpus is restricted to the expected reaction from the reader, who needs to be convinced to purchase the cheese.

A preliminary rhetorical analysis revealed a similar structure in English and Spanish serving suggestions, with the same steps. In both languages, the most frequent step is the presentation of the cheese, as it deals with how best to prepare and serve the food product. The best season and age is the least common step in both languages. Food-pairing is found to be more frequent in English, whereas drink-pairing is more frequent in Spanish. This result reveals clear cultural preferences and conventions in this text type: in the English-speaking world, it seems to be more relevant to mention other foods that go well with a particular cheese, for example, crackers or certain fruit, whereas, in the Spanish-speaking culture, cheese descriptions are expected to contain more references to drinks that go well with it, most often wine.

Another difference identified is the fact that Spanish makes use of more specialized terms to refer to eating and drinking: *atemperar*, *degustar*, *saborear*, *regar*, *maridar*, *consumir*; in contrast, in English, there is a preference for more

general and less specific terms, such as *try*, *enjoy* or *eat*. These findings reflect a difference in the degree of formality. The Spanish promotional texts tend to be more formal, to use more technical terms, and to display a wider range of lexical items than the English texts.

Regarding the linguistic expression of the pragmatic functions of instruction and persuasion, the findings constitute an exhaustive inventory of syntactic and phraseological patterns typically found in each of the steps of serving suggestions. In Spanish, the main syntactic structures found in our corpus include infinitives, the *se-passive* and modal periphrases with *deber*, *poder*, *soler*, *hay que*, etc., but, unexpectedly, only one imperative. The preference for impersonal forms rather than the choice between *tú* and *usted* seems to account for the lack of imperatives in Spanish in this subgenre. In contrast, in English, imperatives are very frequent, as well as the passive voice and non-finite clauses. The data suggest that not all the instructions in the corpus have the same illocutionary force, but rather represent a cline from strong directives to recommendations and weaker suggestions.

As for the phraseological patterns, each language employs several specific collocations for praising the cheese. We have found stronger and weaker collocations, such as fixed expressions, especially for headings, and more flexible patterns in the body of the texts. These patterns include positive evaluation mainly in the form of adjectives and adverbs; some nouns and verbs have also been found to contribute to this positive evaluation and the persuasive function. This persuasive function was not found in steps 1 and 5, which focused exclusively on the instructive function.

This paper has explored serving suggestions in online cheese descriptions, identifying the most common syntactic, phraseological and lexical resources to express the two main pragmatic functions of this subgenre: instruction and persuasion. The results reveal a general trend in both languages towards the use of specific syntactic constructions to express the instructional function, whereas the persuasive function seems to rely more on lexical resources. Learning these cross-linguistic conventions in English and Spanish can help business students, English or Spanish foreign language learners, translators, translation trainees and professionals working in the food industry, in particular in dairy companies, to write more successful promotional texts in their foreign language.

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**Noelia Ramón** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of León, Spain. She has worked on corpus-based contrastive studies and translation between English and Spanish. She is the current leader of the ACTRES research group, which is engaged in producing expert language data for the development of text-production applications in specialised domains. She has published extensively in international journals such as *Target*, *Babel*, *Languages in Contrast*, *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, *Terminology*, *English for Specific Purposes*, and *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

**Belén Labrador** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of León, Spain. Her main research interests lie in English-Spanish Contrastive Analysis, Translation Studies, Corpus Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, Teacher Training and Teaching English as a Foreign Language. She has published extensively in these areas in international journals like *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *Linguistics and Education*,

*BABEL*, *English for Specific Purposes*, *International Journal of English Studies*, *Languages in Contrast*, *Terminology*, *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, *TARGET*, and *META*. She is a member of the ACTRES research group and the coordinator of the CODOS Teaching Innovation Group.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://actres.unileon.es/wp/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://actres.unileon.es/wp/rhetorical-move-tagger/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://actres.unileon.es/wp/comparable-corpus-browser/>

## Appendix 1

List of websites from which the English texts in the corpus were retrieved:

<https://www.cheese.com>

<http://www.britishcheese.com>

<http://www.farmhousecheesemakers.com>

<http://www.grandma-singletons.co.uk>

<http://www.swaledalecheese.co.uk>

<http://www.stiltoncheese.co.uk>

<http://www.wensleydale.co.uk>

<http://www.staffordshirecheese.com>

<http://www.smartsgloucestercheese.com>

<http://www.waitrose.com>

<http://www.finecheese.com>

<http://www.houseofcheese.com>

<http://www.thecourtyarddairy.co.uk>

<https://www.gourmetcheesedetective.com>

<http://www.hafodcheese.co.uk>

<https://www.northumberlandcheese.co.uk>

<https://www.snowdonia-cheese.co.uk>

<http://www.arlacheese.co.uk>

List of websites from which the Spanish texts in the corpus were retrieved:

<https://www.mundoquesos.com>

<https://www.quesoadictos.com>

<https://www.quesos.es>

<https://www.lacasadelosquesos.com>

<https://www.poncelet.es>

<https://www.quesosderadiquero.es>

<https://canarejal.es>

<https://www.elcorteingles.es>

<https://queserialascortas.com>

<https://queso-quevedo.es>

<https://queseriacultivo.com>

<https://lacruzdelpobre.es>

<https://www.queseriademucientes.com>

<https://www.quesoscampoveja.com>

<https://despacho.queseriamontequesos.com>

<https://www.quesoshernandezgarcia.com>

<https://www.queseriazucca.com>

<https://www.quesosgamazo.com>