

# DESCRIBING CHEESE IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH: A CORPUS-BASED CONTRASTIVE STUDY

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## **Abstract**

This is a corpus-based contrastive study of online cheese descriptions in English and Spanish. For global trade, English is considered the *lingua franca*, and Spanish dairy industries need to produce accurate descriptions of the cheeses they manufacture for commercial purposes. This paper provides native speakers of Spanish with the main rhetorical, phraseological and lexical features of this text type in English, highlighting the major differences with the same text type in Spanish. The empirical data have been extracted from a comparable corpus containing 22,834 words in English and 24,736 words in Spanish. The corpus was tagged with rhetorical labels to enable a subsequent analysis of the most common phraseological and lexical resources employed for the description of cheese in both languages. The study offers non-native writers of this subgenre in English guidelines about the structure of these texts, as well as an inventory of ready-made phraseological and lexical units.

Key words: cheese descriptions, ESP, corpus, genre, phraseology, terminology.

## **1. Introduction**

This is a corpus-based contrastive study of online cheese descriptions in English and Spanish. The main objective is to provide a detailed account of the main differences in rhetorical, phraseological and lexical features of this particular text type between both languages. This study is part of the larger ACTRES project, currently in progress at the University of León, Spain (<http://actres.unileon.es>), which contrasts other text types in the food industry and tourism.

The dairy industry is becoming increasingly internationalized, with a wide variety of cheeses from many different countries easily made available worldwide. In Spain the dairy industry has developed greatly in the recent past and a large number of our cheeses have won international awards and are now being exported all over the world. Because of the great variety of cheeses, the type of language used to describe them is also varied, focusing in particular on a wide range of adjectives available for the characterization of taste or smell of a particular cheese.

For global trade, English is considered the *lingua franca*, so Spanish industries need to produce accurate and detailed descriptions of the cheeses they manufacture for commercial purposes. The aim of this paper is to provide native speakers of Spanish with the main rhetorical, phraseological and lexical features of this particular text type in English, highlighting the major differences found compared with the same text type in Spanish. This will empower the Spanish dairy industries when they decide to engage in exporting their cheeses.

For the purpose of this paper, an *ad hoc* comparable corpus of online cheese descriptions was compiled, including 150 of these descriptions in English and 150 in Spanish. Our corpus contains a total of 22,834 words in English and 24,736 words in Spanish. The corpus was tagged with rhetorical labels to enable a more detailed subsequent analysis of the most common phraseological and lexical resources employed for the description of cheeses in both languages. The rhetorical analysis was carried out using Swales' move-step method (1990), and some moves or steps include ingredients, preparation, aging, serving suggestions and recipes. Next, specific software was used to browse through the various moves and steps identified in order to determine the recurrent sentence patterns used in each section. Finally, a list of lexical equivalents has been compiled in English and Spanish to work as a specialized glossary in the field of cheese descriptions.

The application-oriented results of this ESP contrastive analysis offer non-native writers of this particular subgenre in English, especially Spanish-speakers, a) some general guidelines about the structure of this type of texts and b) an inventory of ready-made phraseological and lexical units to be used when describing cheeses. With such materials at hand, online cheese vendors can easily make their products visible to the global market and their cheeses will probably be more appealing to potential buyers if they are presented in rich and detailed descriptions.

## **2. Theoretical background**

This paper presents an analysis of the rhetorical structure of online cheese descriptions in English and Spanish based on corpus data. Online cheese descriptions follow specific

textual conventions which make them recognizable as belonging to a particular subgenre. These conventions imply a common overall structure where all the texts contain a similar arrangement of purposeful communicative units determined by the context of use. Bhatia defines genre as referring essentially to “language use in a conventionalized communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution which gives rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discoursal resources.” (Bhatia 2004: 23).

Several authors have proposed ways of describing the different functional units within texts that identify them as belonging to a particular genre or subgenre, including the typical linguistic features associated to each unit (Bhatia 1993, 2004; Swales 1990, 2004; Biber et al. 2007). Swales (1990, 2004) put forward the move-step method for the rhetorical analysis of professional and academic writing. 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” (Biber et al., 2007, p. 23). A move can be further divided into steps to give an account of more detailed rhetorical structures. All these purposes together contribute to shaping the lexical content and style of texts in a particular genre so that all the texts exhibit “various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience” (Swales 1990: 58). This implies that each particular move or step is characterized by some specific phraseology and lexis, which are especially common in communicative acts sharing one and the same purpose.

The aim of this study is to provide a detailed account of the various moves and steps that conform the sub-genre of cheese descriptions in English and Spanish, as well as the prototypical lexico-grammatical resources in each language, to identify differences and similarities in this particular text type.

### **3. Data and Method**

This contrastive study of English and Spanish cheese descriptions is based on an *ad hoc* comparable corpus of 150 texts in each language, containing 22,834 words in English and 24,736 words in Spanish, with an average number of approximately 152 words per text in English and 163 words per text in Spanish. All the texts were downloaded from websites of

either cheese manufacturing companies or more general websites describing different types of cheese.

A preliminary analysis of a small number of texts provided a tentative list of rhetorical tags to be used in the process. These labels were employed to tag the texts with an *ad hoc* tagger, which later enabled us to extract concordances in particular moves, steps or sub-steps. By observing the concordance lines, the specific phraseology typical of a particular move or step is thus easily retrieved. A total of 9 different moves, some of them with steps were identified in cheese descriptions, including tags such as the geographical and historical provenance of the cheese, the type of milk and rennet used, and serving suggestions like food and wine pairing. A detailed analysis was carried out to obtain the most relevant lexico-grammatical elements contained in each move and step to produce a number of ‘model lines’ which may function as suggested phrases for the writing of online cheese descriptions.

#### **4. Results and discussion**

##### ***4.1 The rhetorical structure in contrast***

The first step in this study consisted in the analysis of a number of representative texts to obtain a prototypical rhetorical structure for this particular subgenre. Here we can see the 10 moves with the corresponding steps identified as most frequent and relevant in online cheese descriptions:

##### **Move 1: IDENTIFYING THE CHEESE**

Step 1: name of the cheese (and PDO)

Step 2: name of the company/ manufacturer

Step 3: (geographical and historical) provenance

##### **Move 2: SHOWING A PICTURE**

##### **Move 3: DESCRIBING THE PRODUCT**

Step 1: characteristics: shape, size, texture, coating and weight

Step 2: ingredients: type of milk and rennet used

##### **Move 4: DESCRIBING THE PROCESS**

- Step 1: preparation
- Step 2: aging
- Move 5: DESCRIBING THE SMELL AND TASTE
- Move 6: OFFERING SERVING SUGGESTIONS
  - Step 1: temperature
  - Step 2: presentation
  - Step 3: food-pairing
  - Step 4: wine-pairing
  - Step 5: best season
- Move 7: SUGGESTING PRESERVATION METHOD
- Move 8: SUGGESTING RECIPES
- Move 9: PROVIDING QUALITY ASSURANCE (quotations, awards, quality tests)
- Move 10: LISTING PRICES

After tagging the two comparable subcorpora on cheese descriptions, we used an ad hoc browser to extract statistical information on the number of words included in each move and step, in English and in Spanish. In addition, we extracted the number of texts where each particular move or step occurs. This information is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: English-Spanish rhetorical contrast.

		ENGLISH		SPANISH	
		Number of words	Number of texts with this step	Number of words	Number of texts
Move 1	Step 1	529 – 2.32%	149 – 99.33%	538 – 2.17%	150 – 100%
	Step 2	1,625 – 7.12%	69 – 46%	45 – 0.18%	2 – 1.33%
	Step 3	3,852 – 16.87%	63 – 42%	3,216 – 13%	78 – 52%
Move 2			100%		100%
Move 3	Step 1	4,963 – 21.74%	137 – 91.33%	5,730 – 23.16%	142 – 94.67%
	Step 2	1,496 – 6.5%	103 – 68.67%	2,720 – 11%	125 – 83.33%
Move 4	Step 1	1,384 – 6.06%	44 – 29.33%	4,023 – 16.26%	67 – 44.67%
	Step 2	363 – 1.59%	28 – 18.67%	1,091 – 4.41%	79 – 52.67%

Move 5		1,647 – 7.21%	113 - 75.33%	2,667 – 10.78%	120 - 80%
Move 6	Step 1	1,367 – 5.99%	43 – 28.67%	665 – 2.69%	29 – 19.33%
	Step 2	1,127 – 4.94%	55 – 36.67%	931 – 3.76%	42 – 28%
	Step 3	864 – 3.78%	49 – 32.67%	523 – 2.11%	26 – 17.33%
	Step 4	598 – 2.62%	31 – 20.67%	811 – 3.28%	42 – 28%
	Step 5	519 – 2.27%	23 – 15.33%	322 – 1.30%	11 – 7.33%
Move 7		87 – 0.38%	3 - 2%	1,060 – 4.29%	37 - 24.67%
Move 8		92 – 0.40%	7 - 4.67%	0	0
Move 9		2,243 – 9.82%	73 - 48.67%	324 – 1.31%	14 - 9.33%
Move 10		76 - 0.33%	3 - 2%	70 - 0.28%	5 - 3.33%
<b>TOTAL</b>		22,834		24,736	<b>150</b>

The result show that some moves or steps occur with a very similar frequency in English and in Spanish cheese descriptions. However, there are significant differences in some particular communicative functions. For example, the name of the **company**, **food-pairing**, **best season**, and **quality assurance** occur far more often in English than in the Spanish texts, whereas **ingredients**, **preparation**, **aging** and the **preservation methods** occur much more frequently in the Spanish texts. The conclusion we may draw is that Spanish cheese descriptions seem to focus much more on the actual process of manufacturing cheeses, most often detailing ingredients and preservation methods. In contrast, English descriptions appear to be less technical and more casual, drawing attention to the manufacturer, the awards and other quality standards achieved, as well as to ways of enjoying cheese together with other foods.

#### ***4.2. The lexico-grammar in contrast***

Some of most frequent lexico-grammatical structures identified in the moves and steps in our corpora of online cheese descriptions will be listed below to show recurrent phraseology in English and Spanish in similar contexts and with similar functions. This will provide an inventory of common linguistic resources to be employed in each particular rhetorical section of this text type.

Move 1 refers to the function of identifying a particular cheese as different from all other cheeses. It includes 3 steps; steps 1 and 2 correspond to the name and manufacturing company and are therefore not relevant from a lexico-grammatical perspective. Step 3, in contrast, identifies the cheese with respect to its historical and/ or geographical provenance. It may be mentioned either in the form of a list, or in the form of a full sentence or paragraph, as in the following examples: *Originally produced in the South Wales town of ...; Country of origin: England and United Kingdom - Region: Buxton, Derbyshire; ... dates back to Roman times and possibly earlier; Se elabora básicamente en toda la comarca de ...; El queso de ... nació gracias al mecenazgo de ...; Su zona de elaboración originaria es ...; Origen: Toledo; Fabricado en Arriondas, concejo de Parres.*

As for move 3, it contains 2 steps, one on the physical characteristics of the cheese and the other on the ingredients, both often intertwined in the same sentence. The physical characteristics of the cheese may be expressed either in the form of a list of characteristics or in the form of a paragraph with full sentences or verbless clauses, or both in the same text, e.g. The step ‘characteristics’ includes a wide range of external features such as size, shape, colour, weight, etc. Heavy pre-modification is dominant in English (a ... rind/ texture/etc.) and post-modification in Spanish (queso + adjectives and PPs. Examples are:

*Type: soft, artisan, blue-veined*

*Fat content: 45%*

*Texture: crumbly*

*Rind: natural*

*Color: yellow*

*a stunning edible orange rind; a crumbly, flaky texture; the cheese has a rough, crusty, natural rind; La corteza es grabada, de color pardo a marrón oscuro; El interior es cerrado, compacto, sin ojos o con algunas cavidades y de textura laminar; Su forma es similar al manchego, y su peso varía entre uno y tres kilos y medio; Queso mantecoso, de forma cónica y de corteza ambarina.* As for ingredients, these refer mostly to the type of milk, rennet, and sometimes to additional foods included in the cheese. Some examples are: *Bonchester is made from unpasteurized Jersey cow’s milk; Made using locally sourced milk and vegetarian rennet; with chives running through; Soft goats milk cheese; elaborado a partir de leche cruda o pasteurizada de oveja de las razas de la zona: churra y castellana;*

está fabricado con leche pasteurizada de vaca Frisona, ... también se utiliza la leche de las vacas Ratina, Roxa o Carreñas; Para su elaboración se debe utilizar leche procedente del ordeño de la tarde.

Move 4 focuses on the preparation and aging processes again, both often intertwined in the same sentence and paragraph. The passive voice in English and the ‘se-passive’ in Spanish are typical syntactic constructions found in this move. Sequence connectors occur often, sometimes followed by purpose clauses, as well as by references to temperature and time. Examples are: The cheese is then sealed with cloth or other wrapping material and at about 5 weeks of age the cheese is pierced with stainless steel needles to allow air to enter the body of the cheeses; Once the curds are produced, the whey is drained off; The whey is heated ...; La leche se coagula entre 28° y 32° aproximadamente; La masa cuajada, se corta en granos tamaño arroz y se calienta hasta una temperatura no superior a 40°; El grano, se vierte en un molde donde se prensa, para su posterior inmersión en salmuera; Después del cuajado se corta la pasta; The cheese is ready for consumption at around 2 months; It is aged for a minimum of 6 months; mínimo dos meses de curación; con un proceso de maduración que oscila entre los dos y cuatro meses.

Move 5 refers to the description of the smell and taste of the cheese, both of which are essential sensory characteristics of this particular product. In this particular move, adjectives are crucial, often in long chains including adverbial pre-modification: It has a young, fresh, slightly tangy taste; the flavor has a hint of dark chocolate and burnt onions on the finish; De sabor es intenso pero no fuerte, mantecoso y con presencia de aromas de bodega; El sabor es suave y agradable, ligeramente ácido y con un regusto a avellanas.

Online cheese descriptions usually include a section on serving suggestions where the author recommends the best temperature for the consumption of that particular cheese, other foods and wines that go well with it, and the season in which it may be available. Several steps are often mixed in the same sentence or paragraph.

- Step 1: temperature: Best enjoyed at room temperature; Degustarlo a temperatura ambiente.



- Step 2: presentation: *Stilton is one of the classic cheeses to include on a cheeseboard; excelente para comer extendido sobre pan tostado y muy apto para preparar todo tipo de salsas.*
- Step 3: food-pairing: *a beautiful complement to smoked haddock; Combina perfectamente con alimentos dulces y salados.*
- Step 4: wine-pairing: *Enjoy with a traditional pint of Lancashire bitter or a full bodied glass of red wine; Ideal para degustar con un vino tinto de la zona.*
- Step 5: best season: *Best eaten between 4 and 6 weeks; Debe consumirse ni muy blando ni muy seco.*

It may be noted that in English constructions including imperatives or the phrase *best + past participle* are quite common here. In contrast, Spanish makes use of infinitives, often as adjective complements (*ideal para degustar; excelente para comer*) fitting in the pattern typical of instructions.

Move 7 refers to different recommendations for preserving the cheeses. Because this is typical instructive language, Spanish tends to use infinitives (*Conservarlo en la parte baja de la nevera y sacarlo de ésta 1 hora antes de su degustación*). In English, this communicative function is traditionally conveyed by the imperative, as in: *simply cut into portions of around 250 grams, wrap in foil or cling and keep for up to 3 months.*

Move 8 is a minor move which contains recipes only in the English subcorpus, and in very few texts. The reason is that the recipes are mostly found elsewhere in the websites, and not directly in the description itself. Actually, the English examples are exclusively hyperlinks to other webpages containing the recipes.

Move 9 contains all the references to quality standards of the cheese, especially prizes and awards of different types, mainly PDO: *Bonchester is a British cheese awarded with a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO); El queso Roncal, fue el primer queso con denominación de Origen en España.* Common collocations found in English to refer to PDO are: *protected and accredited with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status; awarded with a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO); has Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) protection.* In Spanish, the main collocation is the PP with 'con': *Queso con Denominación de Origen.*

Move 10 is actualized merely as lists of the different prices in both languages, though it appears mostly in other pages of the main web site. However, sometimes it was included at the end of the actual description of the cheese.

## **5. Conclusions**

This contrastive study has focused on online cheese descriptions in English and Spanish from both, a rhetorical and a lexico-grammatical perspective. The empirical data were extracted a comparable corpus of this particular text type, which was tagged into moves and steps, and later analyzed for obtaining prototypical phraseological units.

From a rhetorical point of view, both English and Spanish cheese descriptions contain approximately the same moves and steps, though some of these functions are much more prominent in one language than in the other, occurring in more texts in the subcorpus and with a higher number of words in one language than in the other. Spanish cheese descriptions seem to focus much more on the actual process of manufacturing cheeses, most often detailing ingredients and preservation methods, whereas English descriptions appear to be less technical and more casual, drawing attention to the manufacturer, the awards and other quality standards achieved, as well as to ways of enjoying cheese together with other foods.

From a lexico-grammatical point of view, the study has highlighted the main phraseological resources employed in each move or step in English and in Spanish. We have thus compiled an inventory of the most common phrases used for each particular communicative function in each language. These data can be useful in the teaching of English or Spanish as foreign languages, in the translation process between these two languages, and in providing guidelines for technical writing. In this case, the phrases identified will be implemented into a computer tool designed to assist native speakers of Spanish in the writing of online cheese descriptions in English.

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