

# The Popularisation of Business and Economic English in Online Newspapers



The Popularisation of Business and Economic  
English in Online Newspapers

By

Elisa Mattiello

**CAMBRIDGE  
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P U B L I S H I N G

The Popularisation of Business and Economic English in Online Newspapers,  
by Elisa Mattiello

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## PREFACE

Popularisation discourse is the current object of study of many scholars whose interest and research focus on specialised text. Most studies have shed light on the multifaceted concept of popularisation—including its conceptual changes and methodological implications—within the fields of science, medicine, and law. The fields of economics and business still remain, as far as I know, an unexplored or under-explored area of enquiry in connection with popularisation. Nonetheless, popularising texts on economics and business-related matters may give specialists and non-specialists significant food for thought and fascinating insights into specialised knowledge. The present book explores this under-researched area via the qualitative analysis of extracts drawn from newspapers on the web.

Online newspapers belong to the domain of new media discourse and take advantage of new technologies to reach a wide audience and to spread specialised knowledge worldwide. The Introduction to this book discusses the popularising effects of new media—in particular, the Internet—on economic and business English. It shows economic and professional vocabulary in real contexts, concentrating on the features distinguishing popular texts from (more traditional) fully specialised texts. The remaining chapters provide an in-depth investigation of various topics related to the economics and business worlds. English structures are contextualised in realistic settings and the lexis of ESP is offered in a fresh less formal style, which may attract younger and non-expert readers alongside experts and professionals.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The popularisation of specialised discourse is a rather modern and increasingly studied phenomenon (Calsamiglia 2003; Calsamiglia and Van Dijk 2004; Garzone 2006; Anesa 2012; Gotti 2013; Mattiello 2013b; Williams 2013). Nowadays, scientific and legal texts, as well as political discourse are expanding and adapting to the new technologies and Internet resources. For instance, most scientists tend to publish their articles in online journals or magazines, which are accessible to a wide reading public, and many politicians have adopted social network sites, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, as one of their communication tools (Mattiello forth.), especially to target younger voters. Economic discourse is likewise increasing in popularity and outreach by means of online newspapers and similar web genres.

This book aims to investigate the evolution of economic discourse from fully specialised economic texts towards popularisations. In particular, the book analyses genuine extracts drawn from two well-known online newspapers—*The Guardian* and *The Observer*—with the purposes of:

- 1) Investigating the popularising effect of the Internet on business English and economic discourse;
- 2) Providing the reader with the real language currently used in business and economic texts and contexts;
- 3) Giving the reader the tools to understand and appreciate popular articles on economics with a background knowledge of the terminology suited to the subject content.

Although there are many textbooks on business English which offer valuable grammatical accounts, or which may include useful glossaries of technical terms, this book offers specialised language in an online journalistic context for both expert and non-expert readers, thus including the use of idioms or slang terminology alongside economic jargon. The present Introduction to the book discusses the phenomenon of popularisation of specialised discourse through online newspapers. The rest of the book

offers thorough explanations of linguistic (i.e. morphological, grammatical, lexical, and semantic) phenomena, which may help examine popularising texts from different angles. Lastly, the book is meant to give support to readers through comprehension and grammar exercises.

### **1.1. The popularisation of specialised discourse**

In literature, the phenomenon of popularisation has attracted the attention of scholars working in different disciplines. Historians have investigated the development of this phenomenon in the Victorian period (Cooter and Pumfrey 1994; Secord 2000; Topham 2009). Scientists have examined the effects of popularisation on the relationship between science and society (Whitley 1985). Rhetoricians have analysed the rhetorical structure of popular science texts (Fahnestock 1986), with particular focus on the use of metaphor (Gülich 2003). Experts on legal language have also studied the role of education and the ‘Plain language movement’ in the popularisation of legal discourse (Williams 2013). However, most scholars seem to be interested in the linguistic features of popularising texts, as compared to the features of research articles, books intended for the educated public, or similar fully specialised texts. The latter line of research has been adopted by scholars focusing on various linguistic aspects, such as sentence subjects, grammatical voice, verb choices, modality, connectives, semantic aspects (e.g. explanations, denominations, descriptions), and textual form (Calsamiglia 2003; Myers 2003; Calsamiglia and Van Dijk 2004; Palumbo and Musacchio 2010).

A new line of research focuses on the popularising effects of the Internet (Luzón 2013; Masi 2013; Mattiello 2013b; Vicentini 2013). The Internet allows people to share information and communicate with each other efficiently and effectively. Thus, it has also become a preferred medium for the transmission of specialised information through popular scientific web genres.

New media are actually having a significant impact on all types of specialised communication, both on the way specialists communicate with peers and on the dissemination of science, economics, and law to the lay public. E-journals, e-magazines, blogs, and articles in newspapers online, in particular, provide an open space for specialised communication, where a diverse audience (with different degrees of expertise) may have access to information intended both for non-specialist readers and for experts.

Other typical genres of popularisation discourse are: media interviews, television documentaries, political talk shows, and propaganda spread by politicians via social network sites (SNSs) (Mattiello *forth.*). What these

types of communicative events or genres share is a reduced technicality in both content and vocabulary, a more informal register, and, often, a dialogic structure. More precisely, the main criteria for distinguishing fully specialised texts from the above-mentioned popularisation texts include the following:

- 1) Whereas fully specialised texts target a restricted readership, in that they are mainly addressed to specialist scientists, jurists, or economists, popularisations target a wide reading public, including non-specialists, due to their higher accessibility to large communities.
- 2) Whereas traditional specialised texts discuss new specialised knowledge (e.g. new theories, models, principles), in popularisations there is a lack of innovative theoretical arguments.
- 3) Whereas specialised texts deal with specialised topics in a precise scientific, business, legal, or technical jargon, the language of popularisations is close to general discourse and to the layman's everyday experience. In other words, terminology is less specialised, sector-specific terms are only given occasionally, and definitions are provided using juxtaposition rather than copular structures.
- 4) Whereas traditional forms of specialised discourse are identified, on the one hand, by their "actors" or "authors", i.e. politicians, doctors, economists, lawyers, teachers, etc., and, on the other hand, by their "recipients", such as citizens, patients, consumers, defendants, and students (Van Dijk 1997: 12-13), popularising texts and genres may include other participants in communication.

The latter point is especially relevant to the field of media discourse, including the various outlets that individuals in the media use, such as newspapers and magazines, television, radio, and the Internet. Media discourse also needs to focus on its audiences, whether or not these are actively involved in political, medical, legal, economic, or educational discourse, or merely as recipients in one-way modes of communication. Hence, the definition of popularisation text should not be limited to its principal authors, but needs to be extended to a more complex picture of all its relevant participants.

In this approach, "the journalist or reporter assumes a very active role as manager of the reformulation of the text produced by specialists and now destined for a new public" (Gotti 2013: 17). He recontextualises the original discourse to disseminate specialised knowledge in a different

communicative situation for the lay audience. In other words, popularisation discourse is adapted to the appropriateness conditions of the new communicative events and to the constraints of the media employed. This recontextualisation process (see also Calsamiglia and Van Dijk 2004; Luzón 2013) implies relevant changes not only in terms of terminological simplifications and adaptations to the public's prior knowledge and information needs, but also in terms of the roles undertaken by the actors and their lower degree of authoritativeness.

The mass media themselves are no longer seen as passive mediators of specialised knowledge, but as “active participants in the production of novel information and new opinions” (Gotti 2013: 19-20). As pointed out by Garzone (2006: 83), in the popularisation process “the experts’ views are reported second-hand in the media”, and this affects the public perception of scientific and technological issues and people’s reaction to them. In the media, specialised knowledge is altered, filtered, amended, and may often be distorted, depending on the representation of information offered by newspapers, magazines, TV news, or the Internet.

Another recurrent scenario involves passive recipients who become actors. For instance, in online newspapers and social network sites some readers from the public may decide to show their position on the subject matter by adding their personal comments, thus giving an active contribution to the original discourse. These additions imply a reorganisation of the text, which acquires a dialogic structure, with adjustments at all linguistic levels, from lexicon to syntax, semantics, rhetoric, and pragmatics. Politicians’ profiles on *Twitter* or *Facebook* as well as newspaper articles on the web take the final form of interaction with multiple participants (Spina 2012; Mattiello forth.), their characteristics being close to those of real-life conversations.

Overall, popularisation genres involve a reformulation process, i.e. “the transformation of specialized knowledge into ‘everyday’ or ‘lay’ knowledge” (Calsamiglia and Van Dijk 2004: 370). This is the main reason why some scholars have suggested comparing popularisation to “translation” (Gotti 2013: 13). Like translation, popularisation involves a transformation of a source text (the specialised one) into a target text (the popularising one). For instance, in trials legal concepts may be ‘translated’ for the lay public, including jurors and witnesses, who need a full comprehension of all the communication going on in the court. This translation process implies a redrafting of the disciplinary content in the source text to suit a new target audience. However, unlike translation, in popularisation the target text does not express equivalent concepts in a

different language, but approximates the content of the source text by altering the language and adapting it to a less or non-expert audience.

As this brief outline shows, popularisation is a very complex phenomenon and its study should not neglect all possible perspectives of analysis. For a full understanding of the phenomenon, Gotti (2013: 28) suggests adopting an “integrated approach”, from the cognitive dimension (analysis of reformulation), to discourse analysis (intra-/inter-textuality), and critical discourse analysis (purposes/functions of textual practices), from media studies (e.g. entertaining aim and commercial purposes) to a semiotic approach, involving multimodality (visuals, sounds, and other semiotic systems). Only an interdisciplinary approach can help identify and describe all the aspects involved in the popularisation process, highlighting interesting underlying dynamic patterns, changing trends, and new textual and discourse strategies.

## **1.2. Popularising economic texts in online newspaper articles**

Popularising economic texts are emblematically illustrated by articles drawn from online newspapers. The target audience of newspapers on the web does not require highly specialised knowledge of the subject matter and can commonly access information with no ambiguities or blocks. Although the topics dealt with are sector-based and this may limit the number of readers or their interest in content, information is presented so clearly that there may be no barriers in full text comprehension, even for the inexperienced public.

In this section, a small corpus of articles mainly taken from the ‘Business section’ of *The Guardian Online* is investigated. The aims are mainly: 1) to provide a qualitative analysis of the characteristics of popularisation texts related to business and economics, and 2) to provide readers with language skills which will be useful in the professional environments that young people typically encounter in today’s ever-more international working world. The approach draws mainly from discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992), but also takes into account advances contributed by media studies (Lewenstein 1995), especially for scientific popularisations. The basis for comparison is the research article in economic journals, which uses appropriate and professional vocabulary in order to address an elite group of experts.

Results from my analysis demonstrate that there is a tendency in online newspaper articles to disseminate specialised knowledge all around the world. This worldwide dissemination is obtained by reformulating

vocabulary, reshaping texts, and reorganising information into a less formal style. The most frequently evidenced features of popularising texts in business and economics cover the following linguistic aspects.

### 1.2.1. Definition

As pointed out by Gotti (2013: 11), “[t]erminological definition is not so pervasive in specialized discourse, where the meaning is taken for granted within the disciplinary community”. It is only employed when a new specialised term is coined, or when a novel, more technical meaning is associated with an existing word. The definition typically displays the following forms: *We shall call this phenomenon x* or *By x we mean...* (where *x* is the specialised term involved).

In popularisations, by contrast, definitions include a far more limited use of specialised lexicon and generally take the form of juxtaposition—a process whereby the specialised term is followed by its periphrasis or explanation, with the two separated by a comma or a dash:

- (1) But he says that in microeconomics—**the bottom-up study of individual firms and markets**—it would be wrong to throw the baby out with the bathwater. (*The Guardian*, 14 October 2012)
- (2) Sowood blamed its problems on a sharp widening in credit spreads—**the difference in return between corporate and government debt**. (*The Guardian*, 1 August 2007)

The explanation may also occur in brackets immediately after the specialised term, often introduced by such metalinguistic items as *that is, meaning*, or by the equality sign =. Interestingly, in extract (3), a simplification of the definition of *market share* indicates textual progression:

- (3) Recently I wrote about how easily people confuse “market share” (**the proportion of sales**) for “installed base” (**the number and proportion of devices in use**) [...]  
 There were some comments suggesting that latter fact was because the market share—**that is, the sales**—of Android and iOS phones were in roughly that proportion in the US specifically [...]  
 Separately, there were cries of joy from Windows Phone backers this week when the latest market share (= **sales**) figures from Kantar ComTech showed that in the three months to the end of November 2013, Microsoft’s smartphone platform had achieved more than a 10% share in a number of markets [...] (*The Guardian*, 9 January 2014)

The need to repeat a brief–ever-more condensed–explanation of the technical term each time that it is mentioned in the text shows the populariser’s awareness that his/her reader may be a non-specialist in the subject.

### 1.2.2. Denomination

In fully specialised texts, acronyms and similar abbreviations are often used with a naming function (Mattiello 2013a: 287), because of their specificity and monoreferentiality (Gotti 2005: 33). Abbreviations are efficient labels which allow rapid transmission of information and avoid textual redundancy. Therefore, they are often preferred over their full-form counterparts.

Denomination is also a relevant category in the study of popularisation discourse (Calsamiglia and Van Dijk 2004). In popularisations, abbreviations may be used to favour textual efficiency, especially with well-known or lexicalised acronyms:

(4) European markets calm ahead of the **ECB**

The Italian **FTSE MIB** jumped 211 points to 20970, a 1% gain.

In London, the **FTSE 100** has gained 27 points to 6802, up 0.4%, with Aviva leading the way after this morning’s decent results.

Germany’s **DAX** is up 0.4%, and the French **CAC** has gained 0.6%.

(*The Guardian*, 6 March 2014)

Some of the above-mentioned acronyms or initialisms are also familiar to non-expert readers. For instance, the alphabetisms *ECB* (from *European Central Bank*) and *FTSE* (from *Financial Times Stock Exchange*, also, informally, *Footsie*) are also accessible to the community of non-specialists. By contrast, the etymology of the market indices *DAX* (from G. *Deutscher Aktien Index*) and *CAC* (from Fr. *Cotation Assistée en Continu*) is only known by economists and professionals, although the lexicalisation of these two specialised terms explains their unexpanded form.

More commonly, abbreviations occur in popularising texts as anaphoric referents to their full forms (Mattiello 2013a), which are made explicit in the text to prevent ambiguity. The acronym or the initialism generally follows the full form and is given in round brackets:

(5) Meanwhile costs of renewable technologies have gone down, performance has improved, plus incentives and funding structures such as feed in tariffs (**FITs**), Renewable Obligation Certificates (**ROCs**)

and Power Purchase Agreements (**PPAs**) have come in. (*Guardian Professional*, 18 November 2013)

Once the expanded phrase is made clear to the reader, the acronym may be re-used later in the text to maintain internal cohesion:

- (6) McLaren Applied Technologies (**MAT**)—another spin-off business which is part of the F1 group—said separately it had won a four-year contract to increase efficiency at Heathrow airport, which handles more than 190,000 passengers a day.

**MAT** will use modelling and simulation technology developed to win F1 races to help decrease the amount of time planes spend circling the airport, and improve their movement on the ground. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)

### 1.2.3. Generalisation

In economic research articles, data is commented on with precision, figures are accurately reported, sources are clearly specified, and evidence is visibly incorporated in the text either by using direct quotation or by paraphrasing other authors' ideas and words (Swales and Feak 2012). This precision confers reliability on the specialised content of the text, and helps the writer to support his/her views and opinions.

In economic and business articles published online, exactness of data is often neglected or ignored in favour of approximation and generalisation. Although figures and percentages are faithfully reported, the studies, works, investigations, or surveys from which they are obtained are often generalised:

- (7) **A recent report** found that on-site generation by UK businesses increased by 53% in 2012 alone, with almost 90% of that coming from solar and wind. (*The Guardian*, 18 November 2013)
- (8) **Study** found that 22% of UK jobs demanded only primary education, against less than 5% in Germany and Sweden (*The Guardian*, Subtitle, 26 February 2014)

The vague nouns *report* and *study* do not specify who reported the information or where the study was carried out. However, they allow the journalist to smoothly communicate some findings from statistics and to compare them with previous (*increased by 53%*) or other countries' results (*against less than 5% in Germany and Sweden*).

### 1.2.4. Description

Economists typically use descriptions to explain the methodology used in their research, or to illustrate the characteristics of the sample selected for their study (Swales and Feak 2012). For descriptions, they use neutral language and an objective style, which is the most appropriate to give formal accounts. Journalists, instead, use descriptions in specialised articles online to put emphasis on problems, to show the gravity of situations, and to focus their readers' attention on serious issues which need solutions. The technique most commonly adopted for online descriptions is exaggeration, in particular, via superlative forms. This technique is illustrated by the following examples:

- (9) Shop price deflation hit 1.4% in February after a rate of 1% in January, according to the British Retail Consortium/Nielsen shop price index. That was **the deepest rate of deflation** since the BRC began producing these numbers in December 2006. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)
- (10) The five years since the monetary policy committee cut the base rate to 0.5%—**the lowest since the Bank of England was founded in 1694**—have been a boon for borrowers and a sore point for savers. But rock-bottom interest rates will not be around forever. (*The Guardian*, 5 March 2014)

Comparisons may be used in articles on the web with the same exaggerating purpose, especially when the comparison sounds strange, or even absurd:

- (11) **Families are paying more on average for part-time childcare than they spend on their mortgage**, according to a report. The report, by the Family and Childcare Trust, also shows that **some families may be spending more on childcare than they do on their weekly shopping**. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)

### 1.2.5. Metaphor

Metaphor has been repeatedly associated with specialised discourse, especially with political texts (Semino and Masci 1996; Musolf 2004; Charteris-Black 2011), scientific texts (Williams Camus 2009), and economic discourse (Monsalves 2005; Musacchio 2011). Metaphors are comparably numerous in online newspaper articles. They belong, for instance, to the domains of KINGDOM, SPORT, HOME, and DAMAGE:

- (12) One of the top UK entrants is Denise Coates, **the British online gambling queen** who, along with her brother, owns Bet365. Coates was at school when she started working as a cashier in her father's betting shops and has amassed \$1.6bn in personal wealth. [...] **Bill Gates reclaimed his crown** as the world's richest man, after a surge in the value of Microsoft shares increased his wealth by \$9bn to \$76bn. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)
- (13) Cantor analyst Sam Thomas said Soames "will have his work cut out", adding: "Serco is in need of serious repair." Soames will **take the reins** on 1 June. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)
- (14) Great businesses have a meaningful concept of value creation. They make a positive contribution to their owners, employees, customers, suppliers, society and the environment. And they understand that their actions today will influence how healthy their business will be tomorrow. They see beyond **the four walls of their own business** and work to make the world better. In doing so, they inspire others to share in their vision. (*Guardian Professional*, 13 November 2013)
- (15) PwC says UK arm of Lehman was not **crippled** by debts—but 'cash flow insolvent' because parent company collapsed (*The Guardian*, Subtitle, 5 March 2014)

### 1.2.6. Addresser and addressee

In economic research articles, the tone may be either subjective (*In this paper, I analyse...*, *In this work, we investigate...*) or objective, the latter often opting for an abstract subject (*The paper analyses...*) or a passive form (*In this work, x is investigated*). This fluctuation seems to be well represented by this passage taken from the *Guardian Professional*:

- (16) However, **targeted research** in particular contexts can reveal contemporary trends. As a researcher, **I** wanted to find out directly from undergraduates and graduates what really matters in the creative world, using a variety of outlets to gain the necessary feedback. **The findings** suggested that creative undergraduates and graduates overwhelmingly believe that confidence, contacts and money are the most important things they need to get work. (*Guardian Professional*, 26 February 2014)

where abstract nouns (*targeted research*, *The findings*) alternate with the first-person pronoun *I*.

However, in articles online, the tendency to adopt first- and second-person pronouns (or possessive adjectives) to respectively identify the addresser (*I*) and the addressee (*you, your*) seems to dominate:

- (17) At the World Economic Forum in Davos, **I** gave Nestlé chair Peter Brabeck, a present—an original, signed copy of *The Baby Killer*, the 1974 report that **I** wrote for War on Want. (*Guardian Professional*, 13 February 2013)
- (18) **I** don't like the way companies such as Nestlé promote bottled water, turning one of life's essentials into a brand that only the better-off can afford and undermining the value of public supplies in the process. But **I** have to acknowledge Brabeck's efforts to get business and governments to work together to manage and protect the world's vital water resources. (*Guardian Professional*, 13 February 2013)
- (19) One of the problems with e-commerce is that getting started is way too easy—find some stuff to sell, buy a website in a box (or just create an eBay account), upload **your** logo and **you** are live. What **you** have is a website—not an e-commerce business. (*Guardian Professional*)
- (20) A niche product range scope gives **you** lots of benefits; **your** money won't be spread across so much stock; **you** will do better in the search engines because **your** website will be focused on certain keywords; **your** blog will be easier to write; and (most importantly) customers will “get” **your** business quicker—if they don't understand they won't buy. (*Guardian Professional*)

In Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse markers (cited in Masi 2013: 317), the degree of explicit author presence in the text signalled by pronouns and possessive adjectives corresponds to the category of “self-mention” (17)-(18). Examples (19) and (20), instead, correspond to the category other-mention. Here, by mentioning a second-person pronoun *you* (*you are live, you will do better*) rather than a more general noun (e.g. *people* or *entrepreneurs*), the writer increases his/her proximity to the addressee, with evident convincing and persuasive purposes.

### 1.2.7. Modality and hedging

The role of epistemic modifiers (e.g. *obviously* and *certainly*) and of modals, such as *should*, *may*, *might*, and *could*, has been amply studied since the past, especially with relation to their use in prediction and assertion in general (Merlini Barbaresi 1983, 1987). Modals mainly

function as hedges, emphasising “the subjectivity of a position by allowing information to be presented as an opinion rather than a fact” (Masi 2013: 317). In newspaper articles online, epistemic possibility modals play the same function:

- (21) Seven ways Microsoft Excel **could** change the world (*The Guardian*, Title, 31 January 2014)
- (22) If your idea requires a business structure more complex than those, it’s going to be harder to build success, so it **might** be time to look for another idea. (*Guardian Professional*)
- (23) US retail chain Target says that about 40m credit and debit card accounts **may** have been affected by a data breach that occurred just as the holiday shopping season shifted into high gear. (*The Guardian*, 19 December 2013)

It is worth noting that the same function of personal expression of evaluation is similarly served by the adverb *possibly* and by the evidential expression *it seems* in these titles:

- (24) Target says data breach **possibly** affected millions of credit cards (*The Guardian*, Title, 19 December 2013)
- (25) **It seems** the 50p tax rate is paying us dividends (*The Guardian*, Title, 22 February 2011)

Hedges, in general, serve to modulate the illocutionary force of speech acts, in particular, they act as mitigating or attenuating devices both in directives, such as (21)-(22), and in assertions, such as (23)-(25).

### 1.2.8. Vocabulary

In traditional genres of economic discourse, vocabulary is typical of the economic jargon and commonly includes: specialised terminology, technical expressions, formal Latinate words, professional language, and various types of abbreviation which are accessible only to the community of experts in the sector. By contrast, in popularisation texts, expert journalists tend to alternate technical and specialised terms with idiomatic expressions, informal language, and even slang (Mattiello 2008).

In (26), for example, an English idiom (i.e. *the final nail in the coffin* ‘an event that causes the failure of something that had already started to fail’) is used:

- (26) Thirty years on from the miners' strike, will carbon emissions—and environmental taxes—be **the final nail in coal's coffin**? (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)

The excerpt in (27), instead, provides an example of a colloquial expression (i.e. *to get rid of somebody* 'to send away someone annoying'):

- (27) My boss is in charge of job cutting but the process is not transparent and it feels as if she is trying **to get rid of me** (*The Guardian*, Subtitle, 3 March 2014)

Lastly, (28)-(29) illustrate slang use by means of the words *rip-off* ('something that is not worth what you pay for it') and *nuts* ('crazy, mad'):

- (28) BA has failed to justify the '**rip-off**' fee it tried to charge for changing a flight (*The Guardian*, Title, 1 March 2014)
- (29) In January, the mayor of London, Boris Johnson said it would be "utterly **nuts**" to deter foreign investment in London's housing market. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)

The following extract shows how popularising articles in online newspapers take the form more of an informal blog addressed to the average reader than of an economic news item targeted at experts:

- (30) It's no surprise a growing number of parents are worried their **kids'** degrees were an expensive mistake. Once upon a time students could rely on their degree to **give them a leg-up** to a decent career. But times have changed. Now young people are **spat out** into a thick sludge of economic misfortunes, and they face a jobs market in which their impressive CVs might not even get them a shop job. Our higher education system is a **mess**. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)

As can be seen, colloquialisms pervade the whole passage, making its language familiar (*kids*), unceremonious (*give them a leg-up*), colourful (*spat out, mess*), and, therefore, attractive to readers.

### 1.2.9. Text type: Narratives

Narration is not the most common text type in fully specialised economic texts, which generally belong to the category of expository (and partially argumentative) text type. Conversely, the analysis of news articles online reveals that narratives are often used by reporters to

introduce the main subject matter. For example, (31) is extracted from an article on the rise of white-collar apprentices:

- (31) When Sam Robson finished sixth form and most of his classmates went on to university, he didn't join them. The 19-year-old looked at the rising cost of tuition fees, considered the tales of inexperienced graduates turned away by employers, and went for an apprenticeship instead. (*The Guardian*, 3 March 2014)

whereas (32) is taken from an article on Coca-Cola targeting new markets in Africa:

- (32) Noah Shemede can still recall the moment he first held a bottle of Coca-Cola. Born and raised in the Makoko slum, a maze of canoes and stilt houses on the polluted Lagos lagoon in Nigeria, he tasted the drink on his ninth birthday after his parents made a special trip to the mainland to buy it. (*The Guardian*, 4 May 2012)

In both excerpts, the personal experiences of two ordinary characters, one from the UK (Sam Robson) and the other from Nigeria (Noah Shemede), call the reader's attention to past facts or events which are relevant to common people's lives, thus arousing the general public's curiosity.

Sometimes personal events are even described by a first-person narrator in a complaint letter which is entirely quoted in *The Guardian's* series 'Consumer Champions', together with the consumer affairs correspondent's comments. The following extracts describe unpleasant events experienced by two *Guardian* readers, who consequently become active participants in the text production:

- (33) My wife and I booked a return BA flight from Glasgow to Gatwick in September. For various reasons we wanted to return a day earlier than planned and asked to change the tickets, accepting there was likely to be a small charge. (*The Guardian*, 1 March 2014)
- (34) I recently joined LA Fitness on an 18-month contract and added my girlfriend as an additional member on a rolling monthly contract for £33 a month. Shortly afterwards, the gym emailed me to say membership costs were increasing and gave me the option of going on contract for a discounted rate. I assumed this was a mistake as I was already in a contract; I didn't notice my partner's details in the top corner—it was actually about her membership. (*The Guardian*, 1 March 2014)

As anticipated in section 1.1, in popularisations readers can act not only as passive recipients, but also as actors, in that their own words may be included in the main texts as an essential part of the articles.

### 1.2.10. Textual genres

Whereas specialised economic texts can be immediately assigned to a specific genre, be it a research paper, a treatise on economics, a report, a business letter, etc., popularising texts in economics can combine different textual genres, from the traditional article on business or economics to various more peculiar genres. Complaint letters, as in (33)-(34), are generally accompanied by remarks or pieces of advice from *The Guardian*'s correspondents, as in (35):

- (35) COMPLAINT: How can BA justify such a rip-off? (By comparison, rail tickets to any part of the UK can be changed for a £10 fee.) I have twice emailed Keith Williams, BA's chief executive, without receiving even the courtesy of an acknowledgment.  
 REPLY: We agree that the costs of making changes to airline tickets can be outlandish, but it is fairly clear at the point of purchase the type of ticket you are buying.  
 You bought a non-changeable and non-refundable ticket and say that you accepted that you would have to pay a fee. (*The Guardian*, 1 March 2014)

which takes the appearance of an exchange.

Similarly, farewell letters can rather unusually be incorporated in the main text of a news item. For instance, *The Guardian* reports the complete text of former CEO Andrew Mason's letter to Groupon's employees after his dismissal; (36) is an extract from it:

- (36) People of Groupon,  
 After four and a half intense and wonderful years as CEO of Groupon, I've decided that I'd like to spend more time with my family. Just kidding—I was fired today. If you're wondering why... you haven't been paying attention. [...]  
 If there's one piece of wisdom that this simple pilgrim would like to impart upon you: have the courage to start with the customer. My biggest regrets are the moments that I let a lack of data override my intuition on what's best for our customers. This leadership change gives you some breathing room to break bad habits and deliver sustainable customer happiness—don't waste the opportunity!

I will miss you terribly.  
 Love,  
 Andrew (*The Guardian*, 1 March 2013)

The linguistic devices characterising this letter are also atypical for a specialised text. For instance, the tone is facetious (*I've decided that I'd like to spend more time with my family. Just kidding*) rather than serious or firm, the language used is informal and familiar (*I was fired today*) rather than official, and directives (*have the courage to start with the customer, don't waste the opportunity!*) and expressive speech acts (*I will miss you terribly, Love*) dominate over assertions or commissives. Although the letter is addressed to the restricted community of staff members, it targets a broader audience when it becomes an integral part of the news article.

The informal tone which often characterises articles on the web may also give news items the appearance of a conversation turn. Example (37) is taken from the beginning of an article on the web:

- (37) So, Australia is going to have to cut greenhouse emissions by more than the bare minimum 5% target and it would be cheaper if we bought overseas carbon permits to help us do it. Who knew?  
 Well, we all did—really. The Climate Change Authority's first draft report joins a bookshelf full of previous reports to governments saying much the same thing—such as the Shergold report to the former Howard government and the two Garnaut reports to the Rudd government.  
 But the Coalition government appears determined to ignore all of them.  
 (*The Guardian*, 30 October 2013)

In Conversation Analysis, discourse markers (*So, Well, But*) (cf. “connectives” in Palumbo and Musacchio 2010), questions (*Who knew?*), substitutions (*we all did*), exo- and endo-phoric references (*to help us do it*), and general vocabulary (*much the same thing*) classify the text as spoken rather than written language. Therefore, (37) appears to be closer to an excerpt from a dialogic exchange than to an appropriately structured article on climate change.

Another frequent genre which is not typical of fully specialised texts is advertisement. The following extract from a news article online seems more plausible taken from a leaflet in which ‘the Hunt’ is advertised:

- (38) Shopping for many is a social event and if you're wanting to share, socialise and kindly help others find what they're looking for then the Hunt may be the app for you. (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2014)

The zero conditional structure *If you're wanting... then x is for you* (where *x* stands for the advertised good) is indeed emblematic of advertising, while being unusual in specialised texts.

### **1.2.11. Functions and effects**

The features of newspaper articles on the web discussed hitherto confirm that there is an effort from the part of expert journalists and reporters to offer the science of economics in a way that is accessible to and consumable by the general public. The primary function of business and economic articles published in online newspapers is the dissemination of specialised knowledge among readers who are not fully trained in economics, but may have an interest in the topics dealt with. In other words, the popularisation process contributes to spread professional information reformulating specialised discourse in such a way that non-specialist readers can have access to it, make use of it, adapt it to their needs, and become more acquainted with its terminology and content.

Therefore, this popularisation process has the effect of extending the interest in specialised knowledge to the common reader, by facilitating his/her access to information, and especially to younger generations, who may feel at their ease with the colloquial tone adopted. Furthermore, popularisation also has the effect of producing hybrid specialised texts. Hybridism is both in terms of varied style (formal vs. informal) and diverse terminology (jargon vs. slang), and in terms of combining genres (article, report, advertisement, complaint letter) and types. The only goal of specialised texts becoming popular is no longer the spread of knowledge and information. Popular texts also aim at entertaining and reaching the widest audience for commercial purposes. These unusual aims contribute to make their apparatus more complex and articulated. Myers (2003: 270) even refers to popularisation as a “continuum”, which is not just a matter of range of genres, since “within each genre there may be a range of registers or repertoires”.

## **1.3. Social and cultural implications of popularisations in new media**

As the analysis of business and economics-related articles on the web suggests, the Internet has had a crucial role in the popularisation process. Like other new media, it has a great impact on a vast audience, including young readers, who often opt for the web (vs. more traditional communication means) to get the information they need. However, unlike

other media such as radio or television, the Internet allows passive recipients to become actors, and perform their role by simply adding a comment to an article, participating in a blog, or even having their complaint letter published in the pertinent series. This is the revolutionary aspect of popularising texts on the web: in popularisations, all participants become actors, including journalists, who are not mere mediators, but are asked to recontextualise (Luzón 2013) or reformulate (Gotti 2013) specialised discourse for the lay reader.

The shift from passive recipients to active participants is crucial for what concerns dialogue and public engagement. As suggested by Bensaude-Vincent (2009: 359) for popular science, this shift “from the deficit model to the participatory model” involves a series of procedures designed to involve the public and to change both economic practices and the public itself. In this new context of the participatory model, the public is no longer viewed as a passive audience. Even the use of the generic term “public”, often used to describe an un-differentiated mass of inert consumers, has been superseded by the use of the term “citizens”, which suggests a variety of motivated individuals or informed groups, acting as responsible actors and members of civil society (Bensaude-Vincent 2009).

The strategies used by expert journalists and bloggers to communicate and recontextualise scientific and economic discourse involve adjusting information to the readers’ knowledge, deploying linguistic features typical of personal, informal, and dialogic interaction to create intimacy and proximity, and using explicit and personal expressions of evaluation. Specialised journalists are the managers of knowledge: they discriminate between what knowledge should be presupposed and what knowledge should be expressed, and in case they decide how knowledge should be newly constructed (Calsamiglia and Van Dijk 2004).

It is also worth noting that economics is not distinct from the rest of the culture, so the public is not, on economic and business matters, a “blank slate” (Myers 2003: 274). Popular debates about issues such as job cuts, tax increases, economic crisis, inflation rate, or salary decreases clearly illustrate that the economy is not divorced from the rest of the culture, and that ‘citizens’ may well be informed on economic matters. Since nowadays economic discourse permeates people’s daily lives, the gap between specialised knowledge and lay knowledge is becoming less and less evident.

Lay or non-professional knowledge, therefore, is neither less prestigious nor less authoritative than the knowledge we acquire from recognised or fully specialised texts. In other terms, popular economic science does not necessarily mean lower science. Similarly, we should not draw a