

Titles in Food Science Posters: A preliminary Survey from the *ChimAlsi_2012* Book of Abstracts

Eugenio Cianflone

Gastronomic Science Degree, University of Messina (Italy)

ecianflone@unime.it

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Abstract

Titles, the first point of contact between authors and readers, provide concise and exhaustive information on the research and on the findings. Analyses in different disciplinary fields indicate that the structural construction conforms to four different layouts: nominal, compound, full-sentence and question. The aim of this paper is to report preliminary results from ongoing research on title encoding practices in Food Science. Previous research in this disciplinary field has surveyed titles in research articles and in short communications. Results have shown the prevalence of nominal and compound titles, and a mean length of 15.3 for research articles and of 14.6 for short communications. This paper wants to offer a further contribution to extant literature by examining 241 poster titles presented at a conference. Findings indicate the mean word count in 12.02 words per title and the exclusive use of the nominal and of the compound format.

Key-words: Titles; Poster presentation; Food Science; LSP

Introduction

Titles outline the paper's contents and serve an important communicative aim: they catch readers' attention.

Genre analysts have acknowledged the communicative role played by titles and have produced a consistent number of studies on this topic. Available surveys can be divided into multi-disciplinary and mono-disciplinary.

The former discuss titles in natural and social sciences (Buxton and Meadow, 1977; Jaime Sisò, 2009; Pereira, Fadigas, Senna and Moret, 2011); education, psychology and literary criticism (Dillon, 1982), literature, linguistics and science (Haggan, 2004), medicine, life sciences and physics (Ball, 2009); medicine and linguistics (Busch-Lauer, 2000); biology, clinical medicine, oncology, chemistry,

engineering and physics (Hartley, 2005 & 2007; Lewinson and Hartley, 2005); anthropology, biology, biochemistry, medicine, linguistics, psychology (Soler, 2007 & 2011). The mono-disciplinary surveys discuss titles in computer science (Anthony, 2001), education (Dillon, 1981), linguistics (Gesuato, 2008; Pułaczewska, 2009), management (Farray and Wodilla, 2005), applied mathematics (Yakhontova, 2006) and psychology (Whissel, 1999). The medical field has been object of careful attention. Cianflone (2010) offered a brief description of title formats in veterinary medicine; Singh, Chaudhary and Suvirya (2009) examined dermatology samples to study the divergence between the title and the body of the article; Giannoni (2008) discussed titles in medical editorials published in Italian and in English journals; Goodman (2000 & 2005) surveyed the use of active verbs in clinical reports and allusions to Shakespeare's plays, to Andersen's tales, to the Bible, to popular proverbs and films; Siegel, Thacker, Goodman and Gillespie (2006) examined the information provided by titles on the topic, the methods, the datasets, the results or the conclusions whereas Wang and Bai (2007) identified three different sub-genres within the nominal-group: uni-head, bi-head and multi-head. Food science (FS) has also been object of analysis. In this field, research article titles, research article and short communication titles (Cianflone, 2011a & 2012) were examined.

To date, titles in FS poster presentations have not been object of study, even though this written genre plays an important role to spread findings in a specific interactional context (Cianflone, 2011b).

Materials and Method

Corpus compilation has met various criteria. Researchers selected the first published articles (Giannoni, 2008), the first 25 specimens taken from electronic indexes (Gesuato, 2008), exemplars labelled "best articles" (Anthony, 1999), or a randomised collection (Farray and Wodilla, 2005; Haggan, 2004; Soler, 2007 & 2011; Wang and Bai, 2007). As a consequence, analyses were founded on corpora of 30, 40 or 80 specimens per discipline (Giannoni, 2008; Soler, 2007 & 2011, respectively) or on larger ones when the survey examined the compound (Hartley, 2005 & 2007) or the question format (Ball, 2009).

As regards the layout, there is no unanimous consensus on how to label titles. Haggan (2004), for example, defines titles "full sentence", "compound" and "a remaining group". Jaime Sisò (2009) defines titles "indicative" and "conclusive", although the former label corresponds to the nominal and compound formats, while the latter corresponds to the full-sentence type. Anthony (2001) names compound titles "hanging titles", whereas Hartley (2005 & 2007) labels them "colonic", thus excluding those encoded with the comma, the dash and the full-stop (Cianflone,

2012). Soler (2007 & 2011) employs a quadripartite list, namely nominal, compound, full-sentence and question.

For the aims behind the present research, that is to provide a preliminary account of the writing practices used by food scientists to shape poster titles, the posters presented at *ChimAlsi_2012*, the ninth Italian Congress of Food Chemistry were examined. Titles and abstracts were published in a supplementary online issue of the *Emirates Journal of Food and Agriculture (ChimAlsi_2012, 2012)*. Of the 244 titles, two were not considered because written in Italian, whereas one was printed twice. The final corpus, thus, consisted of the 241 samples written in English.

As in previous analyses on titles in FS research, the selected samples were examined at the surface level to elicit the mean word count and the frequency of the different structural constructions (nominal, compound, full-sentence and question) on FS writing practices.

As concerns the first research line, title length was measured in number of words manually counted as follows: acronyms, such as *HILICELSD/MS* in title 1, and numerical sequences, such as *HEPG2* in title 2, were considered single units; hyphenated and compound words were counted as single items when they functioned as bound morphemes, as in the case of *γ-oryzanol* and *p-coumarate* in title 3, and *in-house* in title 4.

1. Determination of phospholipids in various milk samples by means of HILICELSD/MS (Cichello et al., *Poster 9*)
HILICELSD/MS= 1 word
2. Resveratrol and pterostilbene: Protective effects toward induced DNA damage in HEPG2 cells (Lombardi et al., *Poster 55*)
DNA= 1 word; HEPG2= 1 word
3. Separation of *γ-oryzanol* components and its synthetic *p-coumarate* and caffeate derivatives by NP-HPLC (D'Ambrosio, *Poster 11*)
γ-oryzanol= 1 word; *p-coumarate*= 1 word
4. In-house validation of chromatographic speciation methods for arsenic in fishery products (Serpe et al., *Poster 205*)
In-house= 1 word

As concerns the second research line, that is layout frequency in the examined corpus, a brief description of the different title formats is necessary.

“Nominal” titles are those arranged around one head, with or without pre-modifiers, followed by other prepositional structures, or post-modification. The

nominal format is divided into three sub-categories, namely uni-head, bi-head and multi-head (Wang and Bai, 2007), indicating the number of research questions or topics dealt with in the article, and into non-verbal and verbal. The latter type is characterised by the presence of one verb that connects the head to the post-modifying structure (Cianflone, 2012). Three verbal tenses are used in the nominal verbal format: present participle, past participle and infinitive.

“Compound” are those titles made up of two sections, acting as main and sub-title (Busch-Lauer, 2000), connected by a colon, but also by a comma, a full-stop or a dash (Anthony, 2001).

“Full-sentence” are the titles phrased as sentences with a subject, referring to the object of study (Jaime Sisò, 2009), followed by a positive or negative declarative verb in the simple present tense, either in the active or in the passive form (Cianflone, 2012) and by an object that fine-tunes the research or the findings discussed in the article.

“Question” are those titles shaped as plain sentences in the interrogative form (Ball, 2009), that is with the question mark at the very end of the string.

Results

As already stated, words were manually counted. Results show that in the analysed corpus title length ranges from 4 words, as in title 5, to 29 words, as in title 6 below. The mean count is attested at 12.02 words, as in title 7.

5. NMR-based metabolomics of meat (Ritota et. Al., *Poster 181*)
6. Rapid determination of acrylamide in conventional cereal-based foods and potato chips through conversion to 3-[bis(trifluoroethanoyl)amino]-3-oxopropyl trifluoroacetate by gas chromatography coupled with electron capture and ion trap mass spectrometry detectors (Russo et.al., *Poster 194*)
7. Nutritional characteristics and functional properties of new Italian rice varieties (*Oryza sativa*) (Acquistucci et al., *Poster 1*)

As regards the layout, the FS corpus is characterized by the presence of the nominal (with 194 titles) and of the compound (with 47 titles) format and by the lack of full-sentence and question titles¹.

¹ Only one poster shows an interrogative sentence. Because of its specific format it was counted among the compound titles. *Recipe composition data: Calculation procedure can be considered a valid alternative to chemical analysis for all nutrients?* (Camilli et al., *Poster 42*)

Of the 194 nominal titles, 168 belong to the non-verbal sub-category, while 26 belong to the verbal one.

The FS nominal titles display a great pre- and post-modifying structural variety. As regards the former, titles are shaped as strings consisting of one head without pre-modifiers, as in titles 8 and 9. Alternatively, the pre-modifying structure is a complex construction consisting of several adjectives or acronyms used in adjectival position, as in titles 10 and 11. As regards post-modification, it can consist of one simple noun, as in title 5 above, or of a very complex construction, as in title 6 above.

8. Effect of chromosome doubling on secondary metabolite profile of *Solanum bulbocastanum* genotypes (Caruso et al., *Poster 59*)
9. Plasticizers in tea and flavored tea by HRGC-MS (Potortì et al., *Poster 174*)
10. Carbohydrate prebiotic activity of typical Italian garlic cultivar (*Allium savitum* L.) (Rossetti et al., *Poster 124*)
11. HPTLC synoptic profiling for a rapid characterization of the phenolic fraction of extra virgin olive oils (Coran et al., *Poster 149*)

As concerns the number of heads, only bi-head nominal titles were detected in the analyzed corpus, as, for example, title 12, where the research lines are pivoted on the eating habits and on the blood levels, or title 13, where the profile and the properties of wines are studied.

12. Eating habits and human blood levels of dioxins (PCDD/FS) and PCBs in Campania (Serpe et al., *Poster 206*)
13. Antioxidant profile and in vitro antiproliferative and cardioprotective properties of typical red and white wines from vineyards cultivated in Scafati (Salerno, Italy) (Tenore et al., *Poster 218*)

In the verbal nominal titles, the head is linked to the post-modifying structure by a verb in the present participle, in the infinitive or in the past participle tense.

The poster corpus shows the prevalence of the present participle tense (with 14 titles), as in titles 14, 15, and 16, followed by the infinitive tense (with 7 titles), as in titles 17, 18, and 19, and by the past participle (with 5 titles), as in titles 20, 21, and 22.

14. Passata di pomodoro authenticity checks using $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ analysis (Bontempo et al., *Poster 34*)
15. Fingerprint of “special” edible oils using a widespread analytical protocol (Cesa et al., *Poster 49*)
16. Rapid and highly sensitive quantitative analysis and screening of aflatoxins in foods using liquid chromatography triple quadrupole mass spectrometry (Zaza et al., *Poster 235*)
17. Exploitation of synthetic DNA to monitor real-time PCR assay quality in food analysis (Hodek et al., *Poster 136*)
18. A fast and sensitive method to detect powdered milk in fresh cow milk based on MALDI-TOF-MS (Calvano et al., *Poster 130*)
19. Application of flow cytometry to assess the viability of stressed *Lactobacillus sakei* (Bonomo et al., *Poster 29*)
20. Characterization of volatile fraction of wines obtained with starter in different formulation (Calabretti et al., *Poster 41*)
21. Validation of an electrochemical method based on screen printed electrodes for Cd and Pb analysis in Cephalopoda (Del Carlo et al., *Poster 60*)
22. Towards a new generation of food additives based on the covalent bond principle (Siracusa et al., *Poster 210*)

The second occurrence elicited within the poster corpus is the compound format. Of the 47 titles, only two samples are encoded with the comma, namely title 23 and 24 below, while in the remaining samples the use of the colon, as exemplified in titles 25 and 26 below, prevails.

23. *Vitis vinifera* cv. Uvalino, a neglected grape vine as a source of nutraceutical lipids (Argentieri et al., *Poster 4*)
24. Dihydroasparagusic acid, a strong antioxidant natural product from *Asparagus spp.* (Venditti et al., *Poster 230*)

25. Irradiated meat: Analysis of dose-correlated volatile compounds (Mariani et al., *Poster 89*)
26. Food quality control: Application of near infrared spectroscopy for dried egg-pasta characterization (Materazzi et al., *Poster 131*)

As previously discussed in FS title analyses (Cianflone, 2012), compound titles in FS follow two distinct models. In the first, general information on the research carried out is introduced in the main title, while specific details on the findings are introduced in the subtitle, as titles 27 or 28 show; the second model provides information on the topic in the main title and a description of the type of study in the subtitle, as can be detected in titles 25 above and 26 below. In the poster corpus the former model prevails over the latter as the sequence “general/specific” caters for the presentation of relevant information in a concise, but interconnected and highly informative, way.

27. Nitrate in the Italian total diet: Levels in fresh vegetables (Tufi et al., *Poster 83*)
28. Impact of pollutants on fish collected from coastal area of Milazzo (Sicily/Italy): Histopathological study (Palombieri et al., *Poster 156*)

Discussion

The data gained from this survey offer preliminary insights on the encoding practices employed by FS researchers to conceive the title for poster presentations in terms of mean length and in terms of layout.

As regards length, the mean count of 12.02 words per title is shorter than the FS research article and the FS short communication title, attested at 15.3 and 14.6, respectively (Cianflone, 2012). This lower figure can be ascribed to the peculiar communicative role poster presentations have in academic FS conferences.

Conferences, in fact, are an important opportunity to discuss research “at various levels of completion” (Hyland, 2009:79), and an event that boosts the member’s or the team’s reputation within the community of peers. In FS, poster presentations are considered a valid alternative to the oral presentation. As the number of posters in the *ChimAlsi_2012* book of abstracts confirms, posters in FS research do not bear the second class status elicited in other disciplines (see Swales, 2004). In FS conferences, this medium is extensively used because posters benefit researchers, the public and the conference committee (Cianflone, 2011b). Posters assist researchers in discussing their work in a relaxed, yet interactive, atmosphere in a conference section specifically devoted to this type of presentations. Posters

benefit the public because this medium facilitates the interaction with presenters in the form of questions and feedback. Posters help the organising committee since this medium allows many presenters to be registered among the conference participants (Cianflone, 2011b).

For the reasons discussed above, FS titles must be shaped as condensed and informative strings, shorter than the other written FS genres so far examined in FS literature. Poster titles, in fact, aim at catching attention in a limited number of words to be easily read from a distance (Erren and Boume, 2007) during the poster sessions.

As regards the layout, some interesting peculiarities seem to emerge. The occurrence of the nominal and of the compound format indicates that FS researchers prefer titles with a distinct communicative imprint. Both title-formats, in fact, allow the piling-up of information by means of pre/post modifiers or by the partition into two interconnected sections. The aim is to attract the conference committee's attention and, once the poster is accepted, to intrigue readers and to invite them to read on.

As concerns the impact of nominal non-verbal format, this incidence is in line with what is known from FS literature. This layout, in fact, is selected because of the multiple verbal constructions to encode relevant information in a limited number of words. By this means, authors inform readers with a written title design that conforms to the impersonal and detached style peculiar to scientific prose.

As attested by the number of specimens found in the analysed corpus, the verbal nominal title is an interesting alternative to the non-verbal one. The use of the three verbal tenses, and the prevalence of present participle and of the infinitive tense over the past participle, shows some communicative peculiarities that deserve attention.

A verbal nominal title, as in 16, shaped with the present participle, or shaped with the infinitive tense, as in 20, aims at involving readers in a colloquial fashion by putting researchers on a level with readers (Cianflone, 2012). A title shaped with the past participle, on the other hand, seems to encode the message in a more detached fashion. As can be inferred from titles 21 or 22, the past participle tense seems to inform readers that the whole research is over and that the spreading of findings at a conference is the last step before the publication of data in the conference proceedings or in a scholarly journal.

As concerns the compound format, the peculiarity of this layout is the double partition into two distinct, but interconnected, segments, defined main title and sub-title by Busch-Lauer (2000). The link between the main and the sub-title, serves an important interactional aim. It caters for the introduction of relevant information in a concise fashion by exploiting what Haggan (2004) calls "the add-on principle". The incidence of compound titles is not only in line with the data on its

growing use in some disciplinary fields (see Hartley, 2005; 2007). It also indicates that FS researchers are interested in communicating their findings with a structure that, because of the double partition, attracts readers scanning titles during the poster sessions. The prevalence of the colon adds to this interactional role as, once the poster is printed and displayed on a panel, the colon looks graphically more conspicuous than the comma. For this same reason, the prevalence of the “general/specific” model should be seen as a stylistic choice to attract readers and to inform them in a concise way.

Conclusion

Titles are considered independent discourse units (Gesuato, 2008; Haggan, 2004) that should stand alone to be indexed and searched in online search platforms. They play two crucial functions: they catch attention, first, and, then, influence researchers’ decision to read on by informing on the topic, on the methods, on the findings and on the impact on everyday practice (Goodman et al., 2001).

Writing titles, therefore, is a complex activity that asks authors to consider editorial policies, community practices and personal preferences to produce short, catchy and informative strings (Cianflone, 2012).

The characteristic traits evidenced by title analysts are informativity and economy (Soler, 2011). This means that titles should offer readers as much information as possible in a limited number of words.

The data gained from the analysis of poster titles can serve to define the encoding practices in FS. The first peculiar trait is that food scientists meet the interactional criteria of informativity and of economy by shaping their poster titles with a mean number of words, attested at 12.02 words per title. The second peculiar trait is that, to meet the communicative effect of rousing interest, FS scholars shape their titles using two distinct formats: nominal and compound.

As regards the mean length, poster titles are shorter than titles in other FS genres because they comply with the written conventions of conference posters. In this context, accepted presentations are displayed on panels. Titles, therefore, are to provide schematic information to support the claims presented in the poster’s main body from the first glance. This means that titles should intrigue readers and should not bore them with too many words. This aim can only be reached by the use of short titles.

As concerns the layout, FS poster titles display their communicative load in those formats that inform with a limited word count. Both formats, in fact, enable researchers to meet informativity and economy by the use of those structures that cater for the synoptic presentation of findings. Additionally, compound poster titles, to be eye-catching, are mainly encoded with the colon. This prevalence should be

considered a graphic device to call for readers' attention during the poster sessions. Colons, in fact, can be spotted from a distance.

The data presented in this paper can be considered biased because the corpus is limited to the titles from one conference. They are, nevertheless, important.

The findings discussed in this paper are the first to have examined this important written genre in FS research and to have described the written conventions used by FS scholars to attract and to inform conference participants.

These findings are shared to offer a preliminary contribution to the literature on titles. The data on the frequency of the two layouts can be used by language teachers working with FS students. In this case, the writing conventions discussed in this paper can serve to stress textual schemata and rhetorical patterns to shape effective FS titles.

Additionally, the titles listed in the Appendix can be used in language classes in several ways. Titles quoted in the appendix can be discussed with perspective authors to inform them of titles' peculiarities and to stress the communicative load brought by each specimen. The specimens can serve to develop writing skills by asking students to shape titles in a different way. To this aim samples can undergo linguistic change by the insertion/deletion of adjectives and by the use of the different verbal tenses. Alternatively, a nominal title can be re-written in the nominal verbal form or in the compound form.

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Yakhontova, T. (2006). Cultural and disciplinary variation in academic discourse: The issue of influencing factors. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5, 153-167.

Appendix A

Complete reference list of cited posters from the *ChimAlsi_2012* Book of Abstracts

13

1. Cichello F., Russo M., Sommella E., Donato P., Tranchida P.Q., Dugo G., Dugo P., Mondello L. *Determination of phospholipids in various milk samples by means of HILICELSD/MS*. Poster 9.
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19. Bonomo M.G., Milella L., Martelli G., Salzano G. *Application of flow cytometry to assess the viability of stressed *Lactobacillus sakei**. Poster 29.
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