

**STYLISTIC DIFFERENCES IN MULTILINGUAL
ADMINISTRATIVE FORMS: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC
CHARACTERIZATION***

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the stylistic variation in the design of administrative forms in three European countries—the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain—through the linguistic analysis of a small corpus of multilingual administrative forms dealing with pension benefits and other kinds of allowances written in four different languages—English, Spanish, Italian, and German. The analysis included both monolingual administrative forms—written in English, Spanish, and Italian—and bilingual Italian/German and Italian/English forms. The purpose of the study was to search for cross-linguistic regularities in the design of administrative forms which would enable their characterization as a genre, both in terms of its staging structure and of the linguistic and formatting features of the elements which configure it as such. The analysis performed on the small corpus yielded interesting stylistic differences and tendencies in the design of comparable administrative forms in the different countries, characterized by different socio-cultural backgrounds. It is suggested that these differences are a reflection of the social attitudes of the different administrations toward their citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

The language of administrative documents has been the subject of several publications in different European countries as part of a generalized trend in the Administration to improve the communication with the citizen. The British Administration, for example, and more specifically the Department of Social Security, have developed over the years a body of expertise in effective document writing, following a general policy to provide a better service to the citizen. Style manuals, such as the *Good Forms Guide* [2], the *Letter Writer's Kit* [3], and the *DSS Review of Communication Research* [4], describe the principles of effective form writing, and are extensively used by technical writers in Great Britain to produce forms which are simple, clear, and easy to understand.

Other European countries like Spain or Italy have only recently recognized the need to improve the communication with the citizen, and published style manuals as a response to this social need. In this sense, the Spanish administration reacted promptly with the publication of the *Manual de estilo del lenguaje administrativo* [5], which was soon followed by a similar manual published by the Italian administration (*Codice di Stile* [6]).

Less attention, however, has been paid to the study of administrative forms as a genre, i.e., as a “socially ratified text-type” in a community [7, p. 216] or, to use Martin’s definition, as a “staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture” [8, p. 25]. However, administrative forms could be considered as a genre in itself, since they are a “recognisable communicative event characterised by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs” [9]. Administrative forms are the product of what Swales calls a *sociorhetorical discourse community*, one where the members have functional needs as primary determinants of linguistic behavior [9, p. 24]. Moreover, administrative forms are characterized by certain “relatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic types of utterances” which, according to Bakhtin [10, p. 64], reflect a particular function and the particular conditions of speech communication which give rise to particular genres. In fact, genres are highly structured and conventionalized communicative events easily recognizable by the staging structure in which they unfold.

The purpose of this article is exploratory: our aim is to carry out a pilot study on a small corpus of administrative forms, designed in different countries with different socio-cultural settings, to uncover possible cross-linguistic regularities in their composition design which would enable their characterization as a genre. With that aim in mind, we undertook a generic structure analysis, following a well-established methodology in genre studies [11]. This involved a series of steps such as defining the social purpose of the genre, identifying and differentiating the stages within the genre, specifying obligatory and optional stages, and analyzing certain linguistic and formatting features within each of the proposed

stages. The analysis performed on the corpus yielded interesting stylistic differences and tendencies in the design of comparable administrative forms in the different countries, characterized by different socio-cultural backgrounds. Although these results are only indicative given the small size of the sample corpus, they certainly reflect cross-linguistic tendencies in the organization and stylistic variation of administrative forms, which can be related to the different social attitudes of the Administration toward its users in the different countries.

The article is organized as follows. First, a description of the multilingual corpus used for this study and the procedure used for its analysis is presented. The results of the cross-linguistic analysis are described in the following section. The last section discusses and summarizes the research results and provides concluding remarks.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Materials

The corpus used for this study contains approximately 61,000 words and consists of 27 administrative forms dealing with pension benefits and other kinds of allowances. It includes six English, 11 bilingual (Italian/German), two bilingual (Italian/English), and eight Spanish administrative forms (see the specification of the names of the forms in Appendix 1: Sources of Data).

The English forms were originally designed at the DDU (Document Design Unit) of the University of Leeds. Over the years the DDU has developed a body of expertise in the design of forms and letters, based on the viewpoint of citizens rather than that of the administration officials. New forms are tested by independent market researchers who interview typical users in their homes, recording their reactions as they fill in the form. Also, the forms are designed following the guidelines presented in the *Good Forms Guide* [2], the *Letter Writer's Kit* [3], and the *DSS Review of Communication Research* [4], which describe the principles of effective form writing. As a result of the conscious effort made by the DDU to produce forms which are simple, clear, and easy to understand and, at the same time, warm and non-intimidating in tone, the forms produced by the DDU have been widely recognized as exemplary.

By contrast, the Italian/German forms are issued by two Italian organizations: INPS and PAB. INPS (Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale) is the national institution for social security, the counterpart to the British DSS. All forms are produced in Italian by the central office of INPS in Rome and adapted to include a German translation at a local office in Bolzano. PAB (Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano) is the local government of the province of Bolzano—an officially bilingual area—in charge of producing a variety of forms, brochures, and other official communications, all of which must be presented as parallel texts in Italian and German. Unlike the British ones, the social security

offices in Italy have not developed any well organized and formalized set of specific guidelines for writing forms, nor is there an office similar to the English DDU which carries out extensive user testing on the forms. As a result, the Italian/German forms have been recognized as inadequate, which caused the government to launch a new policy for improving official communication with the public. The new Italian policy on *transparency* has been set out in the *Codice di Stile* [6], which presents very general and abstract guidelines for improving the written communication between the administration and its users.

The Spanish forms were produced by the INSS (Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social), a branch of the Spanish Ministry of Social Security, and, like the Italian forms, were not subject to extended user testing to ensure the readers' acceptance of the forms. However, they include some of the stylistic features suggested by the *Manual de estilo del lenguaje administrativo*, published by the Spanish Administration with the aim of "improving the intelligibility of administrative language" [5, p. 11]. This manual, written in collaboration with the Department of Spanish Philology of the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid, represents a conscious effort on the part of the Spanish Administration to improve the communication with the public, usually hindered by the lack of simplicity and clarity in the language of administrative documents. The final aim was to offer a more efficient service to the citizens. This trend follows similar initiatives in other English-speaking countries. As a result, the Spanish forms have improved their tone in recent years, their style being simpler and easier to understand by the general public.

Procedure

A contrastive corpus analysis was carried out to uncover cross-linguistic regularities in the design of administrative forms which would enable their characterization as a genre, both in terms of its staging structure and of some linguistic and formatting features of the elements which configure it as such. This was done by following an adapted version of Eggins and Slade's proposal for carrying out a generic structure analysis, consisting of the following steps [11, pp. 321-325]:

1. *Defining the social purpose of the genre*

This involved the clarification of the overall function or social purpose of the genre of administrative forms and its functional labelling. Other subservient or secondary purposes were also identified and labelled.

2. *Identifying and differentiating stages within the genre*

This step involved chunking the forms into functional constituents (stages), and assigning functional labels to them with the purpose of describing what each stage is doing relative to the whole, in the genre of administrative forms.

3. *Specifying obligatory and optional stages*

The obligatory elements of a generic structure are those which define the genre and which are key elements in recognizing it. Optional elements, on the other

hand, are not a defining feature of a genre and can, therefore, occur across genres. In the genre of administrative forms, we defined as obligatory stages those elements of the generic structure which we considered essential for the production of a well-formed administrative form, whereas we specified the optional stages as those which were not essential. This specification was also based on the frequency distribution of different stages: the generic elements which appeared in all the forms were considered as core stages, while those which only appeared in some of them were considered as optional for the functional characterization of administrative forms as a genre.

4. *Analyzing the linguistic and formatting features for each stage of a genre*

An accurate and systematic generic analysis involves not only the identification of the schematic (or staging) structure of the genre, but also a linguistic analysis of the different stages which make up a given genre. Our analysis concentrated on some linguistic and formatting choices which occurred in the different stages of the generic structure. Therefore, our purpose was not to provide a full lexicogrammatical analysis, but to uncover stylistic regularities or differences in the use of certain linguistic phenomena and formatting devices in the corpus.

ANALYSIS RESULTS

In this section we describe the results of the generic structure analysis of the multilingual corpus of administrative forms. These are presented following the steps outlined above:

1. *Definition of the social purpose(s) of the genre*

The overall and primary function or social purpose of administrative forms is to *request* information from the user. Administrative forms are issued by the administration to obtain information which is needed to satisfy social needs, or to provide services (e.g., pensions, benefits, allowances, etc.). Other secondary purposes or functions are: to *inform* the reader about aspects of the form (such as its purpose, composition, addressees), and to *instruct* the reader on how to fill in the form.

2. *Identification and differentiation of the stages within a genre*

The stages identified in the multilingual corpus of administrative forms are the following:

- Title
- Information about the form
- Instructions about how to fill in the form
- Requests for information about the reader
- Authorization
- Declaration and Signature
- Warning(s)

The labelling of each of the stages of the generic structure describes the functional role each stage is playing, and how it contributes toward achieving the overall social purpose of the genre. We will therefore proceed to comment on each of these stages separately, concentrating on their occurrence and order of appearance in the different forms of the multilingual corpus:

- *Title*—The title is present in the majority of the forms. However, some forms lack a specific title and leave the reader to infer what the form is about. Thus, for example, INPS 8 only explains throughout the form that this is the “Cartolina C,” but the title is not explicitly presented on the front of the document. INPS 13 is a different type of document, composed of several payslips, and therefore it does not have a clearly defined title. CSA1 and CSA3 lack specific titles and include only information about the agency that issues them (Child Support Agency). BR1 has a very generic title (Retirement Pension). Finally, BR19 leaves the reader to infer what the form is about in the first section “*How you can get a Retirement Pension Forecast*,” but contains no title.

The placement of the title also differs in the forms. Most of them place the title at the very beginning, this being the first element the reader encounters. However, this is not always true for all the forms. COM’s title is placed on the top right-hand side of the page, with some general information on the left. This position does not hinder processibility as long as the type size is larger than the one used for the information located on the left.

Some bilingual Italian/German forms (INPS2, INPS8, INPS9, and INPS13) introduce a letter addressed to the reader at the beginning of the document. The title is thus moved to a second place within the structure. The letter provides information about the purpose of the form, but it is no appropriate substitute for a large-type title at the top of the page (for example, INPS3, Italia-Australia, DLA).

All the Spanish forms contain a title: five of them display it in large font size and with a color-coded background that helps distinguish the form throughout its different sections. Thus, J6, for instance, has a title in black print over a strip of green. The headings, both in the request and the instruction sections, are also printed in the same green color, so that the claimant will never mix the components of two different forms together. The instructions are usually presented in a detachable sheet.

- *Information about the form*—This stage is not present in all the forms, and for this reason it is considered as optional within the genre. Some bilingual Italian/German forms present both informative and instructive material in the form of a letter (INPS2, INPS8, INPS9, and INPS13). Other forms group together in one single block both informative and instructive material after the requests and place it under general headings such as *Notes*, *Istruzioni*, *Avvertenze*, and *Importante*. These sections may also include explanations, definitions, and examples referring to specific request fields. This is the case of INPS3, INPS4, INPS5, INPS6, INPS7, and INPS13. Other documents, such as BR1 and CH2-CP, distribute these two kinds of information throughout different parts of the form.

There are only two texts that provide instruction—no information—at the beginning: CSA1 and CSA3. The instructions direct the reader to the notes section outside the actual form. In the Spanish corpus this stage is never present, although there are some preliminary instructions on how to fill in the form (typewritten or block capitals), and a reminder to read the whole form first, before completing it.

- *Requests for information*—All the documents request information from the citizen in one way or another. This could be personal details or any other specific detail that is relevant for the processing of the form. Two texts are somewhat different: COM and INPS2 request the reader to *check* that the information in possession of the INPS is correct. The reader only needs to fill in the form when this information is not accurate. The requests are usually the main body of the text, and come after the title and the informative-instructional section, if there is one. INPS3, INPS4, and INPS6 ask for an authorization after the personal details, and before the rest of the requests.

- *Authorization*—Only six documents—COM, INPS2, INPS3, INPS4, INPS6, INPS9—require the reader to sign an authorization for the INPS office to assist and represent the claimant in relation with the claim. Such authorization is placed after the requests for personal details and before the requests for more specific details. This authorization seems to be optional, as it is not present in all the forms.

- *Declaration and Signature*—The declaration is usually placed at the end of the document, after the requests for information: INPS4, INPS5, INPS6, INPS7, INPS8, INPS9, Italo-Australia, Italo-Britannica, Italo-Austriaca, BR1, CSA1, CSA3, CH2-CP, and DLA. All the Spanish forms contain a declaration, sometimes (3 out of 8) placed before a warning about the possibility of fraud if the information provided is knowingly false.

- *Other optional elements: Receipt, Signature of Witness and Warning*—Some Italian/German documents (INPS4, INPS5, INPS6, and INPS13), and some of the Spanish ones (INV17, MS5, FAM1, MS3, and J6) provide a Receipt as an extra element. One bilingual English/Italian (Italo-Australia) asks for a witness of the claimant's signature, and some of the Spanish ones include a Warning, advising the citizen about the possibility of committing a criminal offense if he or she provides false information or receives undeserved welfare from the Administration.

3. *Specification of obligatory and optional stages*

A generic structure description, according to Eggins and Slade [11, p. 284] is “an account of the expected unfolding of the genre, as it occurs within specific cultural contexts.” In this sense, a generic structure description is an account of the ideal type, not a fixed schema, it is “a description of the underlying abstract structure which participants orient to.” In this sense, the obligatory stages of a generic structure are those which can be considered as essential for recognizing a genre, while optional elements are not a defining feature of a particular genre and can occur across genres. In the analysis performed on our corpus, elements such as the *Title*, the *Information* about the form, the *Instructions* on how to fill it

in, the *Requests*, the *Declaration*, and the *Signature* seem to be the key elements in recognizing administrative forms as such. By contrast, elements such as the *Receipt*, the *Signature of Witness*, and the *Warning* do not seem to be a defining feature of this particular genre.

Moreover, the distribution of these generic stages in the multilingual corpus seems to support this specification. Tables 1, 2, and 3 summarize the distribution of the different generic elements in the English, the Italo-German, and the Spanish forms.

As the tables show, elements such as the *Title*, the *Information* about the form, the *Instructions* on how to fill it in, the *Requests*, the *Declaration*, and the *Signature* appear in all the forms of the multilingual corpus. By contrast, elements such as the *Receipt*, the *Signature of Witness*, and the *Warning* are only present in the Spanish forms.

4. Analysis of the linguistic and formatting features for each stage of the genre

As explained above, our analysis tried to uncover certain linguistic and formatting features of each stage of the generic structure of the forms. As we intended a cross-linguistic characterization, we concentrated on those features which would uncover stylistic tendencies in the different languages. The cross-linguistic analysis yielded the following results:

- *Title*—The *DSS Review* [4] states that the title is one of the factors that initially conveys relevance. Consequently, titles should be in a larger type size, bold, colored type, or any other graphic means that conveys their relevance. In our corpus, all forms make their titles stand out in some way: COM uses capital letters; INPS2, INPS3, INPS5, INPS7, Italo-Australia, and BR1 have capitals,

Table 1. Distribution of Obligatory and Optional Stages in the English Forms

Form	Title	Infor.	Req.	Instruc.	D.&S.	War.
BR1	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
CSA1	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
CSA3	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
BR19	No	No	✓	✓	✓	No
CH2	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
DLA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	No
Total	5	1	6	6	6	0
% (<i>n</i> = 6)	83.3	16.6	100	100	100	—

Abbreviations: Infor. = Information; Req. = Requests; Instruc. = Instructions; D.&S. = Declaration and Signature; War. = Warning; Wit. = Signature of Witness.

Table 2. Distribution of Obligatory and Optional Stages in the Italian/German Forms

Form	Title	Infor.	Req.	Instruc.	D.&S.	War.
COM	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS2	✓	Letter	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS3	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS4	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS5	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS6	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS7	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS8	No	Letter	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS9	✓	Letter	✓	✓	✓	No
Italo-Austriaca	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
INPS13	No	Letter	✓	✓	No	No
Total	9	4	11	11	10	0
% (<i>n</i> = 11)	81.82	36.36	100	100	90.9	—

Abbreviations: Infor. = Information; Req. = Requests; Instruc. = Instructions; D.&S. = Declaration and Signature; War. = Warning; Wit. = Signature of Witness.

Table 3. Distribution of Obligatory and Optional Stages in the Spanish Forms

Form	Title	Infor.	Req.	Instruc.	D.&S.	War.
INV8	✓	No	✓	No	✓	No
INC1	✓	No	✓	No	✓	No
DEV1	✓	No	✓	No	✓	No
INV17	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓
MS5	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓
FAM1	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
MS3	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	No
J6	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total	8	0	8	5	8	3
% (<i>n</i> = 8)	100	—	100	62.5	100	37.5

Abbreviations: Infor. = Information; Req. = Requests; Instruc. = Instructions; D.&S. = Declaration and Signature; War. = Warning; Wit. = Signature of Witness.

bold, and larger type size; INPS4 combines capitals and small-case letters, together with bold and larger type size; INPS6 has capitals and larger type size, but not bold type; INPS9 has only bold type; CH2-CP and DLA have bold and larger type size (the latter would be the best option, according to the *Good Forms Guide* [2]); INV17, MS5, FAM1, MS3, and J6 have a title in large font against a strip whose color distinguishes the form throughout.

A good title should state the department that issues the form and give an indication on the nature and content of the form (*Good Forms Guide* [2]). The name Social Security, INPS, etc. must be placed before the department name and content, and in smaller type size. Most forms display only the name of the agency (INPS) and the content of the form (“*Domanda di assegno per il nucleo familiare*”), but provide no specific reference to the department or area. The only forms that show the department name are CSA1 and CSA3, but these do not provide a real title with content or purpose.

- *Information about the form*—As mentioned earlier, the *Good Forms Guide* [2] and other style manuals recommend the placement of information about the applicability conditions of the form, preferably immediately after the title. This helps the citizen determine whether he or she is about to complete the right form. A brief paragraph of the type “*You need to fill in this form if you are applying for x,*” or “*This form is used for x*” should suffice to determine the purpose of the document.

Not many of the forms in our corpus, however, presented such an element. Only four in the Italian/German corpus provided this kind of information, in the form of a letter addressed to the claimant (INPS2, INPS8, INPS9, and INPS13). For an example of one of the letters, see Appendix 2. The letter format in addition narrows the distance between the Administration and the citizen, presenting information in a familiar and personalized format.

- *Instructions*—There exists a consistent difference in the format and placement of the instructions between the English forms, on the one hand, and the Italian/German and Spanish on the other. Whereas the English forms place the relevant instruction next to the field it refers to, the Italian/German and the Spanish forms, when they contain instructions on how to fill in the form, present them as a separate element, in one block (examples of each type can be found in Appendix 3). The claimant has to consult this separate part whenever in doubt about a particular field. The instructions in these forms contain headings that make reference to the appropriate field in the requests section. Of this kind are all the Italian/German documents and all the Spanish documents that contain instructions (INV17, MS5, FAM1, MS3, and J6). The Spanish documents present the instructions in a detachable sheet, so that the claimant can have both requests and instructions at reach, without the need to flip pages.

The English forms, and the Italo-Australia form show, in our opinion, a much friendlier approach, providing the instructions only next to the fields where they are deemed necessary. Thus, BR1 asks the question “*Do you have a tax reference*

number?,” providing a “yes” and a “no” box, next to which one can read “*This number is on any letters about tax from the Inland Revenue.*” There is no need to go to an instructions section, where the citizen might have to scan for the appropriate information. The same applies for the definition of technical terms: the definition is placed next to the location of the technical term (“*spouse,*” “*vehicles,*” “*home ownership,*” etc.) in English. Both the Italian/German and the Spanish forms prefer to place all explanations in the instructions section.

Another important difference in the forms is the distance the form places between the Administration and the citizen. In this case, Spanish forms side with the English ones in addressing the reader directly, with a “*you*” in English and with the polite form “*usted*” in Spanish. The Italian/German forms, on the other hand, use a distant, impersonal third person subject that is meant to be interpreted as “the citizen,” “the claimant,” or “the undersigned” (*il richiedente, il sottoscritto* in Italian; *der Antragsteller, der Unterfertiger* in German). The attitude is one of social distance and authority, as opposed to the English ones. The use of the polite form in Spanish indicates respect, but not a striking distance.

- *Requests*—Most of the documents group the entry fields, ticking boxes or questions in a section, and the relevant explanations in a different part of the text, often in a single block at the end of the document. This is true for COM, INPS2, INPS3, INPS4, INPS5, INPS6, INPS7, INPS8, INPS9, and INPS13, from the Italian/German corpus, and for INV17, MS5, FAM1, MS3, and J6, from the Spanish corpus. The other forms provide a more or less exhaustive information or clarification on the entry fields next to them, which is considered to be the best placement by different style manuals.

The requests are often organized in parts, sections, or boxes, following some kind of group order. A good example of grouping, with appropriate headings and with instructions for every subsection is Italo-Australia, partly reproduced in Appendix 4. The general pattern for the INPS documents is to place the questions, entry fields, or ticking boxes without any explanation or instruction on where to go next in the text.

The other documents (Italo-Australia, Italo-Britannica, Italo-Austriaca, BR1, CH2-CP, BR19, and DLA) present a different structure of the requests section. Italo-Australia, for example, gives a general explanation on the topic of the questions (*Real estate/farms*), then presents the requests. BR19 gives that general explanation before the request and after it (where to find the information when it is not known to the reader), and also an instruction to direct the reader to the next part they need to fill in after the field has been completed. CSA1 and CSA2 are somewhat different, providing the extra information after the request, but before the answer space (“*Please tell us your Child Benefit number. You can find this on the cover of your order book or on letters telling you when money was paid into your account. : [] Numbers [] Letters*”).

As for the language-specific realizations of requests in the multilingual corpus, the English and the Spanish forms prefer to use direct expressions to request or to

ask for information from the user, thus opting for the use of the *imperative* in requests and the *interrogative* in questions. In the English forms, the imperative mood structure is often preceded by the politeness marker “*please*,” in Example (1) below:

(1) *Please tick all the boxes that apply to you* (DLA)

The Italian/German forms, by contrast, opt for more indirect means of expression, thus preferring the *declarative* mood and the *passive voice* both in requests and in questions. Examples (2) for Italian, and (3) for German illustrate the use of declarative to express a request:

(2) *La cartolina deve essere utilizzata anche per la segnalazione alla Sede INPS di inesattezze od omissioni nei periodi assicurative riportati sull'estratto.*

“The card must also be used to inform the INPS office of any inaccuracy or omission in the insurance periods reported in the extract” (INPS2)

(3) *Der Berichtigungsabschnitt muss bei der Landesstelle NISF oder bei einem der Patronate der Provinz abgegeben werden.*

“The claim for correction must be sent to the regional NISF office or to one of the Patronats of the province” (COM1)

While the English and the Spanish forms prefer the imperative mood in 88.2% and 85% of the cases and the declarative only in 11.8% and 13%, respectively, the Italian/German forms opt for the declarative in 89% and 92% of the cases, selecting the imperative in only 10.7% and 7.7% of the cases. The difference in these proportionalities is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).¹

The previous remarks lead us to another important aspect of the forms: the way the reader is guided through the text.² Most of the forms could be represented in the form of a graph, with steps and decision points where the claimant is instructed to follow or abandon a path, according to the conditions that apply to his or her particular case. This guidance is achieved differently in the different languages. The English forms prefer graphical devices for such purposes, whereas the Italian/German forms tend to prefer the use of full sentences. The Spanish forms lie in a middle point, exploiting both styles. For an example, in Figure 1, taken from the BR1 form, the first question leads to a “*yes/no*” answer, placed in the reverse order to which it is expected, because the “*no*” answer invites the reader to skip the questions that would result from a “*yes*” answer.

¹ For a detailed study of the distribution of the realization patterns of requests and questions in the English and the Italian/German forms, see [12].

² This aspect is only outlined here for the purposes of illustrative comparison. For a thorough analysis of explicit and implicit routing devices and the use of layout used in the British and the Italian/German forms, see sections 2.3 and 2.4 for the British forms, section 3.3 for the Italian/German forms, and the summary provided by Julia Lavid in deliverable EV-1 of the LRE PROJECT 062-09 GIST, edited by Scott and Power [13].

Have you or your spouse ever claimed any of these benefits?

No

Yes Please tell us about this

Type of benefit

Who claimed the benefit?

What was the reference number?

Figure 1. Guiding the reader in form BR1.

On the other hand, we can see how an Italian/German document (INPS3) presents the same situation. When the reader reaches Box E in the form, the instructions (in Italian) read:

Il Quadro E deve essere compilato per segnalare variazioni della situazione del nucleo familiare già dichiarata; in questo caso il modulo dovrà essere presentato entro 30 giorni dal verificarsi della variazione.

“Box E must be filled in to state changes in the situation of the family nucleus already declared; in this case the form must be presented within 30 days of the change.”

It is obvious that the Italian places a heavier load on the working memory of the reader, because it is more verbose and it does not make any use of graphical devices to help the reader understand.

- *Declaration and Signature*—The declarations are of a formulaic type, usually trying to elicit an oath that the citizen provided truthful and complete information, and followed by a signature. In some cases, only a signature is requested, with the implicit understanding that the signature alone implies the responsibility on the part of the claimant. All the forms asked for a signature.

- *Receipt*—Some of the Italian/German forms (INPS4, INPS5, INPS6, and INPS13) and some of the Spanish (INV17, MS5, FAM1, MS3, and J6) contain a detachable slip of paper that is meant to be stamped or signed by the receiving agency. The receipt represents a proof of submission that the citizen is requested

to keep. In some cases, they fulfil a double purpose. INPS4, INPS6, INV17, MS5, FAM1, MS3, and J6 contain boxes to be checked in case some documents are missing. In those cases, the receipt is a reminder to the citizen of which accompanying documents are still missing. If all the boxes are checked, the receipt serves as an acknowledgment that the submission is complete.

- *Signature of Witness*—Only one of the documents in our corpus, Italo-Australia, contained a request for the signature of a witness. The form clarifies that the witnessing is required by Italian law, and it is to be performed only by one of the officials listed in the form.

- *Warning*—The Warning stage is an optional one, only present in three of the Spanish forms. The inclusion of this warning in the Spanish forms, while it does not appear in the other countries, is clearly a reflection of a social situation: fraud seems to be rather frequent in the Spanish society. The Warning in the Spanish forms indicates that the Administration is aware of this fact, and is fighting to avoid it by informing citizens that the undeserved reception of welfare is fraudulent. The purpose of this stage is similar to that of the declaration: it reminds the claimant that he or she is supposed to provide accurate information, and that not doing so knowingly is illegal. The Warnings remind the citizen that the Administration is adopting a regulatory role, rather than a service one [14].

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our study provides a review of practices in the elaboration of administrative forms by the public administrations in different languages and sociocultural settings. In spite of the small size of the corpus used for this study, the generic analysis performed on the forms shows certain regularities and tendencies in the structural organization of administrative forms across different countries. Thus, all the forms analyzed share certain stages which could be considered as obligatory and would enable the characterization of these texts as a genre. These are the *Title*, the *Requests*, the *Instructions*, the *Declaration*, and the *Signature*. Other stages present in some languages such as, for example, the *Signature of Witness* or the *Warning*, are language-specific and could, therefore, be considered as optional since they do not appear in all the forms.

Also, the analysis of certain linguistic and formatting features contained in each of the stages of the forms has shown some interesting stylistic variations depending on the socio-cultural context where the forms were produced. Thus, for example, the overall style of the British forms is recognized as simple, clear, easy to understand, while, at the same time, friendly and non-intimidating in tone, thus reflecting a conscious effort on the part of the British administration to reduce the distance with the citizens and increase their audience acceptance. In fact, the Document Design Unit (DDU), a special department of the DSS, has been following strong guidelines laid out in the specially commissioned *Good Forms Guide* [2] for producing quality forms, submitting them to rigorous user testing by

independent market researchers before releasing them for use by the general public. As a result, British forms for social security claimants are now considered to be good exemplars of administrative forms. One of the most important devices selected by the British forms to reduce the distance between the administration and the users is through the direct expression of requests, in contrast with the choice of indirect, impersonal expressions in the Italian/German forms written in a socio-cultural context where the administration has only recently begun to show concern for effective official communication. A similar tendency is being followed in Spain, where the Administration is making a considerable effort in improving the acceptability of administrative forms by using a simpler and clearer style. In this sense, recent research points to changes in the communicative strategies adopted by the Italian public administration, which will hopefully bring about stylistic changes in the new administrative forms, following the general trend in other European countries [15].

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APPENDIX 1: Sources of Data

English Forms

[BR1] British Retirement Form. Form BR 1. Department of Social Security.

[CSA1] Your details. Child Support Agency. Department of Social Security.

[CSA3] Your details. Child Support Agency. Department of Social Security.

[BR19] Retirement Pension Forecast. Department of Social Security.

[CH2(CP)] Claim form 1: Child benefit for people who are not getting Child Benefit now.

[DLA] Disability Living Allowance. Benefits Agency. Department of Social Security.

Italian/German Forms

[COM] Foglio richiesta di rettifica dei dati anagrafici COM. INPS.

[INPS2] Estratto conto assicurativo. INPS.

[INPS3] Domanda di assegno per il nucleo familiare su pensione dei lavoratori dipendenti. MOD. ANF/01. INPS.

[INPS4] Domanda di assegno per il nucleo familiare

- su prestazioni di disoccupazione o antitubercolari

- per gli addetti ai servizi domestici e familiari

MOD. ANF/PREST. INPS.

[INPS13] Bollettini per versamento contributi non precompilati nell'importo e nel trimestre. MOD. W01/OTT/92. INPS.

[INPS5] Domanda di riconoscimento del diritto ad includere determinati familiari nel nucleo familiare e/o del diritto all'aumento dei livelli reddituali in presenza di particolari condizioni ai fini dell'applicazione delle normative sull'assegno per il nucleo familiare. MOD. A.N.F. 42. INPS.

[INPS6] Domanda di pensione sociale. MOD. VSR 1. INPS.

[INPS7] Domanda di assegno per il nucleo familiare. MOD ANF/dip. INPS.

[INPS8] Cartolina per la correzione di dati errati su un versamento. MOD. LD02/s. INPS.

[INPS9] Domanda per la corresponsione dell'aumento della pensione sociale. MOD. APS/91. INPS.

[Italo-Austriaca] Convenzione Italo-Austriaca sulle assicurazioni sociali. Domanda di prestazioni ai superstiti. FORM. I.A. S0/1. INPS.

Italian/English Forms

Italo-Australia. Australia. Accordo Italia/Australia in materia di sicurezza sociale. INPS-Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale. Form Australia.

Italo-Britannica. Conv.I.G.B.7. Convenzione italo-britannica sulle assicurazioni sociali. domanda di pensione per ritiro dal lavoro. INPS - Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale. Form Conv. I.G.B. 7 (R.A. 112).

Spanish Forms

[INV8] Solicitud de revisión de invalidez a instancia de parte. INSS.

[INC1] Solicitud de reconocimiento de incremento del 20% en invalidez permanente total. INSS.

[DEV1] Solicitud de prestaciones devengadas y no percibidas. INSS.

[INV17] Solicitud de pensión de invalidez. INSS.

[MS5] Solicitud de auxilio por defunción. INSS.

[FAM1] Solicitud de prestación en favor de familiares. INSS.

[MS3] Solicitud de pensión de viudedad-orfandad. INSS.

[J6] Solicitud de pensión de jubilación. INSS.

**APPENDIX 2:
Letter Included with the Form**

Four of the Italian/German documents (INPS2, INPS8, INPS9, and INPS13) include a letter addressing the claimant and explaining the purpose of the form. The following is an example of such letters.

INPS 9 (German)

Wir erinnern Sie daran, daß die Sozialrente und die entsprechende Erhöhung laut Gesetz je nach Einkommen des Rentners und dessen Ehepartners zusteht.

Damit wir feststellen können, ob und in welchem Ausmaß Sie weiterhin Anrecht auf die Rente haben, ersuchen wir sie, das beiliegende Formblatt auszufüllen und uns zurückzuschicken, wobei Sie die Angweisungen beachten sollten, die im Beilageblatt abgedruckt sind. Unsere Beamten stehen für jede weitere Information oder Klarstellung zu Ihrer Verfügung.

Mit bestem Dank für Ihre Mitarbeit
DER DIREKTOR DER LANDESSTELLE

INPS 9 (Rough translation from German)

We remind you that, according to the law, the pension and the corresponding increase depend on the income of the pensioner and his or her spouse.

So that we can establish whether and to what extent you still have a right to the pension, we ask you to fill out the attached form and send it back to us, following the instructions provided in the accompanying page. Our officials are available for further information or clarification.

Thank you for your co-operation.
THE DIRECTOR OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE

**APPENDIX 3:
Instructions**

The English forms typically present instructions next to the relevant field. Both Italian/German and Spanish forms present the instructions in a block, separated from the form itself. Below are examples of the two different styles.

1. English Forms: BR1

Section “Living Abroad”

- We need to know about any time that you have lived abroad. This is because if you paid into the Social Security system in another country it may count towards your Retirement Pension.
- Please tell us about any time that you lived in
 - any foreign country
 - the Channel Islands
 - the Irish Republic
- But do not tell us about any time that you were overseas with HM forces.

Have you ever lived abroad? No Please go to **Part 7** Time in hospital

If you have only lived in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or the Isle of Man, tick **No** Yes Please tell us about when you lived abroad

Spanish Forms: INV 17

Original Spanish

1. DATOS PERSONALES

Primer apellido	Segundo apellido	Nombre	Documento Nacional de Identidad – N.I.F.
Fecha de nacimiento	Sexo Hombre Mujer E. civil	Nombre del padre Nombre de la madre	Núm. afiliación Seguridad Social
Núm. teléfono	Domicilio (Calle o Plaza)		Número
Código Postal	Localidad		Provincia

1. DATOS SOBRE LA POSIBLE INVALIDEZ

CAUSA QUE LA PRODUJO	Enfermedad común Accidente no laboral Enfermedad profesional Accidente de trabajo ENTIDAD ASEGURADORA DE ACCIDENTES SI ESTA DE BAJA MEDICA, INDIQUE DESDE QUE FECHA . . . / . . . /
ENFERMEDAD Y LESIONES QUE PADECE Y ALEGA

[On a different page:]

INSTRUCCIONES PARA LA CUMPLIMENTACION DE LA SOLICITUD DE PENSION DE INVALIDEZ

1. – DATOS PERSONALES

Consigne sus datos de identificación personal.

2. – DATOS SOBRE LA POSIBLE INVALIDEZ

Cruce con un aspa (X) la casilla correspondiente a la causa por la que se produjo la lesión. Indique también la Entidad Aseguradora de Accidentes (Instituto Nacional de Seguridad Social o Mutua Patronal de Accidentes de Trabajo), así como, en su caso, la fecha de su baja médica.

Rough translation from Spanish

1. PERSONAL DATA

First surname	Second surname	Name	National Identity Number
Date of birth	Gender Male Female Marital status	Father's name Mother's name	Social Insurance Number
Telephone number	Address (Street or Square)		Number
Postal Code	City		Province

1. DETAILS ON THE POSSIBLE DISABILITY

HOW IT CAME ABOUT	<p>Common illness</p> <p>Non-work related accident</p> <p>Professional illness</p> <p>Work-related accident</p> <p>INSURANCE COMPANY</p> <p>IF YOU ARE ON MEDICAL LEAVE, INDICATE SINCE WHEN ... / ... / ...</p>
ILLNESS AND INJURY THAT YOU SUFFER AND WANT TO CLAIM ABOUT	<p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

[On a different page:]

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO FILL OUT THE DISABILITY PENSION APPLICATION

1. – PERSONAL DATA

Fill out your personal identification data.

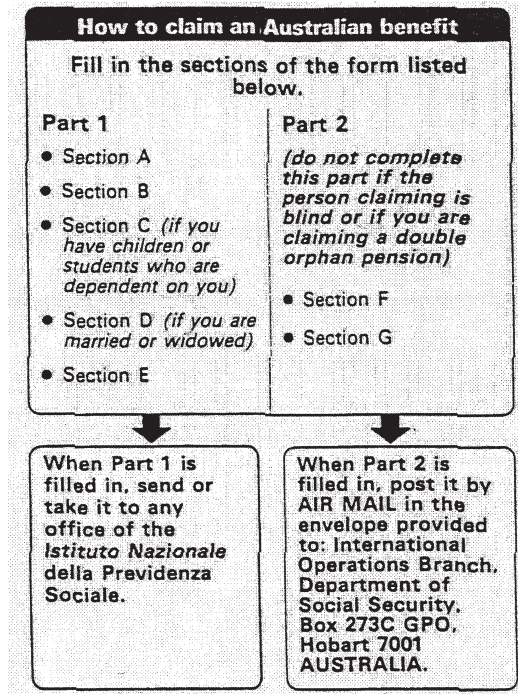
2. – DETAILS ON THE POSSIBLE DISABILITY

Indicate with a cross (X) the box corresponding to the cause of your injury. Also indicate the Insurance Company (National Social Security Institute or Workers Compensation Board), as well as, if applicable, the date of your medical leave.

**APPENDIX 4:
Flow of Information**

An example of grouping and flow of information from the Italo-Australia form.

Use this form to claim Australian benefit.



Note: If your spouse also wishes to claim a pension, they must complete a separate Part 1.

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