

PHONAESTHEMES AND GENRES

James Harbeck

Based on “Relative Use of Phonaesthemes
in the Constitution and Development of Genres”

Research question: “Does the presence of
phonaesthemes in words play a role in the
constitution and evolution of genres?”

Phonaesthemes

- Morphemes:

I like going to conferences. They're springs of wisdom where word-workers meet to drink.

- Morphemes are the smallest meaning-conveying units in words.
- Everything in a word is part of a morpheme.
- Every morpheme is identifiable and definable.
- Phonaesthemes aren't morphemes.

Phonaesthemes

- Phonaesthemes:

sneeze	bump
sniff	clump
snivel	dump
snook	hump
snore	lump
snort	plump
snot	rump
snout	slump
snuff	thump

- overlap with morphemes
- leave remainders that aren't anything in particular
- aren't clearly defined or definitely identifiable
- often aren't etymologically related
- not everyone agrees they're a real thing

Phonaesthemes

- Phonaesthemes exist thanks to probability, association, and inference
- They can become gravitational attractors for meanings:
 - an association is perceived between a sound cluster and a meaning
 - words that match that association are preferred
 - words shift form or meaning to match the association
 - new words are made up using the phonaestheme

Phonaesthemes

- Phonaesthemes aren't usually onomatopoeia
- But phonaesthemes are seen as more expressive
- Thus...
 - more childlike
 - more basic
 - more performative
 - less dignified
 - less scientific

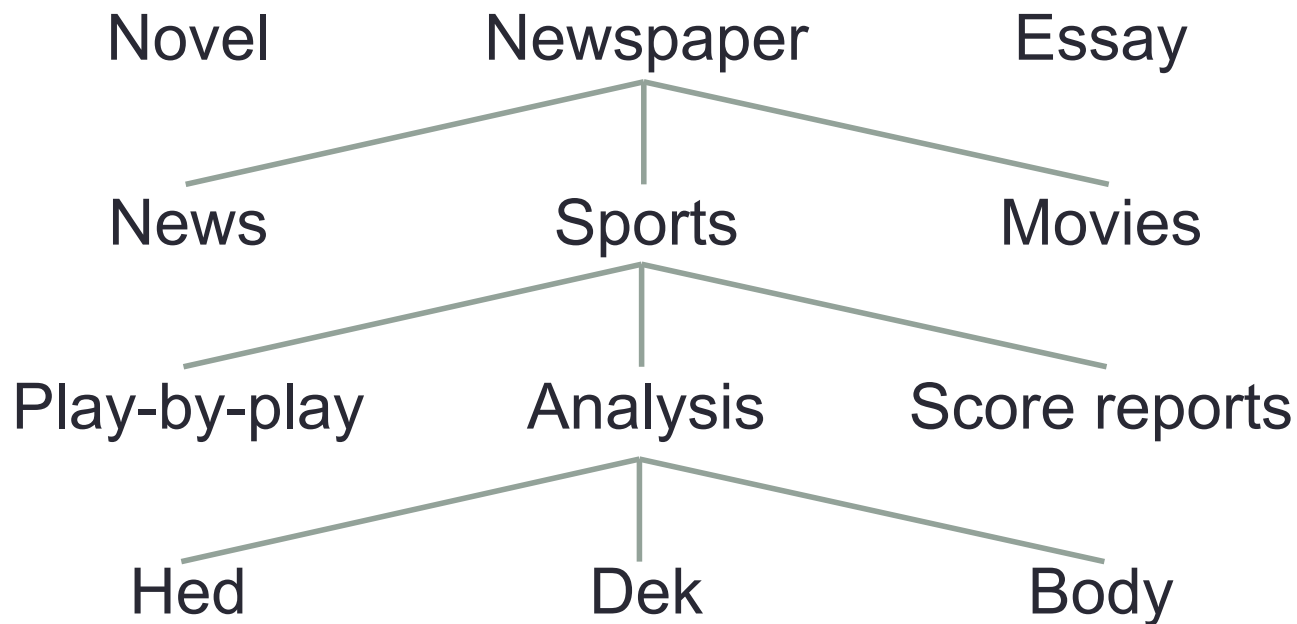
slump vs. subside

gleam vs. shine

slash vs. cut

Genre

- Texts in a given genre have common tendencies in subject matter, structure, syntax, and vocabulary
- There are genres within genres within genres



Genre

Ways genres can differ in linguistic features (Biber):

- Involved vs. informational
 - Involved: “that” deletion, contractions, present-tense verbs, second-person pronouns, etc.
 - Informational: more nouns, more prepositions, longer words, etc.
- Non-abstract vs. abstract
 - More abstract → more passive voice, more past participial clauses, etc.
- Genres can vary over time and between countries too

Phonaesthemes and genres

- If phonaesthemes are real, we should see some variation in their use between genres
- Their use may be greater in more involved (vs. informational) and/or non-abstract (vs. abstract) texts
- Which would mean we can also use them consciously to help adjust the flavor of a text

Phonaesthemes and genres

Phonaesthemes I studied:

- gl–: glow, glare, gleam, glisten
- sn–: snort, snore, sneeze, snout, snivel
- spl–/spr–: spray, sprinkle, splash
- –æf: crash, slash, mash, slash, splash
- –ərl: curl, whirl, twirl
- –ʌmp: dump, slump, clump, hump, rump

I compared them to words that were reasonably equivalent but didn't have phonaesthemes in several genres in several time periods.

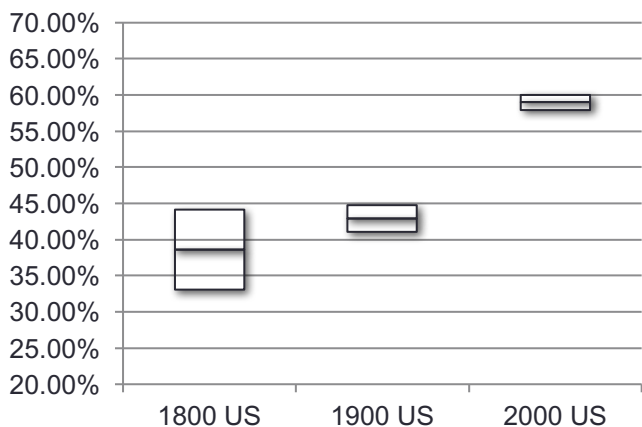
Phonaesthemes and genres

Genres, countries, and time periods I studied:

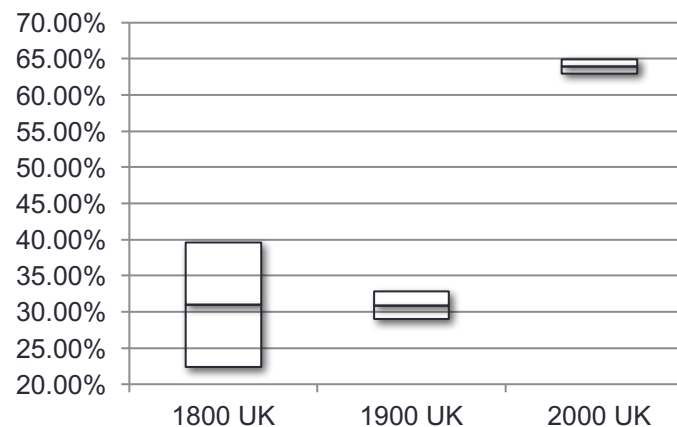
	UK 1800	US 1800	UK 1900	US 1900	UK 2000	US 2000
fiction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
plays/films	✓					✓
magazines		✓		✓		✓
newspapers	✓			✓	✓	✓
humanities articles			✓		✓	✓
Hansard	✓		✓		✓	

Phonaesthemes and genres

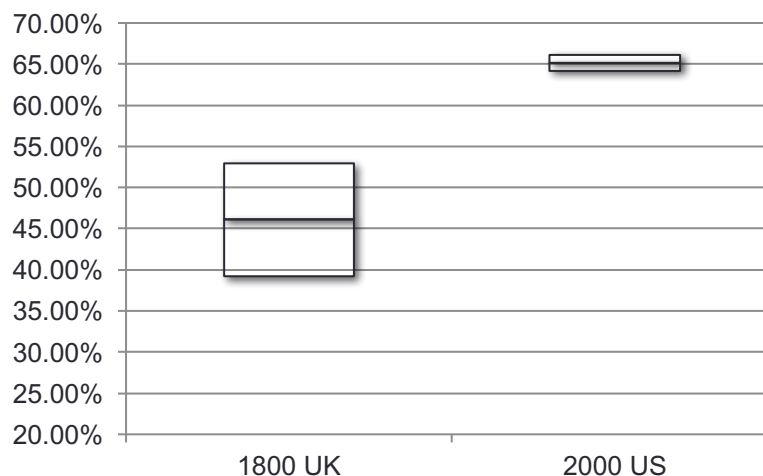
US magazines



UK Hansard

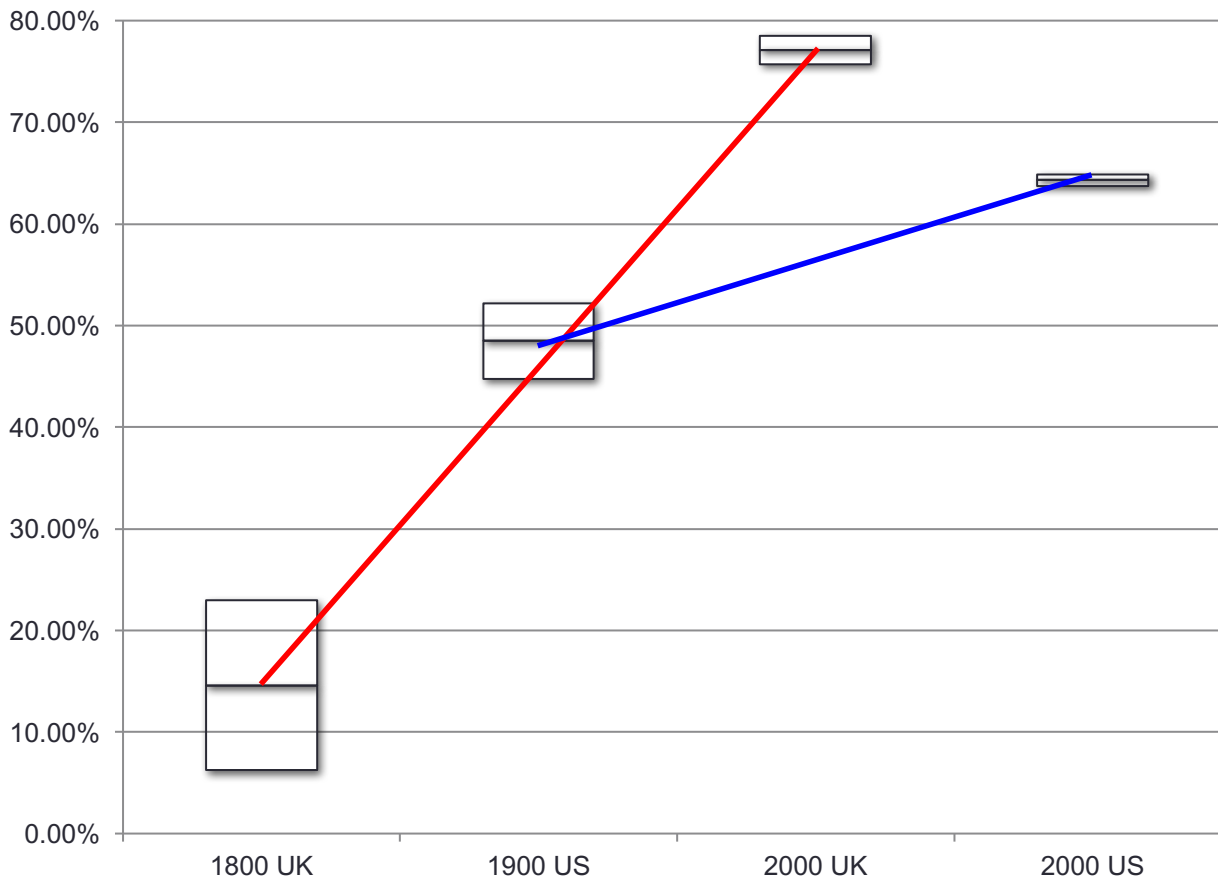


Plays (UK 1800) vs. film (US 2000)



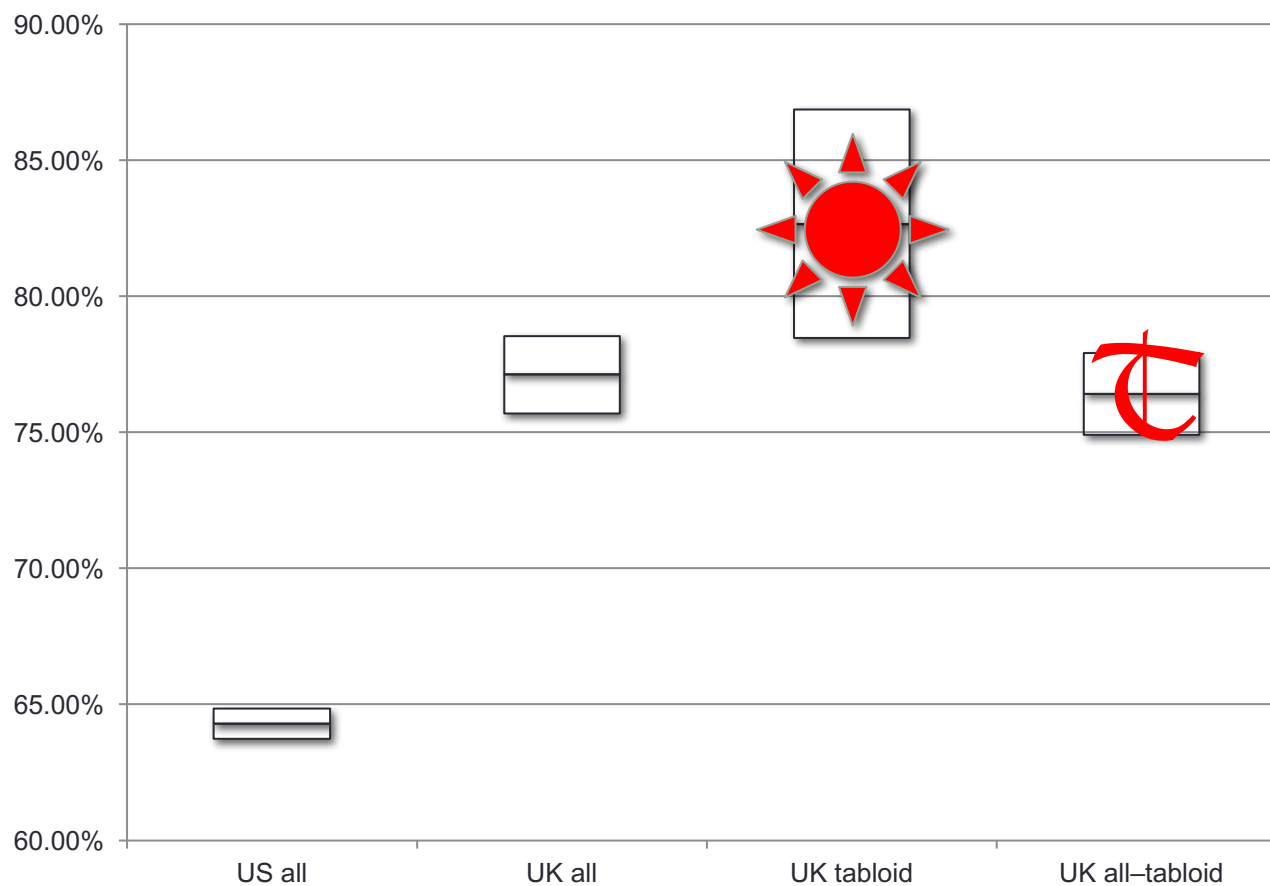
Phonaesthemes and genres

Newspapers



Phonaesthemes and genres

US with UK tabloids vs. non-tabloids, 2000



Phonaesthemes and genres

British newspaper, January 3, 1791:

“On Sunday evening as Mrs. Sherrard, wife of Mr. Thomas Sherrard, watch-maker, Houndsditch, and her daughter, were coming up Petticoat-lane, Whitechapel, they were stopped at the corner of Gravel-lane, by three fellows, who dragged them a short way up Cock-hill, and robbed Mrs. Sherrard of half a guinea, two shillings, and a gold ring; and Miss Sherrard, of four shillings and a gold hair-worked locket. They behaved in a very indecent manner to Miss Sherrard, and on Mrs. Sherrard rebuking them, they attempted to serve her in the same manner, but were prevented by some persons coming up.”

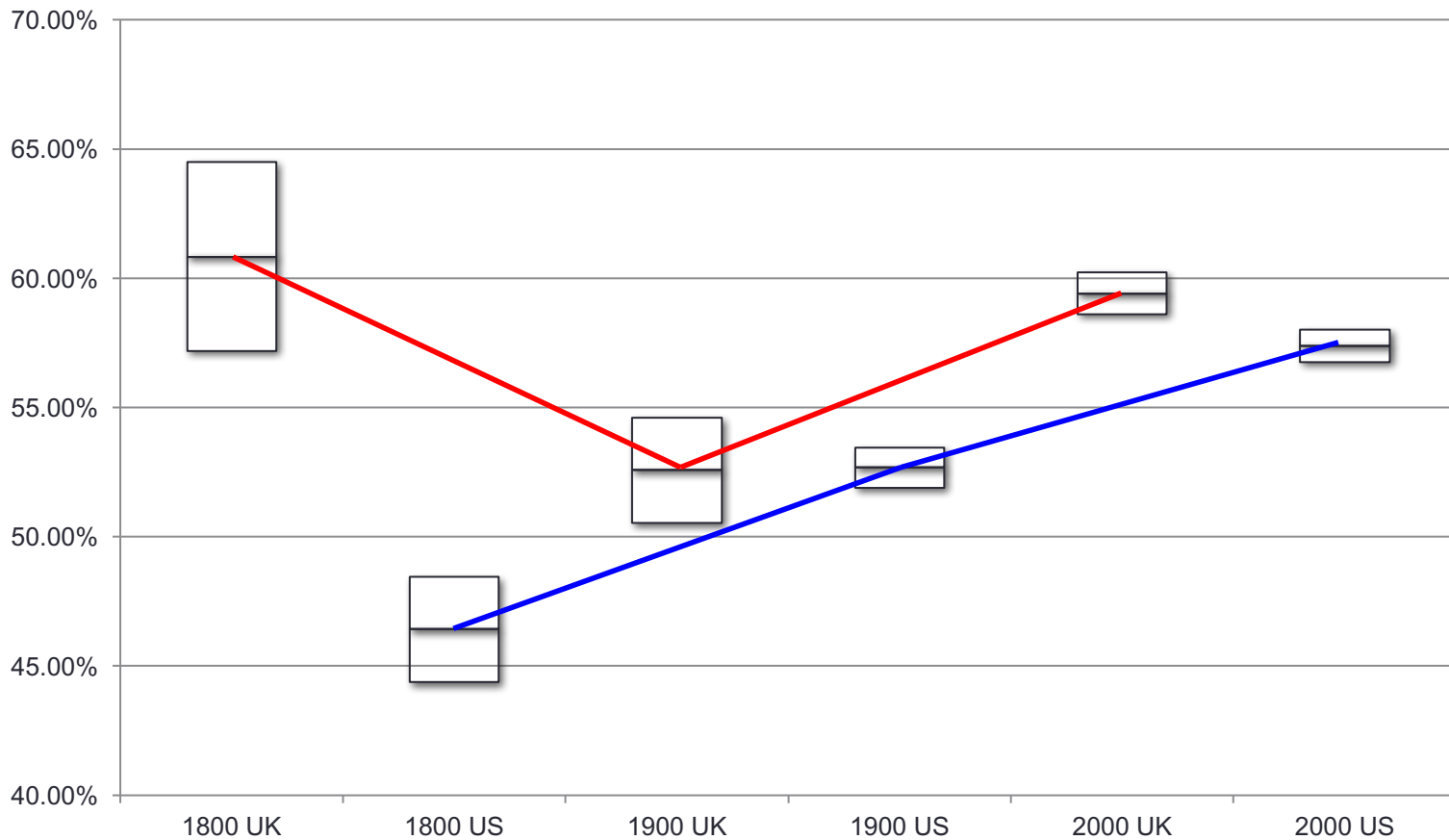
Phonaesthemes and genres

The Telegraph, January 23, 2016:

“The Tory truce over Europe began to crumble on Saturday as David Cameron faced an angry backlash from MPs over his attitude to his party in the referendum campaign.”

Phonaesthemes and genres

Fiction



Phonaesthemes and genres

“First of all, he asked Miss Lucas. I was so vexed to see him stand up with her! But, however, he did not admire her at all; indeed, nobody can, you know; and he seemed quite struck with Jane as she was going down the dance.” — *Pride and Prejudice*, England, 1813

“When we were summoned to dinner, a young gentleman in a clerical dress offered his hand, and led me to a table furnished with an elegant, and sumptuous repast, with more gallantry, and address than commonly fall to the share of students.” — *The Coquette*, US, 1797

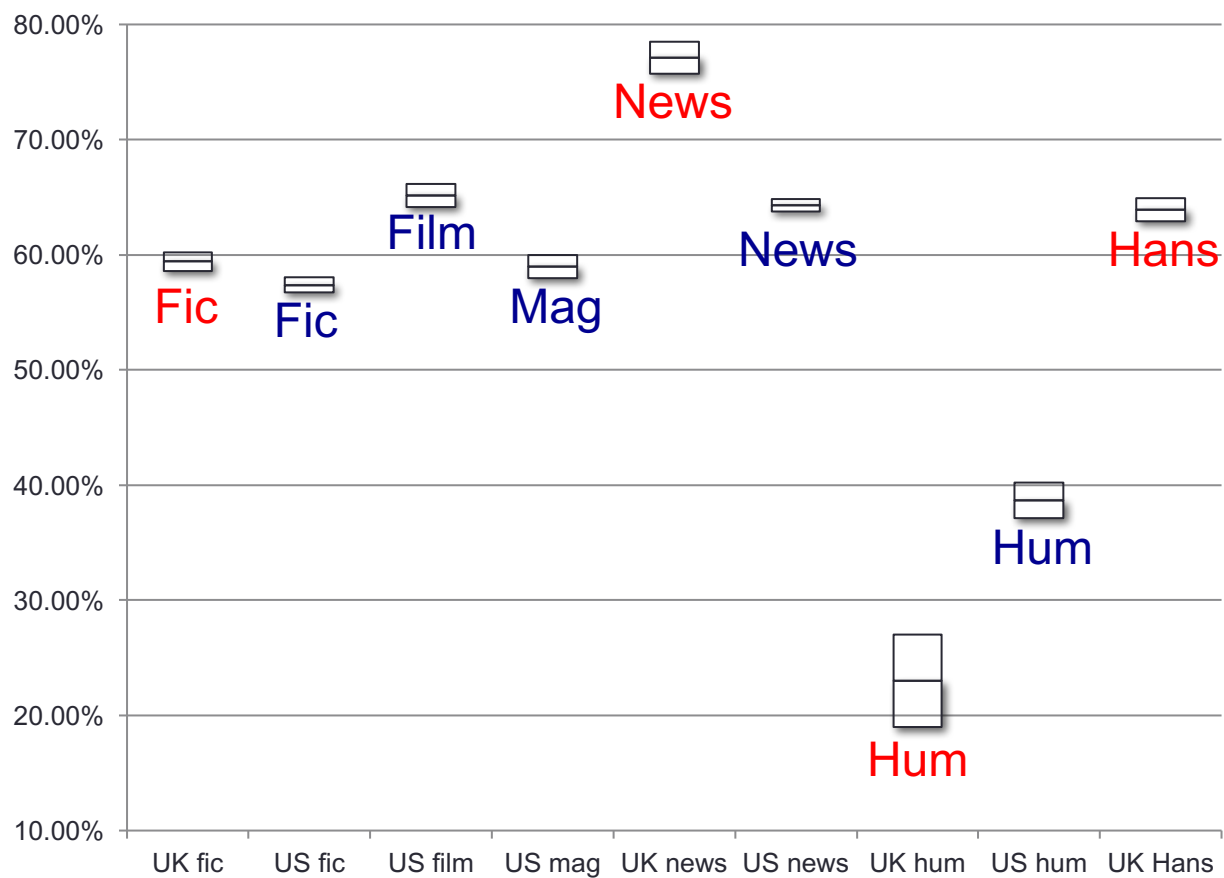
Phonaesthemes and genres

“a warm pink mounted to the girl's cheek, mantled her brow to the roots of her fair braids, and suffused the young slope of her breast to the line where it met a modest tulle tucker fastened with a single gardenia.” —*The Age of Innocence*, 1920

“She was a flow of color. Her hair trapped the sun and seemed to radiate light. It moved in the wind at the nape of her neck and where it had come loose, but was otherwise gloriously up in a way that suggested self-possession and formality and yet also exposed most informally the beauty of her shoulders.” —*In Sunlight and in Shadow*, 2012

Phonaesthemes and genres

Genres in 2000



Phonaesthemes and genres

In the following decade coal exports were strong, which compensated for weak wool exports.

In the following decade there was a boom in coal exports, which compensated for a slump in wool exports.

He does not hesitate to admix bits of information and commentary into the body of the main text.

He does not hesitate to sprinkle information and commentary into the body of the main text.