

THE PERSUASIVE INFLUENCE OF THE METALINGUISTIC MARKER ‘MAIS’ IN COMMERCIAL DISCOURSE: STUDY OF THE SALES PAGE: COPYWRITING GENIUS : LES MÉTHODES D’EXPERTS POUR TRANSFORMER LES MOTS EN EUROS

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Abstract: This article investigates the pragmatic and discursive roles of the connector “*mais*” (“but”) in the sales page COPYWRITING GENIUS: Les méthodes d’experts pour transformer les mots en euros, written by the French copywriter Antoine Blanchemaison. It aims to show how this single discourse marker contributes to the construction and effectiveness of persuasive strategies in contemporary digital marketing discourse, particularly in highly structured promotional texts. The study adopts a qualitative case study design. The corpus consists of a 1,950-word sales page selected for its dense argumentative organization and its representativeness of current online copywriting practices. The analysis is grounded in a pragma-enunciative framework, allowing a fine-grained examination of both the linguistic properties of “*mais*” and its role in the unfolding of discourse, while remaining strictly anchored in observable textual data. Eight occurrences of “*mais*” were manually identified and analyzed in context. The study reveals that “*mais*” plays a central role in structuring argumentative progression by introducing contrast, guiding interpretation, and ensuring transitions between discourse segments. Beyond its basic adversative function, it also contributes to rhythm management and reader engagement within a persuasion-oriented narrative. Although the study is limited to a single corpus and a restricted number of occurrences, its close analytical approach provides detailed insights into the functioning of discourse markers in authentic advertising contexts. It also highlights the relevance of micro-level linguistic analysis for understanding persuasion mechanisms in digital marketing discourse and opens up perspectives for comparative research across broader corpora and advertising formats.

Keywords: Mais ; metalinguistic marker ; persuasion ; pragmatics ; sales discourse.

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1. Introduction

Language, as a dynamic system of expression and interaction, is much more than a simple medium of communication: it shapes representations, attitudes, and behaviors. Every sentence carries both what is explicitly stated and what remains implicit, creating subtle nuances that guide the reader's understanding. Among words that quietly but powerfully influence interpretation, the connector "*mais*" ("but") stands out. It introduces contrast, draws attention, and guides readers through the argumentative progression. Although discourse markers such as "*mais*" have been studied in general linguistic research (Fournier, 1991), their role in commercial and persuasive contexts remains largely underexplored. This study contributes to filling this gap by focusing on how the connector "*mais*" functions in a sales-oriented text, showing how a seemingly simple connector can carry significant discursive weight in structuring arguments and guiding reader engagement. The focus of this study is the sales page COPYWRITING GENIUS: Les méthodes d'experts pour transformer les mots en euros, written by the French copywriter Antoine Blanchemaison and published on the Antoine BM Formations website. This text is part of a conversion-oriented marketing campaign promoting a copywriting course and constitutes the sole corpus of the research. Comprising 1,950 words, it was selected for its argumentative density and its representativeness of contemporary digital marketing strategies. Single-page sales texts concentrate persuasive mechanisms within a highly structured format. By concentrating on this single corpus, the study allows a detailed examination of how the connector "*mais*" functions within a tightly organized persuasive discourse. Eight occurrences of the connector "*mais*" were manually extracted and analyzed to understand their role in structuring arguments, maintaining reader engagement, and supporting persuasive intent. The guiding research question is: How does the connector "*mais*" contribute to persuasion in this commercial discourse? It was hypothesized that, although it appears grammatically simple, the connector "*mais*" performs several pragmatic functions. These functions include the segmentation of discourse, the reframing of ideas, the introduction of contrast, and the orientation of interpretation in ways that support persuasive intent. The study adopts a pragma-enunciative framework, complemented by Fournier's (1991) typology of discourse markers. This approach elucidates the enunciative operations underlying the use of the connector "*mais*", revealing how the connector structures argumentative unfolding without attributing effects beyond textual evidence. Its strength lies in linking micro-linguistic behavior to broader discursive organization while remaining sensitive to the specificities of commercial persuasion.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Owing to the restricted corpus, consisting of a single text and a limited number of occurrences, the findings cannot be generalized. However, this close reading provides meaningful insights into how the connector "*mais*" functions in persuasive sales discourse and opens perspectives for comparative studies across other texts and marketing contexts.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, grounded in a pragma-enunciative framework, to examine how the connector "*mais*" ("but") functions within a single sales page. The corpus consists of COPYWRITING GENIUS: Les méthodes d'experts pour transformer les mots en euros, authored by French copywriter Antoine Blanchemaison and published on the Antoine BM Formations website. Comprising 1,950 words, the text was selected for its dense argumentative content, compact structure, and representativeness of contemporary digital marketing discourse. By focusing on a single, highly structured sales page, the study emphasizes

in-depth contextual analysis over statistical generalization. This allows precise examination of micro-discursive mechanisms at work in persuasive writing.

The research centers on the connector “*mais*”, a metalinguistic connector, and its function in structuring arguments and connecting propositions. Eight occurrences of the connector “*mais*” were manually identified and analyzed. Each instance was examined strictly within its immediate textual context, focusing on pragmatic and rhetorical functions, such as contrast, reformulation, segmentation, emphasis, and interpretative orientation. No inferences regarding readers’ emotions or cognitive states were made; all observations are anchored in the co-text and discourse structure.

To ensure transparency and replicability, a systematic extraction and coding procedure was applied. Sentences containing the connector “*mais*” were reviewed sequentially, and each occurrence was coded according to Fournier’s (1991) typology of discourse markers, which distinguishes structural and functional categories (rectificative, argumentative, phatic, etc.). This coding supports cross-occurrence comparison and highlights functional similarities, position-dependent variations, and dominant discourse roles.

The coding table is as follows:

<i>Occurrence</i>	<i>Text Excerpt</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Function</i> <i>(Fournier, 1991)</i>	<i>Contextual Role</i>
<i>R0</i>	“Ce job de rêve, il existe... mais personne ne le sait.”	Mid-sentence	Rectificative connector	Introduces contrast between existence and awareness of the job.
<i>R1</i>	“mais le souci, c’est que tu n’es pas tout seul.”	Initial	Argumentative connector	Frames the proposition regarding audience context.
<i>R2</i>	“mais tellement peu qui gagnent correctement leur vie.”	Initial	Argumentative connector	Highlights limitation or contrast in the discourse.
<i>R3</i>	“mais que dès qu’il faut envoyer un mail, tu sèches.”	Initial	Argumentative connector	Introduces a specific difficulty encountered by the audience.
<i>R4</i>	“mais tu devrais vivre avec cette question si douloureuse.”	Initial	Argumentative connector	Signals a challenge or key point in the text.
<i>R5</i>	“mais on est tous tombés, un jour ou l’autre, sur cette discipline.”	Initial	Argumentative / phatic connector	Links statements to shared experience, ensuring cohesion.
<i>R6</i>	“mais on a tous un point commun...”	Initial	Argumentative / phatic connector	Highlights similarity among participants to structure argumentation.
<i>R7</i>	“mais avant, il faut comprendre un truc.”	Initial	Argumentative connector	Signals transition to explanatory content.

The study's theoretical framework combines Fournier's typology with insights from cognitive pragmatics (Decety, 2004). Fournier provides a precise classification of connector types, while the pragma-enunciative approach highlights how speaker choices structure discourse, linking micro-linguistic elements to broader argumentation sequences. This ensures that all interpretations are textually grounded and avoids speculative claims regarding audience reactions.

A cross-occurrence analysis was conducted to examine whether all instances of the connector "*mais*" function similarly, which functions predominate, and how the connector's position affects its role in discourse. This comparative perspective allows the identification of patterns and strategies in the use of the connector while remaining strictly anchored in the observed text.

Finally, the study acknowledges its limitations. The small number of occurrences and focus on a single text prevent generalization to other marketing materials, cultural contexts, or non-commercial discourse. Persuasive strategies may differ in multi-page campaigns or longer texts. Nevertheless, this focused examination provides detailed insights into how the connector "*mais*" structures argumentation and organizes discourse in a sales page, offering a foundation for future comparative research on other texts and marketing contexts.

3. Theoretical Framework : Metalinguistic Markers in Sales Discourse

3.1. Metalinguistic Markers

Metalinguistic markers are conscious formulations whose frequency in discourse depends on "the activity in progress, the situation, and the discursive genres"(Da Silva-Genest; Grevisse 2018, p.40). They play an essential role in processes of negotiation and argumentation, particularly in how lexical categorization is managed. The notion of *metalinguistic marker* is subject to a wide terminological variety, reflected in the approximately twenty terms identified by Berthoud (1997, p.192), Östman (1995, p.98), Brinton (1996, p.29), etc. These terminological variations are compiled in Dostie's work (2004), which lists the following labels :

À côté de « marqueurs discursif » (Gulich et Quasthoff 1985, Schiffrin 1987, Traugott 1995a, Bell 1998, H.L. Andersen 1996, Aijmer 1997, Fox Tree et Schrock 2002), qui est l'appellation la plus fréquente, on trouve notamment l'emploi de « marqueur pragmatique » (Pop 1989, Brinton 1996, Fraser 1996, Andersen et Fretheim 2000, G. Andersen 1998 et 2001), « opérateur discursif » (de Gaulmyn 1987a), « particule » (Blass 2000), « particule discursive » (Fischer et Drescher 1996, Hansen 1998c, Weiyun He et Lindsey 1998, Fischer 2000a et 2000b), « particule énonciative » (Fernandez 1994, Yaguello à paraître), « particule pragmatique » (Östman 1995), « mot du discours » (Ducrot et al. 1980 ; Paillard 1999), « phrase parénétique », « expression pragmatique », « connecteur », « connecteur discursif », « connecteur phatique » (Davoine 1980, Bazzanella 1990), « opérateurs métadiscursifs » (Greidanus 1990: 42), « signaux du discours », « hedges » (Holmes 1986), « gambits » (Keller 1979), « particules métacommunicatives » et « ponctuant » (Vincent 1993). (Dostie 2004, pp.40–41)³

This terminological diversity results in a definitional variability, since scholars often focus on a specific function or use of the units they describe. It is worth noting that metalinguistic markers perform a variety of functions in discourse. In this regard, Anne-Claude Berthoud, in her book *Paroles à propos : approche énonciative et interactive du topic* (1996, p. 46), classifies metalinguistic markers into three categories :

- a. *Marqueurs d'ancrage sur l'acte de dire*, which explicitly refer back to the act of speaking;
- b. *Marqueurs d'ancrage sur le mode de dire*, which signal the type of speech act the speaker intends to produce;
- c. *Marqueurs de parcours sur le dire*, which allow the speaker to return to a previous point in the discourse.

3.2. “MAIS” as an Argumentative Connector

In the present study, we have limited our analysis to the connector “*mais*” (“but”), which is omnipresent in our corpus. According to Ducrot (1983, p.09), metalinguistic markers can be divided into two categories: argumentative connectors and argumentative operators. *Argumentative connectors are signs that can serve to link two or more utterances by assigning each a specific role within a single argumentative strategy.*⁴ In other words, when it coordinates two or more clauses, the connector plays a crucial role in the argumentative process being constructed.

Along the same lines, Moeschler (1985) emphasizes the central role of discourse markers in the structuring of argumentation, highlighting their capacity to guide the interpretation of discourse beyond mere logical relations between propositions. The connector “*mais*”, in particular, is classified by the author among *three-place predicates* introducing *counter-oriented arguments* (Moeschler, 1985, p.64), meaning that it operates in argumentative configurations by signaling a shift in orientation between two discourse segments. As an argument introducer, “*mais*” does not ensure argumentative continuity: it introduces a counter-argument to the previous utterance or reduces its persuasive force, thereby prompting a dynamic adjustment in the reasoning process. This mechanism reveals what Moeschler describes as a *complex argumentative valency*, in that the connector does more than simply connect two propositional contents, it establishes an implicit oppositional relation between them, operating at an *inferential* level. The use of “*mais*” thus contributes to structuring discursive reasoning by creating a tension between two oppositely polarized arguments, while also guiding the recipient’s interpretation toward a reformulation of the anticipated conclusion. This makes “*mais*” a key discursive operator in argumentative analysis.

Similarly, in 2005, Adam highlights that markers combine the functions of segmentation, enunciative responsibility, and argumentative orientation: *they trigger a reprocessing of the propositional content either as an argument, as a conclusion, as an argument intended to support or reinforce an inference, or as a counter-argument*⁵ (Adam, 2005, p.123). In such contexts, the connector tends to reinforce the argument or steer the discourse toward multiple conclusions.

In French, the connector and discourse marker “*mais*” is a versatile linguistic tool that fulfills various roles and conveys multiple values in discourse organization: it can be adversative, concessive, reinforcing, refutative, gradational, and more (Adam, 1989, cited in Schlamberger Brezar, 2012, p.228). “*mais*” also has what is referred to as a phatic use (Ducrot, 1980; Adam, 1989, both cited in Schlamberger Brezar, 2012, p. 228).

Within the framework of co-enunciation, the discourse connector “*mais*” is used to take the interlocutor into account, aiming to influence their opinion through the introduction of arguments. According to the analysis by Morel and Danon-Boileau (1998), cited in Schlamberger Brezar, this connector serves to engage the interlocutor and guide the flow of the

conversation. Beyond the argumentative function of individual connectors, linguistic-stylistic analysis of public discourse demonstrates how cohesive devices at multiple levels serve persuasive intent. In an inaugural political speech, Akinmusuyi and Zakari (2024) revealed that the dominant use of simple sentences (48,8%) and the imposition of synonyms and antonyms enhanced the cohesive quality of the text, ultimately exerting great influence on the masses. While our corpus differs (commercial copywriting versus political discourse), both studies demonstrate how micro-linguistic elements, whether argumentative connectors like “*mais*” or cohesive structures like sentence types-structure argumentative flow and serve persuasive purposes.

4. A Presentation of the Sales Discourse

Creating a sales pitch means crafting a *voluntary act of influence* (Seignour, 2011, p.30) with an incentive-driven purpose aimed at winning over the recipient.

Within a persuasive framework, the process of encouraging the target audience’s adherence relies, according to Charaudeau (2009), on two complementary approaches: *making believe* and *having to believe*. Indeed, argumentation, as a *higher function of language whose complex aim is to convince or persuade others—most often with the goal of prompting them to make a decision*⁶ (Hasni, 2016, p.21), plays a central role in sales discourse. In this context, *beyond the arguments themselves, the words—and the way they are arranged—can be of great importance*⁷ (Petard, 2007, p.223). As such, *metalinguistic markers play a crucial role in the negotiation and argumentative processes that revolve around lexical categorization*⁸ (Berthoud, 1997, p.192).

5. Corpus Analysis : The Illocutionary Effect of “*Mais*”

5.1 The Position of “*Mais*” Within the Utterance

Adopted by pragmatics and referred to as a *connector*, the connector “*mais*” fulfills multiple functions according to Fournier:

On a ainsi : un « *mais* » connecteur rectificatif (« il n’est pas à Paris mais à Londres »), un « *mais* » connecteur argumentatif (« il est républicain mais honnête »), un « *mais* » indicateur de valeur illocutoire (« *mais* tais-toi », qui transforme ici l’ordre en reproche), un « *mais* » phatique qui sert à installer le dire (« *Mais* je voudrais dire que... »), enfin un *mais*, indicateur perlocutoire qui marque l’irritation ou l’impatience du locuteur (« *Mais*, tais-toi ! ») ou sa surprise (« *Mais* voilà Pierre »)⁹. (Fournier, 1991, pp. 121-122)

The connector “*mais*” appears in a mid-sentence position only once at the beginning of our corpus:

R0: « *Ce job de rêve, il existe... mais personne ne le sait.* » (“This dream job exists... but no one knows about it.”)

This utterance represents an assertive act in which the connector “*mais*” serves a conjunctive function. It plays a key role in organizing the information and structuring the sentence. It introduces a contrast that alters the claim made in the first part (“this dream job exists”). In other words, the copywriter uses the “*mais*” marker to introduce a piece of information that contradicts or qualifies the main clause (“no one knows about it”). The illocutionary effect of “*mais*” in this context lies in the contrast it creates between the existence of the dream job and the audience's lack of awareness. This contrast is designed to produce

surprise, curiosity, and suspense. It thereby sparks the reader's interest and encouraging them to continue reading to learn more about the so-called dream job.

In contrast, "*mais*" appears in the initial position seven times in the corpus, as seen in the following examples:

R1: « *mais le souci, c'est que tu n'es pas tout seul.* »

R2: « *mais tellement peu qui gagnent correctement leur vie.* »

R3: « *mais que dès qu'il faut envoyer un mail, tu sèches.* »

R4: « *mais tu devrais vivre avec cette question si douloureuse.* »

R5: « *mais on est tous tombés, un jour ou l'autre, sur cette discipline.* »

R6: « *mais on a tous un point commun...* »

R7: « *mais avant, il faut comprendre un truc.* »

When placed at the beginning of an utterance, the connector "*mais*" plays a structuring role in the discourse. As a discourse marker, the connector fulfills a *framing function*, preparing the prospect for the idea that is about to follow. This usage is illustrated in sequences (1, 2, 5, 6, and 7), where "*mais*" introduces the utterance. It is also shown in utterance (3), where it conveys the lived experience of the person concerned.

5.2 From the Persuasive Effect of "*Mais*" to the Discursive Strategy at Play

Every linguistic activity is grounded in the principle of alterity. This passage through the other involves an *I* aiming, through their speech, to bring a *YOU* into their discourse universe. This is the very principle of influence that underpins argumentative activity. According to Charaudeau (2010, p.27), this activity responds to three communicative stakes: legitimation, credibility, and captation. In this sense, by constructing the discourse universe, the copywriter, as an arguing subject, shapes meaning intentions in order to produce the desired effects on the target audience. He/she implements discursive strategies designed to persuade the prospect of the validity of their thesis.

The strategy of legitimation addresses the question of truth, or "being right." It highlights the authority of the arguing subject over their addressee:

autorité de savoir (expert, savant, spécialiste ; autorité de pouvoir de décision : responsable d'une organisation), d'un comportement lorsque lui est reconnue une autorité personnelle fondée sur une pratique de rapport de domination (force), de séduction (charisme) ou de représentation (délégué), autorité de fait qui peut d'ailleurs se superposer à la précédente.¹⁰ (Boix, 2007, p.19).

However, in a persuasive context where the aim is to incite action through a *making-believe* that precedes a *making-do*, the speaker does not adopt a position of authority. Here, the influence process centers on what Cristian Boix (2007, p.25) calls veracity: a subjective response that seduces the target in order to lead them to purchase the product. This subjectivity entails taking a clear stance in favor of a specific thesis (in this case, the effectiveness of the training the advertiser aims to sell), while also responding to the principle of captation, which is *completely focused on the interlocutor so that they come to say: How could I possibly disagree with what is being said?*¹¹ (Boix, 2007, p.21).

5.3 The Use of Pathos

Affect plays a key role in models of attention and perception (Dridi & Makhoul, 2014, p. 74). As Laurence Gailliot (1998) has shown, emotions can unconsciously guide an individual's decision-making process and influence their reactions and behaviors¹².

In our corpus, utterance R0 demonstrates the use of *pathos*: the connector “*mais*” creates an emotional impact on the prospect. This emotional effect is constructed through several mechanisms:

- **Hope** is conveyed in the initial proposition: “*Ce job de rêve, il existe*” (“This dream job exists”). This expression carries and communicates a positive emotional charge to the target audience. Indeed, it suggests the presence of a valuable opportunity to be seized, which generates a feeling of excitement in the prospect.
- **Surprise** arises from the unexpected contrast introduced in the second part of the statement: “*mais personne ne le sait*” (“but no one knows about it”).
- **Curiosity** is triggered by the second part of the utterance, which invites the prospect to keep reading in order to discover the nature of this job.

What emerges here is that the persuasive strategy activated through the perlocutionary effect of the connector “*mais*” consists in building an emotional bridge aimed at capturing the prospect's attention. It also stimulates their interest to continue reading the sales copy. This facilitates the conversion process from prospect to client, as appealing to emotion generates a responsive and engaging attitudinal and behavioral reaction.

In our corpus, “*mais*” introduces:

a. Leveraging Emotion to Engage the Target

The use of emotion in persuasive communication aims to trigger an affective response in the potential consumer in order to influence their purchasing behavior.

In utterance R4 from our corpus, the advertiser provokes fear in the prospect :

« *Mais tu devrais vivre avec cette question si douloureuse* » (“But you should live with this painful question”).

The perlocutionary effect of this linguistic construction lies in its ability to activate the target's affective dimension through emotional appeal (*douloureuse*). The objective is to create strong identification, allowing the prospect to project themselves into the suggested situation, notably through the use of the second-person pronoun “*tu*”. The adverb “*si*” intensifies the fear by preceding the word *douloureuse*, which is already emotionally charged and associated with suffering.

Furthermore, the modal verb *devoir* (should) preceding *vivre* (live) implies an obligation or necessity, which can cause the prospect to feel the urgency of the situation. This is emphasized by the preposition *avec* (with) and the carefully chosen vocabulary. The persuasive power of this structure lies in the creation of a perceived link between an unpleasant situation (*living with this painful question*) and the solution offered: *Bien sûr, tu pourrais tout arrêter là, abandonner ton projet, et mettre tes rêves de côté* ». (“Of course, you could stop right there, give up on your project, and set your dreams aside”).

The expression « question douloureuse » (*painful question*) refers to three rhetorical questions raised by the advertiser in the sales pitch: « *Et si j'étais passé à côté de ma vocation ?* » (“What if I had missed my true calling?”) ; « *Si moi aussi, j'en étais capable?* » (“What if I were capable too?”) ; « *Si ça avait changé ma vie?* » (“What if it had changed my life?”).

This shift to the first-person singular «je» constitutes an enunciative stance with persuasive orientation, which eliminates any marked distance between the communicative parties. It gives the prospect the impression of hearing their own inner voice, thus producing feelings of guilt and self-reproach for having potentially missed the opportunity of a lifetime by refusing to purchase the proposed training.

It is worth noting that through this type of discursive construction, the copywriter employs a deliberate persuasive strategy: immersing the target in a projected future scenario and eliciting negative emotions (fear, regret, guilt, and self-blame) in order to push them toward the desired decision (product purchase).

This is a classic instance of *make-feel to make-do*: generate fear to provoke a purchase. In this context, the connector “*mais*” introduces a warning about a hypothetical situation the receiver may experience if they fail to learn the technique presented in the training program.

b. Stimulating the Imagination to Sell

Imagination plays a crucial role in shaping how consumers perceive products and services.

In our corpus, the expression « *Ce job de rêve, il existe... mais personne ne le sait* » (“This dream job exists... but no one knows about it”) perfectly illustrates this dynamic. Here, the connector “*mais*” introduces a rectification and a clarification that captures the attention of the potential consumer while simultaneously arousing curiosity. This assertion is preceded by efforts to create identification and provoke the target's imaginative faculties through formulations such as :

« *Imagine que tu sois payé pour écrire* » (“Imagine getting paid to write”) ; « *Qu'il te suffise d'envoyer un simple email pour encaisser des milliers d'euros* » (“Imagine that sending a simple email is all it takes to cash in thousands of euros”).

The illocutionary force of the verb «*imaginer*» (to imagine) lies in its semantic nature: it expresses both a focus on a proposed idea (saying) and a directive action (doing), framed as an imperative in the second person singular «*tu*». This linguistic configuration is meant to make-do in order to make-believe in the relevance of the commercial offer. For this reason, it is difficult to separate the illocutionary function of the utterance from its perlocutionary impact, as it seeks to awaken, through a positive semantic universe (get paid, send a simple email, cash in thousands of euros), the prospect's desire and foster attraction toward the promoted training.

In this context, the connector “*mais*” introduces information that not only piques the target's interest but also reassures them about the existence of a job that could allow them to earn thousands of euros through writing «*Ce job de rêve existe*» (“This dream job exists”). In other words, “*mais*” reinforces the notion that, despite common doubts or widespread ignorance, such an exceptional opportunity does exist.

By stimulating the reader's imagination, this formulation transforms a mere possibility into a tangible aspiration, thereby generating a powerful persuasive effect that encourages action, namely, the purchase of the training program.

c. Inclusive Contrast: Creating a Shared Bond through Common Experience

R5 : « *Mais on est tous tombés, un jour ou l'autre, sur cette discipline* ». (“But we’ve all come across this discipline at one point or another”).

The sense of resemblance expressed in R5 illustrates how the advertiser introduces the concept of copywriting by linking it to the success of online marketers. The aim is to persuade the target audience by appealing to a shared experience. In other words, the argument relies on the other as a cornerstone of persuasion. This is evident in statements like : « *Tous les marketeurs que tu suis sur internet...Ils ont tous un point commun...Une compétence qui les rassemble* » (“All the marketers you follow online... they all have one thing in common... one skill that unites them”) as well as : « *Cette compétence, elle leur a TOUS changé la vie. Et la mienne aussi* » (“This skill changed ALL of their lives. And mine too”).

The connection between these primarily informative utterances is based on shared experience. The argument is structured by using “others” (the marketers) to support the conclusion (the necessity of mastering copywriting to succeed). It is a form of reasoning where argument A is used to support conclusion C. This discursive structure gives rise to a pathetic argument centered on a sales promise, built around what appeals most to the potential consumer: the transformation from a current financial struggle to a better future.

The use of the word «*tous*» (*ALL*) in uppercase enhances the process of identification, which, as Malaval and Décaudin (2012, p.15) point out, *implies strong individual involvement in the message or the situation presented*.¹³ Thus, the advertiser aligns the success of marketers with the potential success of the target audience, increasing the persuasive impact. By presenting copywriting as the essential skill for turning words into money, as suggested in the title «*COPYWRITING GENIUS: Les méthodes d'experts pour transformer les mots en euros*» (“COPYWRITING GENIUS: expert methods for turning words into euros”), the advertiser seeks to elicit consumer adherence and create a sense of inclusion.

This dynamic is reinforced when the advertiser shares a personal testimonial : « *Et la mienne aussi ; mais on est tous tombés, un jour ou l'autre, sur cette discipline ; on a tous été fascinés par l'idée de transformer des mots en argent...* » (“And mine too. But we’ve all come across this discipline at one point or another; we’ve all been fascinated by the idea of turning words into money...”). This impactful testimony, coming from the enunciative source, strengthens the idea that this skill has also changed the advertiser's own life. As such, it serves as an implicit recommendation aimed at lowering resistance to the commercial offer by reinforcing the connection between the advertiser, successful marketers, and the target audience.

The conversion process of the receiver into a customer unfolds as the advertiser begins to reassure the target by presenting concrete examples: «*Certains avaient de gros problèmes personnels...D'autres se voyaient comme des losers sans ambition* » (“Some had serious personal problems... Others saw themselves as losers with no ambition”). The use of specific examples makes the sales pitch more effective, by reflecting familiar situations. The persuasive power of this discursive strategy lies in its ability to preemptively

respond to the objections of a target audience that might initially consider themselves incapable of succeeding online.

Thus, the receiver is led to identify with the marketers who succeeded thanks to the promoted training. The advertiser leverages what is commonly referred to as the bandwagon effect, also known as the wave effect, a social psychology concept which posits that people tend to behave in the same way as those around them. In other words, we regularly imitate the actions of those around us¹⁴ (Cialdini, Goldstein, Martin 2019, p.104). This corresponds to what Robert Cialdini calls *social proof* in his book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (2021), one of the most widely used persuasive principles in online marketing.

It is important to note that the informative act embedded in this sales discourse seeks to influence the consumer's behavior through resemblance. It is a *make-do disguised as a make-know*, reinforcing the link between shared experience and the promise of transformation as conveyed by the title: “*COPYWRITING GENIUS: Expert methods for turning words into euros*”. By relying on common experiences, the advertiser establishes an inclusive connection that encourages adherence and reduces the risk of rejecting the offer. In this sense, the connector “*mais*” in R5 introduces a contrast that normalizes the experience of failure, thereby creating a sense of inclusion. It reassures the potential consumer by highlighting that even those who have succeeded have faced similar difficulties, thus encouraging the reader to embrace the advertiser’s message.

d. “Mais” : A Rhetorical Pivot for Apparent Unity

R6 : «*Mais on a tous un point commun...*» (“But we all have something in common...”). «*Aucun de nous n’est un génie... Certains sont même plutôt l’inverse*» (“None of us is a genius... Some are quite the opposite”).

In this part of our corpus, the “*mais*” functions as a rhetorical lever, transforming what is perceived as a hindrance into a shared and motivating opportunity. It contributes to building an engaging narrative where the initial obstacle (lack of expertise) becomes the starting point for inciting action (purchasing the training).

Thus, utterance R6 highlights a similarity framed through an assertive approach: «*Mais on a tous un point commun...* » (“But we all have something in common... ”). This statement is structured through an analogical argument that links two seemingly opposed ideas: the absence of genius and the possibility of radically changing one's life through online persuasive writing. This association relies on two evaluative acts: «*Aucun de nous n’est un génie... Certains sont même plutôt l’inverse* » (“None of us is a genius... Some are quite the opposite”).

On a strictly linguistic level, these utterances amount to simple negations. However, from a pragmatic perspective, they go much further: the speaker implicitly tells the prospect that success is within reach with the intellectual capacities they already possess. This strategy achieves a dual effect, first, it fosters a process of identification, and second, it assigns illocutionary value to the negation, which brings the target audience closer to their objective «*réussir sa carrière de copywriter sans être génie* » (“succeeding in copywriting without being a genius”). By downplaying the lack of exceptional intellect, the speaker strengthens the hope of a successful copywriting career and presents the promoted training as the key to achieving that goal.

This rhetorical dynamic, structured around the “*mais*”, acts as a discursive pivot. It reframes a perceived obstacle (not being a genius) into a point of shared experience, forging a sense of commonality between the speaker and the prospect. This mechanism subtly orients the audience toward making a purchase by positioning the training program as the ideal solution to their problems, and as a tangible hope for financial improvement. This promise, conveyed even in the headline of the sales page, aims to emotionally engage the target and lead them to take action.

e. “*Mais*”: A Strategic Transition to Promote Action

In another part of our corpus, the connector “*mais*” becomes a powerful rhetorical pivot fulfilling multiple roles: it introduces a conflict, builds an empathetic connection with the prospect, exposes a problem, and subtly prepares the audience for the necessity of a solution, as illustrated in utterance R3:

R3 : « *Mais que dès qu’il faut envoyer un mail, tu sèches* » (“But the moment you need to send an email, you blank out”).

Utterance R3 provides a precise description of the target audience’s experience: the mindset of a beginner copywriter, often marked by a lack of courage or experience to venture into the lucrative field of persuasive writing: «*Mais que dès qu’il faut envoyer un mail, tu sèches* » (“But the moment you need to send an email, you blank out”). Here, the connector “*mais*” acts as a strategic transition, introducing a decisive moment in time, emphasized by the preposition «*dès*» (“the moment”). This temporal marker (“the moment you need to send an email”) sets up a realistic scenario that faithfully depicts the prospect’s state of paralysis. This moment is immediately followed by a clear and direct diagnosis: “you blank out.”

The connector “*mais*” plays a key role in this discursive construction. It enables the shift from a stage of empathetic observation to a phase of gentle confrontation.

The persuasive strength of this approach lies in its empathetic dimension: it demonstrates that the speaker has a deep understanding of the client’s difficulties and hesitation. As Nallis (2012, p.100) points out, persuasion relies on the *seller’s ability to* mentally put themselves in the other person’s place, to understand their thoughts, emotions, etc.¹⁵

From a strategic standpoint, the persuasive process employed here follows a classic yet effective structure: first, expose a problem (the block when it comes to sending an email), then propose, implicitly or explicitly, a solution. In this case, the highlighted challenge (the fear of entering the copywriting market) is subtly associated with the training program being offered. The advertiser uses an allusive critique of hesitation to reinforce, in the mind of the prospect, the necessity to take action. The purchase of the training is thus positioned as the ideal solution, not only to overcome the initial fear, but also to acquire expert methods for turning words into actual income.

Here, the connector “*mais*” functions as a crucial discursive lever, skillfully transitioning from empathetic identification with the problem to an implicit encouragement to act by adopting the proposed solution. This mechanism enables the advertiser to gradually guide the prospect toward purchasing the product by highlighting the obstacle that can be overcome through the acquisition of the promoted training.

f. “*Mais*” : Overcoming Psychological Barriers to Highlight the Solution

R7 : «*Mais avant, il faut comprendre un truc. Si la plupart des entrepreneurs échouent, ce n'est pas par manque d'intelligence. C'est parce qu'ils ne connaissent pas le copywriting.*» (“But first, you need to understand something. If most entrepreneurs fail, it’s not due to a lack of intelligence. It’s because they don’t know copywriting”).

In this segment, the connector “*mais*” performs a particular cognitive shift. By introducing an essential explanation framed with emphasis (if... then... structure), it functions as a rhetorical lever aimed at removing psychological barriers typically associated with failure, such as fear or self-doubt.

Here, “*mais*” repositions the perception of entrepreneurial failure. The discursive structure establishes a direct link between the lack of success among entrepreneurs and their unfamiliarity with copywriting. In other words, the connector “*mais*” plays a crucial role in redefining the concept of failure, not as a reflection of personal inadequacy, but as the result of a lack of knowledge in a specific skill. This reframing shifts attention from an internal, fixed trait (intelligence) to an external, modifiable factor (ignorance of copywriting).

The persuasive strength of this strategy lies in its appeal to identification. The prospective customer is led to project themselves into a familiar situation of failure, but now with a hopeful outlook : mastering the skill of copywriting could convert failure into success. This repositioning immediately enhances the perceived value of the training being offered, which is implicitly presented as the clear solution to a solvable problem. Thus, the idea that purchasing the training is the most logical choice is subtly reinforced. It not only solves the consumer’s current difficulty but also provides a concrete means of achieving entrepreneurial goals.

The illocutionary force of this persuasive strategy is to establish a connection with the target audience, making them feel both understood and encouraged. In this sense, “*mais*” becomes an invitation to believe in one’s capacity to succeed, and, therefore, to act (by purchasing the training).

Throughout our corpus, the connector “*mais*” plays a key persuasive role in every utterance by introducing contrasts that guide the potential customer toward a solution. In R1, it indicates that the target is not alone, highlighting competition and the need to stand out. In R2, it underscores that few people truly succeed, enhancing the importance of the training. R3 uses “*mais*” to expose a specific difficulty, suggesting that the course can address it. R4 prompts the audience to confront a challenging question, paving the way to propose a solution. R5 uses “*mais*” to establish empathetic rapport, implying that everyone starts by learning. R6 reinforces unity, emphasizing a common trait that leads to the solution. Finally, in R7, “*mais*” introduces a key idea to understand before proceeding, thus preparing the audience for the core argument in favor of the training.

In each case, “*mais*” acts as a rhetorical lever that reduces resistance and subtly directs the prospect toward action.

6. Metalinguistic Markers and Empathy : Towards a Functional Connection

Berthoz and Jorland (2004), in presenting empathy as the ability to include another's environment within one's own, which has the effect of expanding one's experiential field to the dimensions of a shared world¹⁶ (p.11), and by affirming that empathy, by defining equivalence classes of representations, constitutes intersubjectivity¹⁷ (ibid., p.09), establish a link between three key concepts : empathy, subjectivity, and the experiential field. For them, the concept of intersubjectivity emerges from the intersection of each communication participant's experiential fields. This experience constitutes the foundation of an individual's subjectivity. Consequently, empathy gives rise to an intersubjectivity that emerges through the contact established between the interlocutors' respective backgrounds, resulting in an interaction between two distinct subjectivities: that of the speaker and that of the receiver.

It should be noted that empathy not only involves an affective response triggered by another person's emotional state, but also requires a minimal recognition and understanding of that person's mental states¹⁸ (Decety, 2004, p.54). In this regard, drawing upon empirical studies in behavioral and brain sciences, Decety (2004, p.54) defines empathy as a form of mental simulation of the Other's subjectivity.

In our corpus, the utterances introduced by the connector "*mais*" carry an empathic value with a phatic orientation, made explicit through the direct address of the target audience via indeterminate identification («*tu*», referring to the potential consumer presumed to be active online: «*tu n'es pas tout seul*», «*tu sèches*», «*tu devrais vivre*»). The persuasive power of this interpellative act lies in the rhetorical strategies implemented by the copywriter. This includes an explanatory approach (R7) presented in the form of a directive speech act specifically, a positive command expressed interpersonally: «*il faut comprendre*» (you need to understand). Here, the verb «*comprendre*» functions as a metadiscursive relay, signaling a shift from one discursive level to another.

Additionally, the cognitive biases of conformity and similarity (R1, R5, R6) are illustrated through expressions such as «*on est tous*» (we all are), «*on a tous*» (we all have), and «*un point commun*» (a common point). Lastly, the principle of empathy (R3, R4) is foregrounded when the advertiser describes the lived experiences of the target audience.

7. Conclusion

This article set out to examine how the metalinguistic connector "*mais*" ("but") operates pragmatically within the sales page COPYWRITING GENIUS: Les méthodes d'experts pour transformer les mots en euros. Grounded in a pragma-enunciative approach, the analysis aimed to show how this seemingly simple connector helps structure persuasive discourse in a contemporary digital advertising setting.

The eight occurrences identified in the corpus reveal a consistent pattern: "*mais*" intervenes each time the text shifts direction, marks a contrast, or redirects the reader's interpretive path. A closer comparative reading shows, however, that these occurrences are far from uniform. Some introduce a reformulation or a clarification, while others open new argumentative sequences or ensure transitions between them. Its frequent use in initial position suggests that the copywriter relies on "*mais*" as a strategic entry point, one that leads the reader step by step through the intended persuasive trajectory.

Interpreted through Fournier's (1991) typology, "*mais*" mostly fulfils an argumentative function, sometimes accompanied by subtle phatic effects that reinforce the speaker's presence and guide the interaction. The pragma-enunciative lens thus proves particularly useful for showing how a micro-linguistic element can shape the larger architecture of persuasive discourse. The analysis remains intentionally cautious: it restricts itself to what the text makes observable and does not attempt to infer emotional or psychological effects that lie beyond the scope of a strictly linguistic study.

This work also recognizes its limitations. The corpus is restricted to a single promotional page and a small number of occurrences, which limits the reach of the conclusions. The behaviour of "*mais*" could vary significantly in other genres, commercial or otherwise, or in longer, diversified advertising campaigns. These limits highlight the need to interpret the findings with care and to remain anchored in verifiable linguistic evidence.

Nonetheless, the study shows that metalinguistic markers deserve greater attention in the analysis of digital promotional writing. Future research could widen the investigation to other genres, compare uses of "*mais*" across languages and cultural contexts, or explore its functioning in hybrid promotional formats such as influencer content, short-form video, or automated advertising scripts. A particularly promising direction would be to study how "*mais*" interacts with other discourse markers in multimodal environments, especially on platforms that blend text, images, and algorithmically personalized content. For instance, comparing the function of "*mais*" in written copywriting versus oral sales interactions in luxury retail environments, where sales associates employ strategic discursive mechanisms such as gatekeeping discourse and technical mystification to shape consumer engagement (Babou, 2026), would reveal whether persuasive linguistic mechanisms operate similarly across modalities. Such a perspective would offer a deeper understanding of how micro-linguistic cues contribute to persuasion within today's increasingly complex communicational ecosystems.

AI Statement. Generative artificial intelligence tools were used solely as linguistic assistance tools, particularly for translating certain passages and improving the wording of certain parts of the manuscript. They were not used to generate the scientific data of the study. The bibliographic references were independently verified by the author using the original sources.

Ethical Statement. This study is based exclusively on the qualitative analysis of a publicly available online sales page. It did not involve human participants, interaction with individuals, or the direct collection of personal data. No personal, sensitive, or identifiable information was collected or processed. Accordingly, institutional ethical approval was not required for this study.

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Endnotes

² “Mais” translates to “but” in English. However, we have chosen to use the French term throughout this article, as the analysis is based on a French-language corpus.

³ In addition to “marqueurs discursifs” (Gulich & Quasthoff, 1985; Schiffrin, 1987; Traugott, 1995a; Bell, 1998; Andersen, 1996; Aijmer, 1997; Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002), which is the most frequently used term, we also find references to “marqueur pragmatique” (Pop, 1989; Brinton, 1996; Fraser, 1996; Andersen & Fretheim, 2000; Andersen, 1998, 2001), “opérateur discursif” (de Gaulmyn, 1987a), “particule” (Blass, 2000), “particule discursive” (Fischer & Drescher, 1996; Hansen, 1998c; He & Lindsey, 1998; Fischer, 2000a, 2000b), “particule énonciative” (Fernandez, 1994; Yaguello, forthcoming), “particule pragmatique” (Östman, 1995), “mot du discours” (Ducrot et al., 1980; Paillard, 1999), “phrase parénétique,” “expression pragmatique,” “connecteur,” “connecteur discursif,” “connecteur phatique” (Davoine, 1980; Bazzanella, 1990), “opérateurs métadiscursifs” (Greidanus, 1990, p. 42), “signaux du discours,” “hedges” (Holmes, 1986), “gambits” (Keller, 1979), “particules métacommunicatives,” and “ponctuant” (Vincent, 1993) (Gaétane, 2004, p. 40–41). (Author's translation)

⁴ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « les connecteurs argumentatifs sont des signes qui peuvent servir à relier deux ou plusieurs énoncés, en assignant à chacun un rôle particulier dans une stratégie argumentative unique » (Ducrot, 1983, p. 9).

⁵ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « ils déclenchent un retraitement du contenu propositionnel soit comme un argument, soit comme une conclusion, soit encore comme un argument chargé d'étayer ou de renforcer une inférence ou comme un contre-argument » (Adam, 2005, p. 123).

⁶ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « fonction supérieure du langage, dont la visée complexe est de convaincre ou de persuader autrui, et cela, le plus souvent en vue de lui faire prendre une décision » (Hasni, 2016, p. 21).

⁷ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « au-delà des arguments, les mots eux-mêmes, tout comme leur agencement, peuvent avoir de l'importance » (Petard, 2007, p. 223).

⁸ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « Les marqueurs métalinguistiques jouent un rôle essentiel dans le travail de négociation et d'argumentation sur le mode de catégorisation lexicale » (Berthoud, 1997, p. 192)

⁹ “We thus find: a rectifying connective ‘mais’ (‘il n’est pas à Paris mais à Londres’ / ‘he’s not in Paris but in London’), an argumentative connective ‘mais’ (‘il est républicain mais honnête’ / ‘he is a Republican but honest’), an illocutionary-value indicator ‘mais’ (‘mais tais-toi’ / ‘but shut up’), which here transforms the command into a reproach, a phatic ‘mais’ used to initiate speech (‘Mais je voudrais dire que...’ / ‘But I would like to say that...’), and finally a ‘mais’ functioning as a perlocutionary indicator, which expresses the speaker’s irritation or impatience (‘Mais, tais-toi !’ / ‘But shut up!’) or surprise (‘Mais voilà Pierre’ / ‘But here comes Pierre’)” (Fournier, 1991, p. 121–122). (Author's translation)

¹⁰ Authority of knowledge (expert, scholar, specialist); authority based on decision-making power (leader of an organization); authority through behavior, when recognized as having personal authority based on dominance (force), seduction (charisma), or representation (delegate); and de facto authority, which may in fact overlap with the previous ones (Boix, 2007, p. 19). (Author's translation)

¹¹ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « complètement tourné vers l'interlocuteur de façon à ce que celui-ci en arrive à se dire 'Comment ne pas adhérer à ce qui est dit?' » (Boix, 2007, p. 21).

¹² (Author's translation of the following quotation): « il a été démontré que les émotions peuvent orienter, sans que l'individu en soit conscient, son processus de prise de décision et affecter ses réactions et ses comportements » (Graillot, 1998).

¹³ A translation we proposed for the following quotation : le processus d'identification qui, selon Malaval et Décaudin « sous-tend une forte implication de l'individu dans le message présenté ou dans la situation concernée » (2012, p.15).

¹⁴ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « nous imitons régulièrement les actions de celles et ceux qui nous entourent » (Cialdini, Goldstein, & Martin, 2019, p. 104).

¹⁵ (Author's translation of the following quotation): la persuasion s'appuie sur la capacité du vendeur à « se mettre mentalement à la place de l'autre, comprendre sa pensée, ses émotions, etc.» (Nallis, 2012, p. 100).

¹⁶ (Author's translation of the following quotation): la « faculté d'inclure dans son propre environnement celui d'autrui, ce qui a pour effet d'élargir son champ d'expérience aux dimensions d'un monde » (Berthoz, A., & Jorland, G., 2004, p. 11).

¹⁷ (Author's translation of the following quotation): « l'empathie, en définissant des classes d'équivalence de représentations, constitue l'intersubjectivité » (Berthoz, A., & Jorland, G., 2004, p. 9).

¹⁸ (Author's translation of the following quotation): l'empathie «n'implique pas seulement une réponse affective déclenchée par l'état émotionnel d'une autre personne. Elle nécessite également une reconnaissance et une compréhension minimale des états mentaux de cette personne.» (Decety, 2004, p. 54).