

The study of discourse on the websites media essay

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ABSTRACTThe purpose of this study is to investigate how Australian universities represent themselves through the use of language on their institutional websites. The study also compares and contrasts how a long established university, the University of Melbourne and a young university, Macquarie University construct their institutional identities and build up a relationship with potential students. A critical approach to the study of discourse on the website of the two universities helps not only to describe and interpret the representation but also to explain the formations of relationships, processes, and structures that affect individuals . A three-dimensional framework developed by Fairclough is utilized for three stages of critical discourse analysis. The analysis reveals that the websites of the two universities exhibit a promotional discourse which reflects the impacts of globalisation and the trend of academic marketing on higher education. This type of discourse is utilized by the universities to promote themselves in order attract more students and other resources. A comparison and contrast of the two university websites show that the representation of the two universities is not only determined by the social trends but also their own tradition and reputation. Implications for language education and suggestions for further research are also made. Key words: institutional websites, critical discourse analysis, promotional language

TÓM TẮTMục đích của nghiên cứu là khảo sát việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ trên websites của các trường Đại học của Úc. Nghiên cứu cũng nhằm so sánh và đối chiếu việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ trên website của trường Đại học Melbourne, một trường đại học hàng đầu và lâu đời của Úc với trường Đại học Macquarie, một trường mới thành lập và đang trên đà phát triển mạnh mẽ. Phân tích diễn ngôn phê

phán được sử dụng như một phương pháp hiệu quả nhất không những giúp miêu tả, làm sáng tỏ việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ trên website của các trường đại học mà còn giải thích ảnh hưởng của việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ này tới các mối quan hệ và cá nhân trong xã hội. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy ngôn ngữ của quảng cáo và tiếp thị được tìm thấy trên website của các trường đại học, chứng tỏ quá trình toàn cầu hóa và xu hướng tiếp thị trong giáo dục đã có những tác động to lớn tới giáo dục đại học. Các trường đại học sử dụng ngôn ngữ tiếp thị nhằm quảng bá hình ảnh của mình tới sinh viên trong nước và quốc tế, cũng như thu hút nguồn vốn đầu tư của các cơ quan, tổ chức trong và ngoài nước. Ngoài ra, việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ của các trường đại học cũng bị ảnh hưởng nhiều bởi truyền thống và danh tiếng của từng trường. Từ kết quả thu được, nghiên cứu đưa ra những đề xuất cho quá trình giảng dạy tiếng Anh và hướng nghiên cứu trong tương lai. Từ khóa: website các trường đại học, phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán, ngôn ngữ quảng cáo

Statement of the problem

Nowadays, together with the explosion of the Internet, institutional websites are becoming more and more important to both universities and potential students. Institutional websites are used due to their ability to communicate a significant amount of information to a huge number of audiences in a rapid way . Institutional websites serve as the first, if not only, impression of the universities for potential students . Many students consider visiting institutional websites as their first visit to the universities and they are greeted with a ‘ digital handshake’ through an online campus tour . For universities, institutional websites are not only their representative images but also their admission tools. Eighty-four per cent of potential students

report using institutional websites to do research and find information about universities, which indicates the prominent role of institutional websites on students' process of choosing universities. On the other hand, there is a competition among universities for customers (i. e., students) and resources (i. e., fundings). In order to have a competitive advantage, universities need to create a distinctive image, differentiating themselves from other universities. On the other hand, higher education is largely an intangible product. If universities wish to introduce their ' products' to the customers, they need tangible evidence to support (e. g., logo, slogan, images, words). Thus, institutional websites are utilised as a primary outlet for universities to introduce their ' products' to their customers and language as a strategic tool for them to achieve their goal. Given the importance of institutional websites to both universities and potential students, there is a lack of research investigating the language used by universities on their websites. As a social phenomenon, language is situated in society and also creates society. Language shows ' social effects of texts and on texts' . In the competition for students and scarce resources, universities have adopted free market practices in running schools . This process, which is called ' academic marketing' , has affected various levels of university practice . Particularly, the discourse which is mostly known from the corporate world has affected the discursive practices of universities (e. g., prospectuses and websites) . Although universities adopt this type of discourse to market themselves to the public, including potential students, limited research has been done to examine this type of language.

Solutions to the problem

In order to solve the stated problem, this study aims to investigate how Australian universities represent themselves through the use of language on their institutional websites. The study also aims to compare and contrast how a long established and prestigious university, the University of Melbourne (UM) and a much younger university, Macquarie University (MU) represent themselves on their websites. The comparison focuses on the way the universities construct their institutional identities and relationships with potential students. The study, therefore, revolves around the following questions: 1. How do the University of Melbourne and Macquarie University represent themselves through the use of language on their institutional websites? 2. What are similarities and differences in the way the University of Melbourne and Macquarie construct their institutional identities and relationships with potential students? The author decided to conduct this study in Australian context because Australia is one of the most well-known destinations of higher education in the world. The data of this study was collected from the websites of two Australian universities: The University of Melbourne and Macquarie University. UM has a long history and has achieved high reputation in the country and the world, while MU is early in its existence and is on the track of becoming one of Australia's leading universities. This choice is intentional because it serves the purpose of comparing and contrasting between two universities. The data collection lasts within two months (Aug-Sep/2012) and focuses on the three following pages of the UM and MU websites: The Home Page (e. g., <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/>; <http://mq.edu.au/>)The About Us Page (e. g., <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/about-us>); <http://mq.edu.au/about-us>)

mq. edu. au/about/profile/; http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us)The Future Student Page (e. g., <http://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/>; http://www.mq.edu.au/future_students)These three pages are chosen because they are most visited by potential students . The Home Page gives students the first impression of the university. The About Page is the place where the viewers can explore the history, organization, and tradition of the university. The Future Student Page provides potential students with all information they need, such as programs and courses, admision, financial aid, etc., Since the aim of this study is to investigate how Australian Universities represent themselves through the use of language on their institutional websites, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the most appropriate theoretical and methodological approach. Adopting three-dimensional framework developed by Fairclough (1995) for CDA, this study describes linguistic features of the text on the websites of two universities, interpret the social factors contributing to the process of text production and interpretation, and explain the effects the text may have on social structure and relationships. According to Fairclough , through a close and careful study of language, it is possible to not only describe and interpret representation but also to explain the formation of relationship, process, structure that effects individuals.

The results of analysis and discussion

The data analysis reveals that the websites of UM and MU exhibit a promotional discourse which is constructed to represent themselves and attract potential students. The universities utilize concrete evidence (e. g., logo, images, videos, testimonials, numbers, rankings) in order to shape their identities and enhance their reputation. They also attempt to build up a

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relationship with the public and potential students through a conversational style in which the audience is personally addressed and the universities are personified as friendly companions. A comparison on the discourse of UM and MU websites suggests that both universities build up a global identity in order to persuade potential students of their international relevance and how they can prepare students for global workforce. However, the difference is that Melbourne puts a great deal of emphasis on its international prestige while Macquarie focuses more on its national relevance. The University of Melbourne places itself at the centre of discourse, creating an authoritative distance between the university and students. In contrast, there is an attempt by Macquarie to downplay its authority, foreground its modernity, and put students in the centre of discourse. This reflects the different strategies adopted by these universities. As a long established and top university in Australia, Melbourne gets out of the national boundary and reaches an international standing. Meanwhile, Macquarie, a newly established university, knowing that they cannot compete with others, choose to focus on national standing and a friendly, personalised approach. The analysis suggests that the discourse on university websites is strongly affected by social changes. The trend of academic marketing, together with changes within Australian higher education system such as the cut down of government funding, the decline in the number of international students in recent years have forced Australia universities to seek strategies to make them more appealing towards investors and the public. On the other hand, globalisation urges universities to nurture new relationship and shape new identities in order to stay relevant and competitive in the new era. The

changes in the discursive practices of universities have effects on social order and relationship. They may change people's perceptions of the roles of higher education and universities as well as restructure the relationship between universities and the public.

Implications and suggestions for further research

Implications

With the view of discourse as a form of social practice, CDA makes us aware that discourse is both socially constituted and socially constitutive. This imposes a requirement for language education in schools and universities to develop learners' critical language awareness, which according to Fairclough, should be a significant objective of language education and a prerequisite for democratic citizenship. There is a need for learners to be aware that 'language is not merely a reflection or expression of social processes and practices; it is a part of those processes and practices' as it promotes, perpetuates, contest and rejects discourses. This is particularly important in modern society where learners have access to a great amount of information from a variety of sources. A critical mind will help students to process the information from different perspectives and therefore not to be affected by the information in a passive way. On the other hand, language has power and sometimes it is even more powerful than our actions. Nevertheless, we have not yet recognized and utilized this power in a critical/ reflexive way. In fact, we deal with language in whatever way we have learned and adopted. Language education, therefore, needs to make students aware of that power and encourage students to use it as a vehicle or a weapon to fight for a better world. In addition, it is also necessary to raise the issue of '

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technologization of discourse' and authenticity in language education . According to Wee and Brooks , a consequence of global economy is the pervasiveness enterprise culture, which puts pressure on individuals to demonstrate their entrepreneurial selves not just in the workplace, but even at the much earlier stage of applying for jobs. This suggests that language education at school should play a greater role in preparing students for the workplace by getting them acquainted with the properties of discourse in enterprise culture, helping them to develop competence in such discourse and build up a critical perspective on it. On the other hand, language education needs to work out how features of discourse in enterprise culture are affected by globalisation and help students to develop strategies to meet the discursive demands of the enterprise culture. Finally, universities also need to make changes to their discursive practices. The use of the promotional discourse causes a similarity in the language use of universities. If universities wish to create a distinctive identity on their institutional websites, they need to work out more effective ways to represent themselves. In addition, Fairclough's concept of technologicalization of discourse suggests universities put an emphasis on the training of staff in the discursive practices of marketing, for example, writing a research proposal for research committee, which itself is a heavily promotional form of discourse these days .

Suggestions for further research

According to Fairclough , images play an increasingly important role in the institutional discursive strategies. The use of images is the core component of communication in academic marketing materials distributed by admission

and recruitment offices from colleges and universities . Due to the limitation of time, this study could not focus on visual elements on the websites of Australian universities. Therefore, the author suggests that further research can include analysis of visual elements on the websites of universities in order to get a more complete picture of the universities. This study compares the way a long established university (UM) and a much younger university (MU) represent themselves on their websites. Another option for future research is making comparison between a public university and a private one or between an Australian university and another from other countries, such as the United States or the United Kingdom. Also, research in the future can examine other ways of Australia universities represent themselves, such as brochures and prospectuses. Last but not least, there is a need to investigate potential students' perceptions on the representation of universities on their websites, given the fact that students are those who largely rely on institutional websites for their university choice. By investigating potential students' perspectives, universities can work out more effective ways of representing themselves, then create a more impressive image and attract more students.