Corpus Based Study of Private and Public Verbs in online University Prospectus

Amna Arshad   Aleem Shakir

Government College University, Faisalabad,Pakistan

almsha@yahoo.com

Abstract

The aim of this research is to identify the grammatical and communicative functions performed by the semantic category of verbs, i.e. Private verbs and Suasive verbs. A corpus was compiled from 200 universities of two countries namely as: Pakistan and India. The data was collected from three different parts of prospectus, i.e., About us, Facilities and VC messages. For this study, multidimensional tagger analysis was used as theoretical framework. MAT Tagger was used for the tagging of linguistic features as well as counting the frequencies of selected linguistic features. On the basis of distributional pattern, the communicative functions was investigated performed by these verbs according to the grammatical structure and functions with the association of co-occurring lexical items. The results shows that private verbs and Suasive verbs are extensively used in all the sections of Pakistan with highest frequency than in the sections of India. On the basis of these pervasive features, the research proved that these verbs perform the function of information, marketing as well as persuasion.

Keywords: Higher Education Marketing, Online University Verbs, Register analysis, Private Verbs, Suasive Verbs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prospectus is defined in Online Oxford dictionary, as "a printed booklet advertising a school or university to potential parents or students or giving details of a share offer for the benefit of investors". Institutional prospectuses are principle channel for communication to a vast audience. Researches into the field of language of university prospectus have been done from the perspectives of CDA, discourse analysis, genre analysis, and marketization in higher education. Fewer researches have been conducted from linguistic perspective and cross linguistic perspective.

Askehave (2007), for instance, conducted research on the marketisation of higher education from CDA perspective. He studied international prospectus and found that universities are presenting themselves by offering 'extra' services to the prospective students, i.e., counseling and accommodation. Bhatia (1993) and Osman in (2008) conducted research on genre analysis on promotion letters and academic brochures. Osman (2005) examined the corporate brochures from academic institutions are promotional in nature by using promotional strategies instead of corporate and informative strategies. Previous research into university prospectuses is rather limited in the field of discourse analysis, but some research has been conducted into the discursive practices concerning the marketisation of higher education by analyzing other genres such as academic mission statements (Connell & Galasinski, 1998) and brochures (Osman, 2008).

The current research has collected data from 200 online universities prospectuses of India and Pakistan. The reason to choose these two countries is that these countries were once part of each other and had same English language usage. Three sections have included, i.e., About us, facilities and VC messages. Very limited set of data was used in previous researches and confined to 2 to 11 universities brouchers. The corpus was compiled from 1 to 3 categories.

The present research has taken electronic medium for the linguistic analysis, i.e., online university websites which is a nascent and novel idea as compared to other researches. The current research is focused on linguistic aspects and the corpus is compiled from 200 universities with three different categories to investigate the language used in online university prospectuses and establish online university prospectus as promotional register.

1.1 Research Questions

The aim of the research is to answering the following questions:

- Which category of verbs are significantly identified to reflect the language of university as promotional in nature?

The related sub questions of this research are illustrated below:

- Which specific semantic category of verbs is pervasively used in particular part of prospectus?
- Do verb categories with respect to the parts of prospectus vary country to country in online university prospectus?

1.2 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this research are:

- To investigate the categories of verbs which is pervasively used in particular part of prospectus.
- To investigate how verb categories vary country to country in online university prospectus.
- To establish the language of prospectus as promotional register on the basis of verbs which are pervasively used in it.

1.3 Delimitations of the Study

- For this study only three kinds of verbs, i.e., Private verbs and Suasive verbs are investigated in terms of their Semantic Category.
- Verbs were identified through specific sections of 200 online prospectuses.
- Only three Sections of Prospectus were included, i.e., about us, facilities and VC message from online university prospectuses.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A university prospectus is basically a document of the university's programmes and activities, designed primarily to inform prospective students about the university's entry requirements and its available programmes, although it is not uncommon for universities to package the information in such a way as to persuade prospective students to apply for admission.

Higher education is established as global phenomena. HEIs applying such marketing startegies which occupy larger space to enhance its scope internationally or globally (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Faiclough (1993, p. 193) observed that HE marketing strategies are tailor made product which sold its services to the prospective students. Moreover, with the increasing communicative function, i.e., promotion, HEIs have transformed their roles with state policies and strategies (Fairclough, 2008, p. 131).

In the spotlight of previous researches CDA and marketing were the two main perspectives to examine how institutional prospectuses use strategic marketing by the use of language however no research has been conducted specifically from linguistic perspective. All these information in prospectus accentuates the promotion of university towards its target customers. In this way, the lines between telling and selling are blurred (Fairclough, 1994, p. 257). Consequently, university prospectuses are more promotional and less informative, as the emphasis shifts from telling to selling. In particular, CDA practitioners are also interested to investigate how university's authority relations and identities are realized discursively through their prospectus. Fairclough focused on the diachronic study of various British prospectuses that seem to be influence their discursive practices. Fairclough had done diachronic study on the marketization of discursive practices in British University prospectus of 1967 and 1993. He found that there is no use of pronouns in the prospectus of 1967, so the interaction with the target audience is zero.

According to Fairclough (2001) noticed that there is a common use of pronoun you in university prospectuses to express a personal solidarity between the target reader and university. However, the identity of reader is anonymous to the university. Hartely (2008, p.365) stated that earlier researches relegated the advertising perspective of higher education institutes. Their core business was providing information about academic programs. Corporate brochures and university prospectus use a blend of colorful visual with promotional discourse deploy intentionally to represent institution.

Osman (2008) noted that corporate brochures from academic institution use promotional strategies for the promotion of these institutions of higher education. These persuasive strategies can be achieved through persuasive use of language. It includes certain syntactic choices that appeal the target students. They are selling their products to the potential customer through persuasive use of language. As a result, the function of prospectus shifts from telling to selling as the Fairclough stated in the diachronic study of British universities.

Osman (2005) noticed that Malaysian universities are increasingly publishing promotional or informative literature in form of brochures or leaflets to introduce new academic programs offered by universities. From this advertising perspective, universities are re-branding their traditional image by employing new strategies of marketing to promote their services and products.

Ashkhave (2007) noted the discourse of HE is very rare in the light of marketing and advertisement because many of the genres are working as completely promotional. Previous researches on university prospectus have been done in the field of critical discourse analysis and discourse analysis to analyze the discursive practices in higher education. Genre analysis is applied for the analysis of marketization of higher education and mostly printed prospectuses were selected to accomplish the research. As Bhatia (1999, p. 24) pointed out that medium factor, i.e., printed and web based prospectuses plays a dynamic and complex role in professional writings. Although printed prospectuses are significant nowadays but access of online prospectuses use certain persuasive strategies to attract the potential customers by enabling them direct link to the concerned departments and official web links. The current research use Biber's Multidimensional model (1988) which would be useful to analyze the co-occurrence of linguistic variation across languages. Cross-linguistic analysis of register variation are essential for the development of comprehensive text types. MD approach is particularly well suited to cross-linguistic comparisons because it is based on the co-occurrence patterns that are well

represented in each language, reflecting the communicative functions that are well represented in the corresponding culture.

In this way, online university websites are more useful for the present research because due to the increasing competition among universities, these universities tend to use more persuasive language to enhance the reputation and recruit more students. This use of persuasive language is useful to investigate the nature of language of websites in the present research.

3. Research Methodology

The underpinning research illustrates both qualitative and quantitative analysis in the interpretation of identified linguistic features from corpus based findings. This section explains the procedure of data collection to compile a representative size of corpus. The researcher undertook the purposeful sampling techniques to collect the data from online university prospectus. For the current research, the researcher targeted to collect data from 200 online university prospectus. The researcher obtained online data from two countries, i.e., Pakistan and India top 100 universities were taken from each individual country. Through purposeful sampling approach, total three categories were selected from the institutional prospectus of each country. Three categories were taken to compile the corpus. These categories were namely as, About us, department, facilities, library and Vice Chancellor message. The times in which the researcher obtained the data from online prospectus were from 1st February, 2014 to 1st March, 2014.

The researcher also edited the text file while copying data from online university prospectus and then paste into the word document files. The name of the countries were abbreviated as PAK for Pakistan, IND for India. Similarly, name of the sections were abbreviated as Abt for About us, FC for Facilities and VCM for Vice Chancellor message.

For the current research, the well suited methodological approach is multidimensional analysis tagger analysis (MAT). The analyzed files with the help of MAT Tagger showed the frequency of token for all linguistic as per 100. The researcher copied the frequency counts of Private verbs, Suasive verbs and pasted it to excel sheets. Before pasting it to the excel sheet, the researcher maintained one excel sheet for each individual country. While pasting, it was essentially kept in mind that scores were recorded on excel sheet according to the two selected categories. After pasting the frequencies of verbs, the researcher turned the raw frequencies of verbs into normalized frequencies. The data was normalised to 1000 words. The formula of normalization was taken from Biber (1988).

$$\frac{\text{Frequency of particular linguistic feature}}{\text{Total Length of the text}} * 1000$$

As the research was microscopic in nature, so the researcher done one more step to visualize the pattern of selected features by clicking the button of 'inspect' and selected the MAT tagged file. The inspect tool displayed the six dimensions from which the researcher marked those dimension to visualize the results of selected linguistic feature and investigate the pattern of their communicative functions. The researcher copied the sample text from tagged coloured text and interpret the results with help the microscopic analysis of semantic category of verbs.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Cross- Linguistics Comparison of Semantic Verbs Across Different Countries Categories

This chapter discusses the quantitative findings of Private Verbs, and Suasive Verbs in online university prospectuses. The chapter also shows the grammatical characteristics of each feature and then functionally interpret each linguistic feature in a descriptive and comprehensible way. The grammatical functions performed by these features vary according to the context by their lexical association. The quantitative findings show the highest maximum to lowest minimum frequency of verb in each category. Biber's book LGSWE (1999) is considered to investigate the valancy patterns of verb as well as discourse functions performed by each identified verb in text sample. This comparative study has been conducted between two countries. It reveals that certain linguistic feature is pervasively used among different sections of prospectus which makes the language of online university prospectus informative as well as promotional one.

4.1 Comparison of Sections of India

4.1.1 Comparison of Private Verbs

Sample Text

The university also offers several programs through distance learning. The university has **established** placement cell in each of its institutes to train and guide….

Discussion on findings

According to the quantitative findings it is noted that there is a high frequency of private verbs in the category of 'About us'. The identified private verbs are found in a clause of second sentence. The investigated structural pattern of *established* is as followed: Inanimate subject is followed by an auxiliary verb which has main verb

established that is followed by number of noun phrases. Both verbs *established* and *finding* are from two semantic domain of verbs, i.e., private verb. The verb has transitivity function which requires a direct object to describe the complete process denote by semantic agent. The communicative function illustrated by this structure is to facilitate the students of distance learning. We have found inanimate subject *the university* at the topic position which is denoting the action of facilitation for students. In the same sentence, the verb *finding* is identified as a transitive verb and performs the communicative function of both activity and facility verbs. Sometimes, the activity verbs convey the sense of facilitation when the subject is inanimate object and performing the role of agent or doer of action which facilitates the recipient with instrument. The instrument is denoted as providing training and guiding. In this way, the students maintain their career with their best.

4.2.2 Comparison of Suasive Verbs

Sample Text

During the meeting, librarians came up with a consolidated list of new resources **required** for 2013. This group also decided to meet at least twice in a year in different locations....

Discussion on findings

The above text has been taken from the facilities section due to high distribution of suasive verbs. The structural pattern of identified verb is as followed: the initial position of subject is occupied by adverbial phrase which is followed by a word *librarians* which is followed by verb in past participle form *came up* that is preceded by a prepositional phrase. This prepositional phrase is connected with another verb *required* occurred with direct object *for 2013* due to its transitive nature. The verb *required* is from class of facilitation verb. The associated communicative function with this verb is the maintenance of list to collect new resources for the learners. So that, the students enhance their learning skills by taking benefits from advanced collection of books. Hence, the communicative function proved that verb is denoting the action of facilitation by updating the resources of learning.

4.3 Comparison of Section of Pakistan

4.3.1 Comparison of Private Verbs

Sample Text

NMF, as a seat of learning, is **known** for its academic excellence, and recognize, across the world, as one of the leading institutions of higher education in Pakistan….

Discussion on findings

According to the highest distribution pattern of private verbs, the text is taken from the category of 'About us'. The identified verbs in the above text are from the semantic category of mental verbs. *Greenwich* has performed the role of subject and the valency pattern of verb *known* consists on preposition phrase at post predicate position. The verb performs variety of communicative functions. The verb is reporting about the prestigious status of university due to its academic achievements and is well-known around the world. This quality of university mentally persuade the students of Pakistan as well as international student to seek admission in it

4.3.2 Comparison of Suasive Verbs

Sample Text

Greenwich is fast moving towards its dreams, helped by the continued support of the Punjab government on the one hand and the local people on the other…….

Discussion on findings

This sample text illustrates the structural pattern of identified Suasive verbs which interpret the communicative functions according to its investigated grammatical pattern. The verb moving is identified in the first sentence of the text in progressive aspect and act as intransitive verb within the structure. The verb moving pre-modified by a noun and by an adjective and post-modified by a prepositional phrase and a clause with the omission of that complementizer. This verb is dynamic activity verb because the verb is occur with progressive. Most importantly, the verb moving denotes the action done by the verb that is occurring from a long period of time. The adjective also adds more meaning in the verb. It shows the progress of the university which has made over the time and still is in the progress to achieve its highest destination. Progressive aspect also highlight the element of persuasion which attract the prospective students. The university admire the help of Punjab government and the local people who took certain steps to achieve its goal.

5. Conclusion

From the above findings of the conducted research, it is investigated that online university prospectus of educational institutes are increasingly performing a role of marketization along with persuading and informing the target audience through persuading language. Moreover, it is found out that both categories of verbs, i.e., Private and Suasive verbs is more frequent in all the sections of Pakistan as compared to India. The private category of verbs is mostly consisted on mental and activity verbs (Biber, 1999) which makes the language of prospectus more persuasive towards the target audience and established the language of prospectus as promotional register.

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