

A Critical Genre Analysis of Academic Program Descriptions: A Critical Discourse Perspective on Constructing Authority and Standards in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper discusses academic program descriptions as a type of institutional discourse in which universities create a sense of authority, articulate academic standards, and establish themselves in the international higher education environment. It is based on the Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) and examines four program descriptions of Knowledge University, the University of Oxford, the American University in Cairo and the American University of Iraq/Sulaimani. The results indicate a large degree of dissimilarity in institutions in discursive practices. Prestigious universities are more likely to be based on implicit authority that is based on intellectual tradition and research culture, whereas those institutions that are more competitive are based on explicit legitimizing strategies that are based on a market-oriented discourse, employability rhetoric, and alignment with international academic framework. The other institutes exhibit a hybrid discursive style, integrating knowledge of discipline, with international orientation and a reined-in promotion feature. The paper also adopts Van Dijk's ideas of Critical Discourse Analysis (2008) so as to examine the cognitive construction of the institutional authority based on ideological representation and positive self-presentation. The findings verify the idea that descriptions of academic programs are not just informational texts, but strategic institutional genres which play informational, promotional and legitimizing roles at the same time. This paper, through a combination of CGA and a critical discourse approach, draws a description of the way universities strategically apply genre conventions and discourse so as to achieve credibility and wield symbolic power in a highly competitive.

Key Words : Critical Discourse Analysis - Academic Program Descriptions - Institutional Authority - Symbolic Capital - Marketization of Higher Education

تحليل نوع نقدي لا وصاف البرامج الأكاديمية: منظور خطاب نقدي عن بناء السلطة

والمعايير في التعليم العالي

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المخلص

تناقش هذه الورقة أوصاف البرامج الأكاديمية بوصفها نوعاً من الخطاب المؤسسي الذي تستخدمه الجامعات لبناء سلطة معرفية، وتحديد المعايير الأكاديمية، وترسيخ مكانتها في بيئة التعليم العالي الدولية. تعتمد الدراسة على تحليل النوع الخطابي النقدي (CGA) ، وتفحص أربعة أوصاف لبرامج أكاديمية في كل من جامعة المعرفة، وجامعة أكسفورد، والجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة، والجامعة الأمريكية في العراق/السليمانية. تشير النتائج إلى وجود تباين كبير بين المؤسسات في ممارساتها الخطابية؛ إذ تميل الجامعات المرموقة إلى الاعتماد على سلطة ضمنية تستند إلى التقاليد الفكرية وثقافة البحث العلمي، في حين تعتمد المؤسسات الأكثر تنافسية على استراتيجيات شرعنة صريحة قائمة على خطاب موجّه نحو السوق، والتركيز على قابلية التوظيف، والمواءمة مع الأطر الأكاديمية الدولية. أما المؤسسات الأخرى فتُظهر نمطاً خطابياً هجيناً يجمع بين المعرفة التخصصية والتوجه الدولي مع حضور ترويجي محدود. كما توظف الدراسة تحليل الخطاب النقدي عند فان دايك (2008) ، لفحص البناء المعرفي للسلطة المؤسسية من خلال التمثيل الأيديولوجي والتقديم الإيجابي للذات. وتؤكد النتائج أن أوصاف البرامج الأكاديمية ليست مجرد نصوص معلوماتية، بل هي أنواع خطابية مؤسسية استراتيجية تؤدي أدواراً معلوماتية وترويجية وشرعية في آنٍ واحد. ومن خلال الجمع بين تحليل النوع الخطابي النقدي والمقاربة النقدية للخطاب، تقدم الدراسة تصوراً لكيفية توظيف الجامعات للأنماط الخطابية بشكل استراتيجي من أجل تحقيق المصداقية وممارسة القوة الرمزية في سياق تنافسي عالي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي – أوصاف البرامج الأكاديمية – السلطة المؤسسية – رأس

المال الرمزي – تسليع التعليم العالي.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The current state of higher education is at the place of knowledge production, competition in the economy, and global restructuring. Universities are not viewed as closed worlds of intellectual inquiry anymore but exist in multifaceted socio-economic environments being influenced by globalization, managerial regimes, and market reforms. With institutional competition on the rise and the spread of global benchmarks, institutional communication is turning to strategic communication to help universities identify themselves, prove quality, and gain legitimacy. In this scenario, academic language is one of the main arenas where institutional power and educational norms are expressed, argued out and acted upon (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Over the past decades, higher education has been changing radically in terms of structure and ideology. As it is well known in the literature, the global universities have been experiencing massive transformation (Mautner, 2005, p. 103). These trends belong to socio-economic changes at large. The new forms of organizations, new forms of organizing, as Iellatchitch et al. (2003) note, have been caused by the drivers of change such as globalization, virtualization, demographic developments or changes in the values (p. 729).

These changes do not just represent internal institutional change but broader restructuring processes in terms of the operation and location of institutions. Some of the powerful forces that have influenced this shift include what has been termed as the incursion by markets ((O'Neill and Solomon, 1996, p. 82).

There have been major discursive impacts due to the growing symbiosis between universities and the business world. Structural change is not only organizational, but symbolic as, as Iellatchitch et al. (2003) point out, structure

both facilitates and constrains the action as well as action both extends and recreates structure (p. 730).

The new governance logics are thus reinforced through institutional discourse and reflected in it. According to Mautner (2005), the increasing inclination of state-owned institutions of higher education towards corporate sector has contributed immensely to the higher education debate (p. 2). Specifically, the rhetoric of the free market, which is most literally expressed in the lexis of business, has become well-grounded in the discursive repertoire used by the academic leaders (ibid). This change is not only a change in words, but it is also a change in the way in which institutions approach their mission, value and competitive positioning.

The close ties between institutional restructuring and diffusion of managerial norms and reconfiguration of professional fields are highly interconnected. According to Iellatchitch et al. (2003), the social fields are described as a playground or a battlefield where agents who possess a specific field-relevant capital attempt to seek further their position (p. 731).

The same applies to universities which are going after symbolic and financial capital in a progressively stratified academic environment. Mautner (2005) speaks of the proliferation of the norms and institutional structures typical of the commercial society to universities. It is through marketisation and managerialism therefore that the reinforcement of dynamics is done to redefine institutional communication and redefine the priorities of academia. This has led to the emergence of universities as not only a knowledge production centre but also a competitive organization that is sensitive to market needs (O'Neill and Solomon, 1996, p. 82).

Notably, the effects of these developments do not apply to individual systems of higher education but to a wider global change in higher education.

The adoption or importation of free market practices by the corporate sector and allowing themselves to be influenced by managerial doctrines mark the beginning of what has been dubbed entrepreneurial university model which focuses on competition, branding, and strategic positioning (Askehave, 2007, p. 724).

As empirical studies reveal, the promotional genres, including international student prospectuses, are attempting to create an image of the University and, accordingly, this is accompanied by the new trend in higher education, which is attempting to sell innovative products to the most demanding clients on the hunt after the optimal possible university experience (Askehave, 2007, p. 739).

The patterns of such discursive practices indicate that the competition at the global level increases the necessity of the institutions to position their programs in terms of the discourses of innovation, excellence and market responsiveness. Discourse is constitutive in this change. The conceptualization of language of the Critical Discourse Analysis approach does not consider the language as a description but as a social act, considering it as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1989 p. 18).

In this vein, institutional texts are not merely informative but also constitute and reproduce institutional identities and institutionalize specific perceptions of academic value. In fact, the linguistic representations inherent in the promotional university genres could be transferred to other university genres and this could eventually result in the alteration of social and professional roles of the universities (Askehave, 2007, p. 740).

As Mautner (2005) observes, “the rhetoric of the free market, manifested most tangibly in business-related lexis, is now firmly established in the discursive repertoire employed by academic leaders” (p. 95). In this regard, the

program descriptions take well-thought lexical and rhetorical approach that aligns the academic offerings with the concept of quality, innovation, and global competitiveness, thus, enhancing the credibility of the institutions in an ever competitive academic landscape.

In this sense, the description of academic programs can be viewed as a hybrid form of discourse that lies at the border of education and institutional branding. They not only convey disciplinary information, but encode ideological meanings, which are indicators of broader changes in tertiary education. As Mautner (2005) argues, such keywords “carry significant ideological loads that reflect the colonisation of academia by the market” (p. 95). Consequently, the language of program descriptions is a place in which symbolic capital is developed and negotiated so that universities can find their place in the world and at the same time, it proclaims to be in compliance with international standards and institutional credibility.

From this point, the discussion can be further developed through a critical discourse perspective. These institutional texts can also be understood as sites where knowledge, ideology, and power intersect in subtle but influential ways. Drawing on Van Dijk’s *Discourse and Power* (2008), “discourse needs to be produced and understood in terms of various kinds of political cognition, such as ideologies.” (p. ix). Within this framework, academic program descriptions do not merely convey information; they actively construct mental models of academic excellence, institutional prestige, and student identity. Through strategies of positive self-presentation and selective emphasis, universities generate favorable institutional images while normalizing values such as competitiveness, innovation, and global relevance. In doing so, they contribute to the reproduction of dominant ideological frameworks within contemporary higher education.

1.2 Research Questions

- How do academic program descriptions use various discursive strategies to build institutional power in different universities at varying levels of prestige?
- To which extent does the hybridization of informational, promotional, and legitimizing discourse influence the representation of academic programs in the modern higher education?
- How does a rhetorical structure and lexical choices in describing academic programs show the impact of marketization and global competition in higher education?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

One of the most prominent analyses of the marketization of higher learning in terms of Critical Discourse Analysis is introduced by Fairclough (1993), who believes that the contemporary universities are more influenced by the logic of the market than strictly academic values. Fairclough defines discourse as a form of social practice and shows the gradually increasing colonization of academic genres by promotional and managerial discourses (p. 134).

By analyzing via the text of university prospectuses, job adverts and curriculum materials the change in the stable institutional authority to more personalized, promotional and consumer-based address is evidenced. Such a shift can be seen as something more socio-economically based on the developments of the late capitalist societies where universities are starting to perform as though they are regular businesses aiming to sell their products to consumers (p. 144). Thus, it can be said that Fairclough's study is noteworthy in

terms of its emphasis on the role of the alterations in the textual features, i.e. modality, the use of pronouns, or even promotional lexis in indicating more fundamental alterations in the relations of power and institutional identity.

Based on the Bourdieu theory of field, capital, and habitus, Iellatchitch at al. (2003) use his theory to redefine careers as being played out in the structured and market-driven career fields within a realm of power relations and symbolic struggles. According to them, careers should be viewed as movements within social domains in which actors struggle to attain desirable types of capital and point to the fact that careers are movements of the actors across a social structure through time (p. 730).

Iellatchitch at al. (2003) take a multi-level approach in which they emphasize the circularity of structure and action, with structure constraining and empowering action, and action replicating and following structure (ibid). Their structure shows that institutional rules, economic systems and legal frameworks influence how career capital has been recognized, thus strengthening the hierarchies and inequalities of professional careers. This Bourdieusian method has been specifically applied to the current research as it offers theoretical instruments of analyzing how program descriptions can serve as a discursive resource by which universities gain symbolic capital, establish acceptable norms and locate themselves within larger hierarchies of higher education.

In an attempt to explore how globalization and competition transform the discourse of higher education, Teo (2006) comparatively conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis of prospectuses in two universities in Singapore, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU). Using Fairclough's framework, Teo illustrates how more universities are becoming like a business that competes to sell its products to the consumer (Fairclough, 1993, as cited in Teo, 2006, p. 96). It has been found that the

discursive strategies are contrasting: NTU is relatively authoritative, institution-oriented and SMU is student-centered, promotional in its tactics and approaches students as active participants, as opposed to passive recipients. Teo also mentions that the informational role of university prospectuses as a way of telling is increasingly conceding to the marketing demands, creating a blur between telling and selling (p. 98). This research offers empirical proof that higher education texts do not merely mirror the market pressures, but actually reorganize institutional identities and power relations, thus, maintaining the overall marketisation of higher education discourse.

Chiper (2006) explores the talk of the Romanian universities as an extension of other socio-political and institutional reform, especially in the case of European Union integration. Based on Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper analyzes the university web pages, prospectuses and promotional literature, showing how discourse of higher education turns into a place of change through the forces of so-called marketization and the generalization of promotion as a communicative act (p. 713). In addition, Romanian university language is extremely colonized by European Union lectures and corporate management language that includes mission statements, quality manuals, strategic plans, and managerial terms (ibid).

Hartley and Morpew (2008) use the content analysis approach to conduct a large-scale study of 48 college viewbooks in order to analyze the message the universities send to potential students and how these messages can be interpreted through the lenses of the larger market forces in higher education. Their conclusions show that most of them are more of what they state as a high privatized version of a college education in which their institutions are less focused on civic or democratic activities and much more on individual achievement, employment growth, college life, and student satisfaction (p. 672).

With the help of a critical hypermodal approach based on social semiotics, Zhang and O'Halloran (2013) trace the discursive development of the website of the National University of Singapore in fourteen-year period. Their longitudinal study shows the apparent change in institutional communication in line with the broader processes of higher education marketization. The site started as an informational site where it offered academic resources and expertise of the institution. However, as time progressed, its discussion started covering more on potential students as purchasers of education products (p. 468).

Later on, the image of education shifted away, in the later stages, to learning and mentorship to lifestyle, personal change, and narratives which were more experiential in nature and the university was placed within a global as opposed to a national society. In this work, empirical data is presented demonstrating that the websites of universities are no longer the passive communication of the offerings of the institutions but actively reorganize the educational meaning as it is required by the forces of neoliberalism and globalization, thus becoming an extension of the market-driven remodeling of higher education (ibid).

2.2 Research Gap

Though past studies have offered valuable information on the discourse of higher education, the majority of such studies have been done using the paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Previous studies have been primarily concerned with the discovery of ideological framework, relations of power, and the role of marketization in institutional communication. Those studies have shown that the use of promotional language, managerial and consumer-oriented discourse is a growing trend in the presentation of universities in public communication.

Even though Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially in the work of Fairclough, involves the detailed examination of the textual features and the recognition of discourse as a type of social practice, the analytical focus of CDA is predominantly the relations between discourse, ideology and power. Although Fairclough does address genre and textual organization, these elements are generally discussed within the framework of more general socio-political processes instead of as being strategic, functional units of professional communication by themselves. This has led to a lack of interest in the systematic organisation of certain institutional genres, including descriptions of academic programs, to meet various communicative functions in the workplace. This leaves a vacuum to strategies like Critical Genre Analysis which anticipates the existence of genre conventions, rhetorical structure, and communicative purpose in the construction of institutional discourse.

The other weakness of the available literature is that most of the research has covered general institutional information like prospectuses, mission statements, promotion brochures, and websites of universities. These researches demonstrate that there is indeed promotion and managerial discourse in communication in higher education, yet there is a lack of exploration on academic program descriptions as a specific genre of institutional discourse. The description of programs has a special place in the university communication, as it is both disciplinary knowledge and academic standards on the one hand, and the place where, on the other hand, prospective students are also addressed.

Furthermore, the Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) has been applied to the discourse of higher education institutions rather rarely. In contrast to conventional methods of discourse analysis, CGA is concerned with the way professional genres are used in an institutional setting and the strategic use of combining various communicative functions in a text. It is in this view that a

closer analysis of how institutional texts structure information, constitute authority and incorporate informational and promotional discourse within one genre is possible.

Consequently, the given research covers the identified gap, using Critical Genre Analysis to the analysis of academic program descriptions. The proposed study will shed more light through a more analyzing how these institutions are able to strategically build academic authority and legitimacy by focusing on the generic structure, rhetorical strategies, and communicative purposes of these texts.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper makes use of Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) as formulated by Bhatia (2004) to examine how the processes of eliciting authority and norms in descriptions of academic programs are discursively constructed. In this paper, the Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) by Bhatia (2004) has been applied to the analysis of the creation of institutional power and conventions of the academic practice in the description of academic programs. Though CGA moves forward arguments of other discourse-analytical traditions, it transcends the discourse as a type of ideology by anticipating genre as a strategic locus of a professional practice. Here the genres are not simply a textual form, but a socially enshrined, communicative practice whereby the institutions are actively constructing legitimacy, negotiating power and aiming at some institutional objectives.

Bhatia defines genre as an institutionalized communicative occurrence that can be defined by a similar communicative intent in a professional community. According to him, a genre is a distinguishable communicative event where a set of communicative intents are marked and known by the members of the professional or academic community in which it is performed on a regular basis (Bhatia, 2004, p. 23). These functions define the rhetorical structure as

well as the language selections of the text and determine how institutions organize discourse so as to accomplish their strategic interests.

Genre analysis emerged from what Bhatia describes as a scholarly attempt to produce “thicker descriptions of language use” that move beyond the immediate situational context to explain how language functions within institutional and professional settings. Rather than offering only surface-level textual description, genre analysis seeks to explain why particular linguistic forms and rhetorical patterns appear in specific institutional contexts and how they serve broader communicative and social purposes. (Bhatia, 2004, p. 22).

One of the main contributions of Critical Genre Analysis is the fact that it allows one to see the strategic and ideological aspects of professional communication. The institutional texts often serve but one or two purposes at the same time, that is, the informational, persuasive, and promotional purposes. Bhatia points out that professional genres usually embrace hybridization and genre mixing and she adds that professional genres are rarely pure and are normally colonized by other discourses and are highly interdiscursive in nature (Bhatia, 2004, p. 84). This hybridity is specifically observed in institutional communication in which informational discourse is interwoven with promotional and managerial rhetoric.

Academic program descriptions provide one of the explicit instances of such hybridization in the framework of higher education. Though they seem to be used as mostly information-oriented texts describing curricula, learning outcomes, and academic requirements, they are also used as a tool of institutional positioning and branding. Universities, via the use of selective lexis, evaluative language, and even allusions to global standards are strategically creating legitimacy and power in an increasingly competitive academic world.

The second critical approach is known as Critical Genre Analysis which focuses on the need to study genres in terms of their more large-scale socio-institutional contexts. Bhatia puts forward the view that the analysis of genres cannot be confined to the textual description; it needs to examine how traditions of genres are also embedded in professional practices and institutional organization because genres are manifestations of the cultures of disciplinary practices and conventions that are developed within particular professional communities (Bhatia, 2004, p. 22). Thus, this point of view allows scholars to relate the linguistic patterns to the larger institutional processes like marketization, globalization, and the struggle to accumulate symbolic capital.

This conception of genre as a cross-disciplinary communicative practice situated within institutional settings, therefore, allows the analysis of the academic program descriptions as a strategic form of discursive representation whereby universities define their academic identity and institutional locations. Bhatia (2004) emphasizes the association of genre and register as well as disciplinary variation in institutional discourse in discussing the creation of the genre theory. He describes the direction which the early linguistic approaches to discourse variation took, as register analysis and then developing into the genre-based views, which consider communicative ends in professional settings. Bhatia writes:

Discourse variation in academic, professional or workplace contexts has been popularly analysed first in terms of registers, and then more recently as genres, but both of them take into account some aspects of disciplinary variation. Registers have been variously identified, often on the basis of a specific configuration of three contextual factors: *field of discourse, mode of discourse and tenor of discourse* (Halliday et al. 1964).

Closely related to registers we find *disciplines*, which invariably display predominant characteristics of the subject matter that they represent. However, the two are not synonymous. One represents the content, whereas the other represents the language associated with it. In the early years of ESP work, we often found these two terms considerably overlapping. Genres, on the other hand, cut across disciplines in an interesting manner. We often find textbooks displaying typical generic characteristics across a wide range of disciplines, which may include a number of disciplines in humanities, natural sciences or social sciences. They all seem to be (Bhatia, 2004, p. 30).

In addition to Critical Genre Analysis, this study draws on Van Dijk's *Discourse and Power* (2008) where argues that "power involves control, namely by (members of) one group over (those of) other groups" (p. 9). From this perspective, academic program descriptions function as discursive practices that shape shared mental representations about universities, academic quality, and professional success. This approach makes it possible to move beyond the structural organization of genre to examine how discourse influences the way readers perceive institutional legitimacy and academic value.

The integration of Van Dijk's framework with Critical Genre Analysis allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how authority operates at both the textual and cognitive levels. While CGA explains how genres are strategically structured to fulfill communicative purposes within professional contexts, the socio-cognitive approach reveals how these structures contribute to processes of positive self-presentation and ideological reproduction. In the case of academic program descriptions, this means that linguistic and rhetorical choices do not only serve institutional goals, but also reinforce broader assumptions about excellence, competitiveness, and global relevance in higher education. As a result, the analysis captures both the functional organization of

discourse and its role in shaping knowledge, belief systems, and power relations within the academic field.

4. Methodology

This paper uses qualitative discourse-analytical method that draws upon Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) put forward by Bhatia (2004). The use of CGA especially in studying institutional texts makes it a good fit since it gives the researcher an opportunity to study not only the linguistic patterns, but also the professional and institutional frameworks that influence the conventions of the genre. According to Bhatia, genre analysis must not be limited to surface text characteristics, but to the analysis of how the practices of the profession, and the institutions, affect discourse construction and discourse interpretation (Bhatia, 2004, p. 17). In this regard, the methodology is a combination of textual analysis and the review of communicative intentions, as well as institutional roles of the academic program description.

Along with the genre-based analysis, this study adopts a critical discourse perspective through Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to examine the relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power. Van Dijk (2008) argues that critical discourse studies focus on those properties of discourse that contribute to "the expression, confirmation, reproduction or challenge of the social power of the speaker(s) or writer(s) as members of dominant groups" (p. 5). In this sense, discourse is not an impoverished medium of communication, but a place, in which power relations are practiced and reproduced via linguistic and rhetorical decisions. Based on this, the analysis serves no longer the structural and functional aspects of academic program descriptions but on the way these texts create a perception in readers by creating specific mental images of institutional authority, academic excellence, and professional success. This intertwined methodology allows to get a better perspective on the manner in

which genre conventions are interconnected with other processes of ideological signification and power relations in the experience of higher education.

4.1 Research Design

The research design is comparative qualitative because it is aimed to analyze how various universities assemble academic authority and standards within the discourse of program descriptions. The academic program descriptions found on the official university sites were chosen as the primary data set due to the fact that it is one of the most important institutional genres by which universities convey their academic identity, standards, and institutional values to the potential students and stakeholders.

The comparative design facilitates the discursive variation in institutions that may vary in terms of prestige, geographical location and institutional placement in the world of higher education. In this comparison, the study will establish how linguistic and rhetorical strategies are applied to form legitimacy and symbolic power within various institutional contexts.

4.2 Data Selection

The dataset will be composed of four academic program descriptions that will be based on the official university websites. They are digital texts of programs of institutions that are at various levels in the international higher education ladder. The following programs have been chosen:

Business Administration-Knowledge University.

- English Language and Literature- University of Oxford.

MA in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language The American University in Cairo (AUC).

- International Relations- American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS).

The samples were chosen based on purposive sampling since they represent different institutional profiles and communicative orientations. Oxford program is a very popular institution in the world and in most cases, it brings tacit authority founded on the basis of academic tradition and excellence of research. Knowledge University, in its turn, is a more market-driven environment, in which the outline of programs is likely to emphasize on employability and professional skills. AUC program can be regarded as an example of disciplinary specialization and academic expertise and the program of the AUIS can be regarded as an example of an interdisciplinary and globally oriented discourse in line with modern tendencies of international education.

All the program descriptions were accessed via the official university websites, to guarantee authenticity and institutional authority. The whole description of the program is not reproduced in its entirety due to the space constraints, but some excerpts of it were selected to be analysed.

5. Analysis & Discussion

5.1 Knowledge University: Market-Oriented Legitimacy.

The description of the program of Business Administration in Knowledge University shows a high implementation of both academic and market-oriented rhetoric. In terms of Critical Genre Analysis, the description of the aforementioned program demonstrates the process of genre hybridization i.e. formal informational scholarly writing is mixed with promotional and managerial speech. According to Bhatia (2004), professional genres can be characterized by a great level of interdiscursivity, whereby they utilize various discursive resources to achieve institutional objectives (p. 84). This hybridity is evident in the program description, which states:

The department of Business administration offers a Bachelor degree in business administration. The program is four years and provides students

with comprehensive knowledge of business theories and models and their application to real-world situations. The program also reflects business thoughts and practices within the regional and international arena. The department applies the bologna process starting from 2020 to reflect the actual market situation and fulfil organizational needs (Knowledge University).

This hybridization is reflected in the common application of market oriented lexical terms like *market needs*, *leadership quality*, *real world* consulting experience and labor market. In the example, the curriculum is described as the one that is aimed at meeting the requirements of the market and provides the students with the possibility to find improved opportunities. These phrases predetermine links between higher education and employability, representing the academic education as the engagement in the economic systems.

It is also dependent on the use of international educational frameworks to bring credibility to the institution by the text. The reference to the Bologna Process and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) serve as a legitimizing strategy to the program, to which the program is correlated with the established international academic standards. By using this reference, the institution tries to establish its authority by aligning itself to the education structures that are known all over the world.

Discourse is not an indifferent form of communication, but a place, in which power relationships are both practiced and reproduced by the means of linguistic and rhetorical decisions. In line with this, the discussion transcends the features of structure and functionality of academic program description to the aspects of how such texts influence readers in their perceptions by creating specific mental images of the institutional power, academic superiority and

career achievement. This multi-faced method allows seeing how genre schemes are tied to larger dynamics of ideological expression and power dynamics in the context of institutions of higher education.

5.2 University of Oxford: Power by means of intellectual Tradition.

The character of the discursive strategy in the program description of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford, in contrast to the highly promotional discourse of Knowledge University, is quite different. The writing is based on academic and intellectual style as the main point to be considered is the focus on scholarly tradition, the depth of history, and the expertise of research. It is this orientation which we might observe in the first statement:

The Oxford English Faculty is the largest English department in Britain. Students are taught in tutorials by a scholar active in their research field, many of whom also give lectures to all students in the English Faculty. You will therefore have the opportunity to learn from a wide range of specialist teachers (Oxford University).

In this text, there is an implicit prestige-building exercise, whereby power is being formed on a scale of references to institutional scale and research-based teaching. The credibility created by the text is through association of the program with academic authority and academic excellence as opposed to outright promotion.

It starts with the historical coverage of the field meaning that the course offers the students an opportunity to learn about writing in English since its introduction in Anglo- Saxon England to these days. The location of the program at such a time, makes the program a part of a long intellectual tradition implicating the prestige and authority of the institution in an oblique way. The text foreshadows the growth of analytical and interpretative skills that are linked

to studying literature as opposed to growing in employability or professional skills.

Based on the socio-cognitive approach developed in Van Dijck (Critical Discourse Analysis) this type of discourse rejoices in a technique of implicit positive intercourse, where institutional authority is built without any explicit promotional speech. Rather than addressing to market values, the text elicits collective cultural reputation of prestige, tradition, and academic excellence, whereby readers have the ability to draw their conclusions about superiority of the university. By so doing, the program description creates a mental image in which academic authority becomes naturalized and assumed in such a way that discursive information becomes natural, ensuring the elite position in the institution beyond overt but covert discursive strategies.

According to Van Dijk (2008), this is a discursive strategy that can be interpreted as a kind of implicit positive self-presentation where institutional power is developed by subtle means other than overtly. Rather than direct promotional discourse, the text focuses on scholarship, continuity of studying and research quality thus triggering common social ideologies regarding prestige and intellectual superiority.

5.3 AUC: Expertise in the field of discipline and specialization in a profession.

The description of the Master of Arts in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) at the American University in Cairo illustrates another variant of institutional positioning, which is the academic specialization and the selective promotional discourse. The text pays much attention to the disciplinary knowledge and professional preparation of the sphere of language teaching.

The courses have been structured to promote research as well as to develop highly trained teachers. In addition, a number of issues related to

the role of Arabic in modern society are freshly examined, such as current methods of teaching Arabic to children, reform of the writing system, grammar reform movements, and the problem of diglossia. The TAFL program seeks to inspire new approaches to these problems (AUC).

From a Critical Genre Analysis perspective, this extract realizes a disciplinary-legitimation move, in which authority is constructed through the deployment of specialized academic content. The reference to topics such as “*diglossia*,” “*grammar reform*,” and “*methods of teaching Arabic*” reflects a high degree of technical lexis, signaling alignment with established linguistic and pedagogical traditions. At the same time, the phrase “*develop highly trained teachers*” introduces a professional-preparation move, linking academic knowledge to pedagogical practice without resorting to overt market-oriented rhetoric. Such dual emphasis points to the way the text can strategically combine both the disciplinary and professional applicability of a particular textual communicative structure.

Academic program descriptions can be understood as part of a broader cluster of academic introductory genres that share common communicative goals and linguistic conventions. In this regard, academic program descriptions may be regarded as belonging to a larger category of academic introductory genres that have the same communicative goals and linguistic expectations. As Bhatia (2004) notes, academic introductions “share a broadly identified communicative purpose, a range of lexico-grammatical resources, and... academic knowledge” (p. 65). This perspective helps explain how program descriptions employ specialized terminology and structured rhetorical strategies to present disciplinary expertise and professional preparation, thereby contributing to the construction of institutional authority.

The view is useful to understand how problematic language is used to mobilize discipline-specific language to describe a program in the context of institutional discourse to provide the presentation of professional preparation. This focus is reflected by the application of technical academic language, including the appeal to the linguistic analysis, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, research methods, and pragmatics. This kind of terminology is indicative of the professionalism of the field and helps to build the authority of academics by emphasizing the theoretical and methodological basis of the program.

This perspective is useful for understanding how specialized language is mobilized within institutional discourse to present academic programs as sites of professional preparation. In the case of the TAFL program, this focus is reflected in the use of technical academic terminology related to linguistic analysis, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, research methodologies, and pragmatics. This kind of language prefigures the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this area and indicates the academic direction of the program. The presence of this authoritative diction strengthens the dominance of the program by stressing the fact that it is based on the tradition of linguistic and pedagogical practices.

According to Van Dijk (2008), this discursive pattern is a manifestation of a kind of authority construction, which is based on the knowledge of the expert, but not on chances of invoking the market. The use of discipline-specific terminology such as “diglossia,” “grammar reform,” and “second language acquisition” functions as a marker of specialized knowledge; this can be read as a signifier of expertise specificity which is conducive to limited access to specific areas of academic expertise.

5.4 AUIS: B.A International Relations

Unlock Your World with a Degree in International Relations at AUIS
Are you ready to explore the world and shape its future? The American University of Iraq-Sulaimani (AUIS) is thrilled to introduce our new major in International Relations (IR), where you can embark on an exciting journey of global discovery and impact. . Here’s why choosing IR at AUIS is not just cool but a pathway to limitless opportunities. The World is Your Classroom Imagine having the world as your classroom. At AUIS, our IR major offers unique connections to study programs in Europe and East Asia, providing you with an international perspective like no other. You'll have the chance to immerse yourself in diverse cultures, gain a deeper understanding of global issues, and build connections that will last a lifetime.

From a Critical Genre Analysis perspective, the extract can be classified as a predominantly promotional subgenre embedded within an academic context. The lexical and rhetorical choices, such as “Unlock Your World,” “exciting journey of global discovery,” and “limitless opportunities,” function as persuasive devices rather than informational elements. Such phrases are not part of the picture of curriculum, structure, or academic content but rather serve as evaluative and affective lexis that is aimed at enticing future students. As a result, the informative intent of the text is changed to the sale of the program as a life experience and a dream product, which means that emotive appeal is given a priority over informative content.

Furthermore, the text employs a consistent **direct address strategy**, evident in expressions such as “Are you ready...?”, “you can embark...,” and “you'll have the chance...”. This rhetorical pattern constructs the reader as an active participant and positions them within a **consumer-oriented framework**.

This rhetorical device makes the reader an active participant and it places him/her in a consumer-oriented system. Here, the potential student is not depicted as an inactive receiver of knowledge, but as an agent of decision making who makes comparisons between the options provided. This kind of positioning can be matched to the wider discourse of marketization in higher education where educational services are packaged as commodities and students as clients. This change indicates a revolution in the institutional form of communication where persuasive appeal and individual appeal are ultimately taking the place of the conventional forms of talk in academics.

In Van Dijk's terms (2008), this discursive strategy can be a kind of positive self-presentation and positioning of the reader with the help of persuasive and affective discourse. Discursive control can also be taken to imply control over the minds of the receivers; in other words, their knowledge, opinions, attitudes and ideologies. This reflects the role of the AUIS program description, with its emotional language and direct address, in not simply marketing the program, but in doing so to construct the perceptions and expectations of readers,

6. Conclusion

This paper has shown how descriptions of academic programs are not just informational pieces, but carefully crafted institutional genres, using which universities are bargaining authority, legitimacy, as well as positioning in the global higher education marketplace. Using Critical Genre Analysis, the results demonstrate that various institutions use varied discursive strategies based on their positioning in context and institutional agenda. Whereas in prestigious universities like the University of Oxford, where implied authority is based on intellectual tradition and research culture, other institutions, especially those in a

competitive market, use more explicit approaches founded on market-oriented discourse, employability, and alignment to international frameworks.

Meanwhile, the analysis reveals that there are numerous examples of program descriptions that are characterized by different levels of hybridization of genres (the combination of academic, promotional, and legitimizing functions within one text). The hybridity is an extension of the wider marketization and globalization in which universities are becoming more of a learning and competitive institution. Here, language can be seen as a major resource on which symbolic capital is built and institutional hierarchies replicated.

Addressing the problem of academic program description as a particular institutional genre, this work helps to eliminate the gap in the literature and illustrates the usefulness of Critical Genre Analysis in the strategic structuring of the discourse in the professional setting. Finally, the research indicates that institutional communication is not a neutral process, but a type of strategic practice within the context of which the universities actively constitute their academic identity, power, and international relevance. Furthermore, by following Van Dijk socio-cognitive approach, the research emphasizes the way these discursive practices not only organize the institutional communication, but also create a sense of collective perception and establish ideological orientations within the field of higher education.

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