

Discourse and Marketization of Higher Education in Britain: Advertisements of MA
Translation Programmes

GUAN Xian

EID: xianguan2

Abstract

The essay compares two advertisements of MA translation programmes in Britain so as to discuss the discourse of marketization in higher education. Fairclough (1995) observes that the discourse of marketization is evident in higher education as part of the trend of globalization. This essay is an analysis of how British universities attract students through the discourse of marketization. The comparison is conducted looking into textual practice and discourse practice. Through comparison between two British universities, different strategies of marketization are examined, shedding light on the general trend in higher education in Britain.

Keywords: marketization, higher education, institution, textual practice, discourse practice

Discourse and Marketization of Higher Education in Britain: Advertisements of MA Translation Programmes

Introduction

With the globalization spreading over the world, increasingly more undergraduate students pursue further study abroad. Britain is one of destination countries for students to study and is playing a leading role in the global education industry. In this country of many leading universities there is keen competition between them for prospective students. However, “there has also been pressure for academics to see students as ‘customers’” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 141). In other words, universities attempt to attract students so as to increase their income. These universities sell themselves by displaying various prospectuses with unique educational ideas. This is the reason why the “promotional culture” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 141) or “consumer culture” (as cited in Magistro) are popular nowadays. The essay focuses on the marketization of discursive practices in contemporary British higher education. The case study is about prospectuses of two MA translation programmes in the University of Bath and the University of Sheffield. The translation programme aims to cultivate bilingual talents, attracting students from all over the world. My study of this programme in this paper looks at what discourse strategies are used to attract students are its “customers” both locally and from abroad.

A Comparative analysis: Textual practice, discourse practice

In this section, two institutions’ advertisements are compared from the perspective of textual practice and discourse practice, with special reference to their different marketization strategies used.

Textual practice

Visuals. In any advertisements, visuals play an important part in attracting readers. Visuals contain not only colors, graphics, layout, but also contents that fulfill promotional

purposes. Magistro contends that “visuals contribute to capture the readers’ attention and graphically guide them through the information presented in the text.” (Magistro, n.d., p. 162) Thus, visuals serve as a means to strengthen the effectiveness of marketization. Layout and content will be discussed respectively in terms of visuals. First, as for the layout, there is a big difference between the advertisement of the University of Bath and that of the University of Sheffield. In the webpage of the University of Bath, the column of qualifications and durations is placed at the top. While for the University of Sheffield, the remarks by a graduate are at the top of the webpage. The remarks in bold type with double quotation marks are very salient at first sight. In general, the layout of Bath is concise with most of textual information presented on the webpage. The webpage of Sheffield is very catchy. Apart from the basic information, it also contains quoted remarks, image, video and many website links. Second, the content could be compared in several ways. Both of these two universities have a video in their advertisements. The video of Bath shows a staff talking about the partnership between Bath and the EU. It foregrounds the information regarding the strength of the university. Meanwhile, the staff lists some statistics in the video, which is a kind of “pro-scientific and technology discourse” (as cited in Xiong). These objective statistics manifest the achievement of the university, in keeping with the purpose of marketization. For the video of Sheffield, there is an alumnus stating her experience and her reason for studying at this university. Comparing both videos, what Bath presents is much more objective, while the video of Sheffield is from the perspective of a postgraduate, which is subjective. Besides, in the advertisement of Bath, the part of financial information provides readers with a link so that they find the listed tuition fees. The advertisement of Sheffield also has a part named fees and funding. As long as readers input the start year and mode of study, the tuition fee will be presented automatically, which is much user-friendly than that of Bath. In the enquiry part, Sheffield puts the email and telephone number along with the sentence “If you'd like to know more about any aspect of our courses, contact us” (MA translation studies, n.d.).

Bath shows the email and telephone number without any remark. By comparison, Bath tends to be impersonal and distant. Sheffield demonstrates a more friendly attitude toward “consumers”. It “reduces the distance between the institution and its citizens” (Magistro, n.d., p. 160).

Future tense. In Sheffield’s advertisement, the future tense is adopted to match the subject “we” and “you”. For example, “You’ll be assessed by essays, presentations, practical translation technologies projects, translation assignments, a translation exam and a dissertation.” (MA translation studies, n.d.) The statement assumes that the applicant has already been admitted into the university. The use of the future is a promotional practice which places the reader on an established position. This strategy is common and characteristic of “promotional culture” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 141).

Discourse practice

Personalization. The personalization of the institution and the reader is a common strategy in advertising, aiming to embrace the reader and build the trust. Both the two advertisements use “we” “you” “our” as the subject instead of “applicant” or “the university”. It makes applicants feel they are “involved in the communicative exchange” (Magistro, n.d., p. 163) This “dialogic exchange” (Magistro, n.d., p. 160) bears the characteristic of conversationalization. It is not institution-to-citizen relationship, but a peer-to-peer relationship. The applicant is put at ease in the process.

Questions. In the advertisement of Bath, the question “Why study with us?” (MA translation and professional language skills, n.d.) appears as a subtitle in the introduction part. This part introduces the advantages of studying this programme at the University. The form of question projects the image of a considerate and responsible institution by providing, which many Applicants greatly value. It is a way of marketization whereby the institution promotes

itself by showing its potential strengths.

Self-promotional claims. Self-promotional statements are foregrounded discourse. Both Bath and Sheffield adopt the method to speak highly of themselves. As a case in point, in Bath, the advertisement says “It has done this most successfully over more than four decades.” and “We have a worldwide reputation for training professional translators and conference interpreters.” (MA translation and professional language skills, n.d.) “Most successfully” and “a worldwide reputation” describes Bath as outshining its peers. It is a kind of prestige advertising. Moreover, the webpage presents a logo of a software used by Bath called MemoQ, which is a technology in translation and interpreting industry. The technology is portrayed as one of “the leading tools” in the advertisement. The programme combines the traditional curriculum with the technology, which suits the applicants’ needs and could appeal to more applicants. As for Sheffield, it does not have much self-promotional claims. The exclusive one is a title “Russell Group Top 10 for Research Impact” (MA translation studies, n.d.). The ranking shows the university’s achievement and is a major attraction for prospective students. All of these self-promotional statements are helpful to achieve the purpose of marketization.

Communicative function. The communicative function is displayed in Sheffield’s advertisement. It says “We’d love to see you” (MA translation studies, n.d.). It is a welcome remark demonstrating much enthusiasm and friendliness of the institution. It is an informal style in a university’s prospectus. However, this peer-to-peer relationship makes applicants feel they are in a cozy conversation with the institution. Thus, they can identify more easily with the university and want to be its students.

Above all, both the two universities attempt to build a self-identity through the discourse of marketization. Sheffield’s advertisement embodies an informal and conversational

style, catering for consumers' psychology. However, Bath does not choose this amiable style. Its discourse is generally more "objective".

A summary of the discourse of marketization

In general, on the basis of analysis from textual practice and discourse practice, the discourse of marketization is a process of informalization and conversationalization. For one thing, the two institutions build an equal relationship by using the pronoun "we", "you", "our". Moreover, the use of informal language makes the introduction less overbearing. To some extent, it stimulates applicants' interest. However, for these universities in the education industry, the information, including qualification and requirement for admission should be stated in formal style. Thus, it is a mix of formal and informal styles, which is also a kind of intertextuality.

The discourse of marketization makes a difference in that the institutions no longer play the role of a mandator, but rather a friend, a supporter. For readers, they are not under obligation to apply for any of these institutions. Instead, they will choose between these institutions based on personal judgement. Whether this judgement is informed or not is determined by what the information value of these advertisements. In terms of higher education, these institutions regard their target audiences—applicants as consumers. In the process of informalization and conversationalization, the institutions tend to please their consumers, making them buy into the discourse. The case exemplifies the trend in higher education in Britain.

Conclusion

The essay takes the advertisements of translation programme of the University of Bath and the University of Sheffield as a case. Through the investigation into the textual presentation and the discourse that are related to marketization, several differences are examined. By comparison, the University of Bath tends to be objective in introducing itself. While the University of Sheffield takes readers' psychology into consideration. The discourse of marketization is more obvious. The case also shows the phenomenon in higher education in

Britain. Increasingly more institutions have a tendency to promote themselves through the discourse of marketization, attracting applicants. This essay aims to provide some insight into the discourse of marketization in higher education in one country. Further study may focus on the comparison between two or more regions, thus exploring the trend in global education industry.

References

MA translation and professional language skills. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.bath.ac.uk/study/pg/programmes/ma-in-tran-and-prof-lang-skil/>

MA translation studies. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://sheffield.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/courses/arts/somlal/translation-studies-ma>

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language*. New York: Longman Publishing.

Magistro, E. (n.d.). The marketization of institutional discourse: The case of the European Union. In Okulska, U & Cap. P (Eds.), *Perspectives in Politics and Discourse* (pp. 155-168). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Tao, X. (2012). *Discourse and marketization of higher education in China: The genre of advertisements for academic posts* (Master's thesis). Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China.

Appendix

The link of the translation and professional language skills programme in the University of

Bath: <http://www.bath.ac.uk/study/pg/programmes/ma-in-tran-and-prof-lang-skil/>

The link of the translation studies programme in the University of Sheffield:

<http://sheffield.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/courses/arts/somlal/translation-studies-ma>