UDC 81'27::004.738.1:378.4(410) **Jelena Matić** University of Belgrade Faculty of Philology

DISCOURSE SYSTEM OF TWO UNIVERSITY WEBSITES

Abstract: With the development of digital technology, universities like other organisations produce websites in order to help them compete with others in the same marketplace. How does the discourse of the website persuade the readership? In order to answer this research question I draw upon the ethnography of speaking. Although Dell Hymes developed the SPEAKING grid to analyse face-to-face interactions, the categories are so productive and powerful that they can be used to analyse many different kinds of discourse. For the purpose of this research, the author applied the model to two UK university websites: Cambridge, as a representative of an old university, and Lancaster, as an example of a newer one. The significance of the findings in this pilot study lies in the employment of heteroglosia, multiliteracy and multimodality. Also, now that Serbia has started negotiations with the European Union and with a new aim to put emphasis on attracting foreign students to study in Serbia, this research can be significant in the sense that it can point to avenues that can be pursued if changes in websites of Serbian universities are required.

Key words: discourse system, university websites, Dell Hymes, the SPEAKING grid, Cambridge, Lancaster

1. Introduction

Websites as a genre, which include text coupled with visual materials, represent a research area that requires attention in the contemporary world. By genre we mean 'diverse ways of acting, of producing social life, in the semiotic mode' (Fairclough, 2003: 206). With the development of digital technology, universities like other organisations produce websites, promotional videos, and similar artefacts in order to help them publicise themselves and compete with others in the same marketplace.

The textual materials (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011; Silverman, 2010) urge people to act in specific directions. They encourage people to 'perform.' Hence, it is wise to approach websites for what they are and what they are used to accomplish.

Visuals (Knoblauch, 2006; Bohnsack, 2009; Heath, 2004), on the other hand, have received less attention in the literature, and yet they are very important to the practical accomplishment of social action and activity.

New information technologies have transformed the way we produce and use texts nowadays. Therefore, researchers have recently shown great interest in the language used on the internet. Analysis of the discourse system of websites is still new and not developed. A discourse system in this paper is understood as "a 'cultural toolkit' consisting of four



subjects: ideas and beliefs about the world, conventional ways of treating other people, ways of communicating using various kinds of texts, media, and 'languages' and methods of learning how to use these other tools'." (Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2012: 8). Since sociologists do not have linguistic and text-analytical tools, applied linguists should engage much more in the field where multimodal work can be utilised.

2. A theoretical framework

In order to illuminate the data in this paper, the researcher draws upon the ethnography of speaking, later amended to the ethnography of communication, which is not just a method but a coherent theoretical approach to understanding language in use (Hymes, 1962, 1964).

Hymes distanced himself from speech as an abstract model because speech does not occur in a vacuum¹ but within a specific context. In other words, he argues:

....that the study of language must concern itself with describing and analysing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence) rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence). Speakers of a language in particular communities are able to communicate with each other in a manner which is not only correct but also appropriate to the socio-cultural context." (Farah, 1998: 125).

Dell Hymes defines the social units and units of analysis for ethnographies of communication. The primary unit 'speech community' does not mean a community defined by common language but rather by common linguistic norms: "a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (Hymes, 1972: 54).

Within speech communities, researchers must look for 'speech situations', 'speech events' and 'speech acts'. By speech situations, Hymes means sociallycontextual situations like 'ceremonies, fights, hunts, meals, lovemaking, and the like' (Hymes, 1972: 56). Speech events occur within speech situations, and speech acts are the individual utterances that form the minimal unit of analysis for ethnographies of communication. Hymes gives the example of "a party (speech situation), a conversation during the party (speech event), a joke within the conversation (speech act)" to illustrate the three terms.

To investigate communication, Dell Hymes offers a methodological heuristic, often represented in terms of the SPEAKING mnemonic. The eight components of the SPEAKING grid are:

- (S) setting including the time and place, physical aspects of the situation such as arrangement of furniture in the classroom;
- (P) participant identity including personal characteristics such as age and sex, social status, relationship with each other;

¹ The situation where we have an ideal speaker in an ideal situation.

- (E) ends including the purpose of the event itself as well as the individual goals of the participants;
- (A) act, sequence or how speech acts are organized within a speech event and what topic/s are addressed;
 - (K) key or the tone and manner in which something is said or written;
- (I) instrumentalities or the linguistic code i.e. language, dialect, variety and channel i.e. speech or writing;
- (N) norm or the standard socio-cultural rules of interaction and interpretation; and
 - (G) genre or type of event such as lecture, poem, letter (Farah, 1998: 126).

This list is meant to explore and explain social purposes in language. The SPEAKING mnemonic is not an end in itself, but rather a means; 'the formal analysis of speaking is a means to the understanding of human purposes and needs, and their satisfaction' (Hymes, 1972: 70).

3. Research questions

Universities advertise themselves in order to attract more students. How do they do that? How does the discourse of the website persuade the readership? In order to answer this research question we should focus on some components of the SPEAKING tool

4. Research hypotheses

The old university uses less multimodality on its website, which shows that it is more traditional whereas the newer university is more open to new digital technologies and uses it vastly more to attract prospective students, both undergraduates and graduates.

5. Data collection

The data in this pilot study comes from two UK University websites: the University of Cambridge as a representative of an old university and Lancaster University as an example of a newer one. They both compete in the same marketplace, and we wanted to see how they use the discourse system in the digital media to advertise themselves.

Multiple data², textual materials, pictures and videos, was collected from the homepage of the universities as well as from other web pages like undergraduates, graduates etc.

² See Appendix 2



6. Analysis of the data collected

Sociolinguist Dell Hymes developed the SPEAKING grid to analyse discourse as a series of speech events and speech acts within a cultural context. Although the model was originally conceived for face-to-face interactions, the categories are so productive and powerful that can be used to analyse many different kinds of discourse. In order to answer our research questions in this paper, we are going to apply the model to the two UK university websites.

6.1. (S): Setting and Scene: time, place, reality

Setting refers to the time and place of a speech act and, in general, to the "physical circumstances"; whereas scene is the "psychological setting" or "cultural definition" of a scene, including characteristics such as range of formality and sense of play or seriousness (Hymes, 1974: 55 □ 56).

Since we have to adapt the SPEAKING mnemonic to websites, the 'S' in this paper would correspond to the layout of the webpage.

As we can see from the data³, the websites of both universities are similar at first glance since they all have to follow certain rules in construction. However, closer inspection shows bigger differences. The homepage of the University of Cambridge is longer because it has the section 'What's happening' with 12 boxes showing research in different fields. Also, the dynamic multimodality covers the larger part of the screen than at the homepage of Lancaster University. On the other hand, there are fewer examples of it than on the Lancaster webpage, which also uses other media like a short video, the magazine, and tweets to advertise itself. In addition to this, statistics occupies a prominent place on the homepage of the newer university.

6.2. (P): Participants: speaker and audience

Linguists will make distinctions within these categories. First, there is an addressor; second, the audience can be distinguished as addressees and hearers (Hymes, 1974: 54 □ 56).

Goffman (1981) introduced the concept of 'principal', 'author' and 'animator' within the category of speakers, where 'principal' would represent the institutional voice of a University, 'author' would express someone's private voice, and, finally, 'animator' would refer to the use of words expressing values and beliefs of someone else. Within the category of hearers, Goffman distinguishes ratified participants, i.e. those who are addressed directly and unratified participants, i.e. those who are addressed indirectly like eavesdroppers and bystanders.

In this context, the 'P' represents authorship and readership. Various texts found on the websites are results of different writers who have in mind the expected readership. These texts are 'recipient designed'. They address specific audiences,

³ See Appendix 2 – Setting and scene

mostly prospective students, both undergraduates and graduates, as well as researchers, both male and female.

By emphasizing that 3,000 international students from over 100 countries study at its campus, Lancaster University encourages diversity and speaks to the participants from different backgrounds unlike the University of Cambridge which says, What are we looking for? We assess everyone individually which means we look at – and for – different things in different people for different courses. This undoubtedly shows that it is not only the students who can choose the university, but also the university can choose its students, which contributes to its image of elitism.

6.3. (E): Ends: purposes of the situation and the communication in it

In paper original definition, 'E' represented purposes, goals, and outcomes (Hymes, $1974:56\square57$). In this paper, it stands for the aim and/or the function of the discourse on the website.

As the data suggest, the websites exercise multiple purposes: transferring information, persuading and promoting/advertising. They have different purposes for different people. Current students and staff can be informed about the events at the University, prospective students, and researchers need to be persuaded to choose the particular university for their studies or research. In order to do this, universities have to promote the activities at their campuses and advertise themselves using multimedia \square text, pictures, videos \square since they compete in the era of modern technologies.

6.4. (A): Act Sequence: the order of speech acts

Letter 'A' in the SPEAKING mnemonic presents how speech acts are organized within a speech event and which topics are addressed. In other words, it includes both form and content of the speech act. In this context, this refers to the order of information in the layout of the website⁴, and the topics addressed.

6.5. (K): Key: the tone in which something is said

In its original form, the 'K' denotes the cues that establish the 'tone, manner, or spirit' of the speech act (Hymes, 1974: 57). In our research, 'Key' is achieved through stance \Box the relationship we display towards our own utterances \Box irony, epistemic or affective stance \Box and footing, alignment that we take towards other participants.

The analysis of the data shows that even though the tone of the textual materials on the Cambridge site is cooperative, it is also formal, serious and almost regal. The 'key' on the Lancaster webpage is less formal, sometimes casual and playful and, again, cooperative.

⁴ See Appendix 3



6.6. (I): Instrumentalities: medium \square written vs. Spoken \square and the linguistic code

In the original version, instrumentalities covered forms and styles of speech (Hymes, 1974: 58 \(\text{60} \)). In this paper, the 'I' refers to the written medium and includes lexical and grammatical resources, which the texts draw on in achieving their effects.

In this section we are going to discuss the style and register of the texts of the websites. By style, we mean repeated stance features associated with particular discourse features and a particular set of contextual factors. According to our data, it is mostly academese. Register can be defined as 'a set of specialized vocabulary and preferred syntactic and rhetorical devices/structures, used by specific socioprofessional groups for specific purposes.' (Schiffman, 1996: 41).

The website of the University of Cambridge uses formal words and expressions like expertise across a very wide range of disciplines; the superb academic and pastoral support; the interchange of ideas between students, academic staff and the frequent visiting lecturers; whereas the website of Lancaster university deploys more common phrases such as we offer a wide range of international degrees; a richly rewarding experience; one of the safest self-contained campuses in the UK; we welcome overseas students. We can also see here that Cambridge uses more adjectives and Lancaster more adverbs.

As for grammatical resources, the use of passive constructions and the Present Simple tense is very prominent on Cambridge site (Cambridge is structured differently from other universities, and these differences make Cambridge special. Cambridge graduates of all disciplines are highly employable) while the Present Progressive tense predominates on Lancaster site (Lancaster graduates are performing well in what is an increasingly competitive job market).

Also, Lancaster is less formal in style as we may see it in the contracted form of verbs (we're proud of our international reputation) and sentences are not usually long, unlike the syntax structure of Cambridge site (All students freely interact with scholars of all levels, including those who are world leaders in their field, both formally and informally).

Next, the examples we found (we assess everyone individually; highly employable; students freely interact with scholars of all levels on the Cambridge webpages; and a richly rewarding experience; an increasingly competitive job market; globally significant research on the Lancaster site) undoubtedly show that Cambridge is more oriented towards attracting intellectually creative individuals who are willing to express their ideas freely; whereas Lancaster emphasizes rich experience in an increasing global market, which is a product of the modern age.

6.7. (N): Norms of interaction: the rules guiding talk

This part of the model refers to social rules governing the event and the participants' actions and reaction.

Grice (1975) introduced conversational maxims of quantity: be concise, quality: be sincere, relevance: be relevant, and manner: be clear. The CBS style⁵ of the discourse system seems to favour expressing everything participants need to know in direct, straightforward way.

6.8. (G): Genre: type of event

Genre used to refer to cultural or traditional speech genres such as proverbs, prayers, small talk, problem talk, etc. In our context, genres may be seen as 'conventionalized yet highly flexible organizations of formal means and structures that constitute complex frames of reference for communicative practice.' (Brigs & Bauman, 1992: 141).

The data has revealed the following genres: news, research reports, welcome note from the Vice-Chancellor, charts, pictures, videos on the Cambridge site and news, tweets, pictures, videos, 'what our staff say' on the Lancaster site.

In conclusion, most texts are 'hybrids', 'drawing on genres as their starting point, but then developing in highly fluid and creative ways in response to their creators' particular aims and contextual conditions.' (Bax, 2011: 46).

7. Discussion

The data presented and analysed has shown how the discourse system of the websites persuade their readership. With applying the SPEAKING model we paid special attention to the following components: E, P, G, I, K in the fist place, and then to S, A, N.

If one of the aims (E) of the websites was to encourage the readership (P) to start studies at these Universities, we discovered that they do that using different genres (G) and specific lexical and grammatical resources as well as syntactic structures (I), which all contributes to the tone of the discourse (K). In addition, we should not diminish the importance of the layout of the web pages (S) and the order of topics (A) on them. Frequently, they have bold titles and pictures of various colours to make them attractive. Finally, the norms of interaction (N) with the readers revealed the Utilitarian discourse system (CBS style) which is considered to be the discourse system of 'global capitalism.'

We have also discovered several discourse modes \square descriptive, instructive, explanatory, reporting, evaluative, persuasive, conversational \square which were employed to persuade the readership. Also, the website of the University of Cambridge, being more formal, shows that it is a keeper of 800 hundred years of tradition. On the other hand, the site of Lancaster University uses more social media; it is less traditional, more creative and assertive in advertising, with statistics occupying a prominent place on its homepage. All this supports the hypothesis from the beginning of our paper.

⁵ Clarity, brevity, sincerity

8. Conclusion

The old and the new meet several times in the paper: the application of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model from the 1960s to a product of the modern technological age - websites of 800 year old University of Cambridge and 50 year old Lancaster University where both modernist⁶ and post modernist⁷ views on language and culture are exhibited.

The significance of the findings in this pilot study lies in the employment of heteroglosia, the use of voices, registers, styles; multiliteracy, the use of various genres, which can be highly flexible, change, blend and evolve; and multimodality, making meaning not just through language but also through visuals and video.

Finally, qualitative research should pay close attention to documents like websites as 'social facts' and by doing so provide high contributions to analytic issues within social sciences

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⁶ Communication is mostly about accurate, concise and effective exchange of information (CBS style).

⁷ The meaning of words depends on who speaks to whom about what under which circumstances.

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Appendix 1: The links to the University websites

University of Cambridge http://www.cam.ac.uk/ Lancaster University http://www.lancs.ac.uk/

Appendix 2: Data **S:** Setting and Scene

Cambridge	Lancaster
Setting: site on the internet, May 2013	Setting: site on the internet, May 2013
At the top of the homepage: Study at Cambridge, About the University, Research at Cambridge	At the top of the homepage: Home, Study, Research, Business, Global, Alumni
Below that: - in the left corner: the logo/coat of arms and the name of the university - in the right corner: 8 hyperlinks in 2 columns: for staff, for current students, for alumni, for business (column one), colleges and departments, libraries and facilities, museums and collections, email and phone search (column two)	Below that: - in the left corner: the name of the university and its logo - next to it: statistics - 12,000 (We have over 12,000 students, from over 100 countries, within one of the safest campuses in the UK) and 94% (of Lancaster students go into work or further study within six months of graduating) - next to it 2 columns: one with hyperlinks: Our Colleges, News & Media, About Us and Current Students; and another one with hyperlinks: Visiting Campus, Contact & Getting Here, Faculties & Departments, and Current Staff
Below that, in the width of the screen: a dynamic multimodality: a picture on the left with the caption below it and the heading on the right (3 examples which change every 7 seconds)	Below that, on the left (2/3 of the width of the screen): a dynamic multimodality: a picture on the right with the heading on the left followed by several lines of the text (4 examples which change every 7 seconds)



Cambridge

Below that (covering 2/3 of the screen width) Focus on: About the University, Research at Cambridge, Study at Cambridge, What's on (each of these titles with the picture on the right)

Below that: What's happening - with 12 boxes showing research in different fields; each of these boxes contain a picture at the top, a title below and several lines of the text with the link 'read more' below.

On the right (1/3 of the screen width) there are Latest News; 3 pieces of news with the title at the top, the date below and several lines of the text

Below that: Highlight events with the date on the left and the title on the right Below that: Quick links – Notices, Philanthropy, Sport, Hermes webmail, Term dates and calendar, Jobs, Annual report

At the bottom of the homepage: on the right; 2 columns: one is Connect with us (Facebook, Flickr, iTunesU, Linked in, Twitter, YouTube), the other one is About this site (Cookies, Privacy policy)

At the very bottom of the homepage: there are 4 columns: 1. shows the coat of arms and the name of the university and copyright (University A-Z. Contact the University. Accessibility, Freedom of information, Terms and conditions); 2. Study at Cambridge (Undergraduate, Graduate, International students, Continuing education, Executive and professional education, Courses in education); 3. About the University (How the University and Colleges work, Visiting the University, Maps, News, Jobs, Giving to Cambridge) and 4. Research at Cambridge (News, Features, Discussion, Spotlight on...and About research at Cambridge) The background of the site is blue: the colour

the University of Cambridge

Lancaster

Below that: Latest News – 4 pieces of news with the little picture at the top followed by a date and the title

Below- two pictures with caption each: Study with Lancaster and Our City, Coast & Countryside followed by several lines of the text which can be expanded by clicking at 'find out more' On the right (1/3 of the screen width) there is a red box with find a course (undergraduate and postgraduate) or browse the range of undergraduate degrees: all courses, A-Z or by department / subject area

Below that there are two hyperlinks to visit Lancaster and Get a prospectus Below that there is a short video(1.43mins): Life at Lancaster

Below that: Steps – The Lancaster Magazine Below that two pieces of news from the Tweeter

At the bottom of the homepage: there are 6 columns: 1. with the hyperlinks:Home, Study, Research, Business, Global, Alumni; 2. and 3. Quick links; 4. Connect with us (Facebook, Twitter, The Student Room, YouTube, Foursquare, LinkedIn, Weibo – all of these with the little logo) 5. Faculties and Depts (Arts & Social Sciences, Health & Medicine, Management, Science & Technology, Departments, Institutes & Centres, The Work Foundation, Ghana) and 6. Contact us (with the address and the phone number)

At the very bottom of the homepage: Legal Notice, Freedom of Information, Privacy and Cookies Notice, Back to top and Copyright

The background is red: the colour of Lancaster University

P: Participants

Cambridge	Lancaster
Addresor: Teams of writers	Addresor: Teams of writers
Audience:	Audience:
Prospective undergraduate/ graduate students;	Prospective undergraduate/ graduate students;
Researchers;	Researchers;
Male/female,	Male/female,
Individual approach	Different backgrounds – 3,000 international students from over 100 countries

E: Ends

Cambridge	Lancaster
to inform	to persuade
	•
to persuade	to inform
to promote/advertise	to promote/advertise

A: Act Sequence

Cambridge	Lancaster
Form: the order of the information in the layout (see 'S' setting and scene and Appendix 3)	Form: the order of the information in the layout (see setting and scene and Appendix 3)
Content: topics that are addressed	Content: topics that are addressed

K: Key

Cambridge	Lancaster
Formal	Less formal/casual
Serious	Playful
Regal and cooperative	Cooperative



I: Instrumentalities

Cambridge	Lancaster
Channel: Written medium, pictures and videos Lexical and grammatical resources (examples): Why Cambridge? for graduate studies: Welcome from the Vice-Chancellor http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/gradadmissions/prospec/whycam/index.html expertise across a very wide range of disciplines; the superb academic and pastoral support; our 800-year history supports our present excellence and future aspirations; the interchange of ideas between students, academic staff and the frequent visiting lecturers; for undergraduate studies: bullets with numbers: the link http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/whycambridge/ Cambridge is structured differently from other universities, and these differences make Cambridge special. Cambridge is one of the best universities in the world. What are we looking for? (The university chooses students not only vice versa) We assess everyone individually which means we look at - and for - different things in different people for different courses. Cambridge graduates of all disciplines are highly employable. Cambridge students are ambitious, intelligent, motivated, hard-working, passionate, committed, curious, intellectually creative, independent thinkers and able to manage their time effectively. All students freely interact with scholars of all levels, including those who are world leaders in their field, both formally and informally.	Channel: Written medium, pictures and videos Lexical and grammatical resources (examples): a wealth of both undergraduate and postgraduate study options; a richly rewarding experience; we welcome overseas students; we offer a wide range of international degrees; our fees and funding options, including bursaries and scholarships available to Lancaster students; one of the safest self-contained campuses in the UK; Why Lancaster? Ten good reasons why Lancaster is one of the very best places to live, learn and get your future off to a flying start. (bullets with pictures and percentages highlighted) http://www.lancs.ac.uk/study/why-lancaster/ We have over 12,000 students – including 3,000 international students from over 100 countries, offering you a global perspective to your life and learning. Lancaster graduates are performing well in what is an increasingly competitive job market. A Global University: now approaching our 50th year, we're proud of our international reputation as a centre for excellence in teaching and globally significant research.

N: Norms of interaction

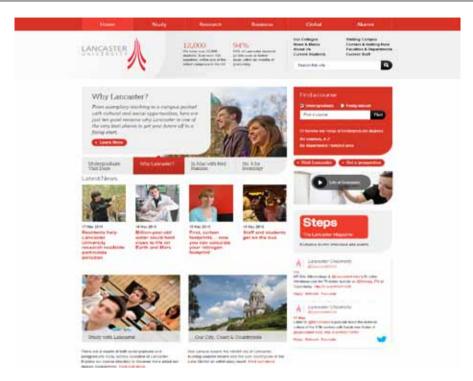
Cambridge	Lancaster
Grice (1975) conversational maxims of quantity (be concise), quality (be sincere), relevance (be relevant) and manner (be clear) CBS style	Grice (1975) conversational maxims of quantity (be concise), quality (be sincere), relevance (be relevant) and manner (be clear) CBS style

G: Genre

Cambridge	Lancaster
News	News
Research reports	Tweets
Pictures	Video
Charts	Pictures
Welcome note from the Vice-Chancellor	What our staff say
	1

Appendix 3: The layout of the websites (pictures)





Jelena Matić

DISKURSNI SISTEM DVA UNIVERZITETSKA VEB-SAJTA

Rezime

Sa razvojem digitalne tehnologije, univerziteti kao i druge organizacije stvaraju vebsajt prezentacije kako bi im pomogle da se takmiče na istom tržištu. Na koji način diskurs veb-sajta ubeđuje čitaoca? Odgovor na ovo pitanje potražila sam u etnografiji komunikacije. Iako je Del Hajmz razvio SPEAKING šemu da bi analizirao interakcije licem u lice, ovi elementi su toliko produktivni da se mogu upotrebiti za analizu različitih vrsta diskursa. Model sam primenila na dva univerzitetska veb-sajta u Velikoj Britianiji: jedan je Kembridž, kao predstavnik starog univerziteta, a drugi je Lankaster, kao predstavnik novog. Značaj rezultata ove pilot studije leži u upotrebi heteroglosije i multimodalnosti. Takođe, sada kad je Srbija započela pregovore sa Evropskom unijom i kada postoji cilj da se privuku strani studenti, ovo istraživanje može biti značajno i u smislu pokazatelja koji putem da se ide ako budu bile potrebne izmene u vebsajt prezentacijama srpskih univerziteta.

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