



Investigating the Construction of Attitudinal and Grading Meanings in University Enrolment Advertisements

In the Case of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Jiangsu University

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Abstract. The present study draws upon the *Appraisal* system to compare the attitudinal and grading resources employed by two tertiary institutions inside and outside the Chinese mainland to present how they are evaluated as excellent education options for the prospective students. Findings indicate that The Chinese University of Hong Kong is personal-development-oriented while Jiangsu University calls for social commitment. This research has empirical implications for applying the *Attitude* and *Graduation* mechanisms in the design of university enrolment advertisements to build up persuasion power.

Keywords: appraisal system · attitudinal · grading · university · enrolment advertisement

1 Introduction

Nowadays, educational advertisements have become a cultural product closely related to image shaping, cultural building, publicity promotion, and also a highly potent way to attract potential students [1]. Most relevant research studies were focused on university publicity films. Huang [2] analyzed the attitudinal items in the enrolment films of Tsinghua University and Harvard University and concluded that the Chinese institution's emphasis on social responsibility and its American counterpart's advocating for individual values reflected their different educational philosophies. This viewpoint is supported by Wei [3], who compared the publicity videos of Peking University and Yale University to explore the routes of communication from a cross-cultural perspective. Li [1] established two corpora to investigate how a Chinese university and a foreign institution persuaded the audience via multimodal evaluations both verbally and non-verbally. In Li's [1] research, attitudinal resources were the most effectively inspiring mechanisms which were mainly exploited as non-verbal resources.

Nonetheless, few studies have touched upon the Message from the President, a written speech usually placed on the home page of university websites as a first impression to the browsers. It works as a complementary part with the publicity film.

2 The Appraisal System: A Brief Overview

Martin and White introduced the appraisal framework in the 1990s and improved the model in the 2000s. This system within the systemic functional linguistic tradition operates at a semantic level to analyze the evaluative resources expressing the speaker's/writer's opinion [4]. It also assists appraisal researchers in identifying implicit evaluative meanings inherent in the co-text [5].

The system encompasses three significant categories of appraising resources: Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement. Attitude is concerned with Affect (emotional responses), Judgement (evaluation of individuals and their behaviors), and Appreciation (assessment of the value of entities) [6]. Graduation directs to grading meanings, whether by Force or Focus [6]. The former is about qualifying and quantifying, while the latter refers to the "sharpening or softening of boundaries around categorical meanings" [7]. As the research focuses on the construction of attitudinal and grading resources, Engagement will not be included in the following discussion.

The configuration of the Appraisal System [6] is as follows:

2.1 Attitude

A. Affect

See Table 1

B. Judgement

Normality (i.e. lucky)
Capacity (i.e. capable)
Tenacity (i.e. reliable)
Veracity (i.e. honest)
Propriety (i.e. moral)

C. Appreciation

Impact (i.e. boring)
Quality (i.e. enchanting)

Table 1. Affects (Table Credit: Original)

a. Inclination Fear (i.e. <i>scared</i>) Desire (i.e. <i>long for</i>)	b. Security Disquiet (i.e. <i>anxious</i>) Surprise (i.e. <i>surprised</i>) Security (i.e. <i>safe</i>) Trust (i.e. <i>reliable</i>)
c. Happiness Misery (i.e. <i>miserable</i>) Antipathy (i.e. <i>hate</i>) Cheer (i.e. <i>laugh</i>) Affection (i.e. <i>loving</i>)	d. Satisfaction Ennui (i.e. <i>bored</i>) Displeasure (i.e. <i>angry</i>) Interest (i.e. <i>curious</i>) Admiration (i.e. <i>satisfied</i>)

Table 2. Force (Table Credit: Original)

Intensity (i.e. <i>very</i>)	
Quantity	Amount (i.e. <i>reasonably large</i>)
	Extent (i.e. <i>for 30 years</i>)
Enhancement	Rigour (i.e. <i>look at</i>)
	Frequency (i.e. <i>frequently</i>)

Table 3. Focus (Table Credit: Original)

Valeur	Authenticity (i.e. <i>in particular</i>)
	Specificity (i.e. <i>real</i>)
Fulfillment	Realization (i.e. <i>suggest</i>)
	Fulfillment (i.e. <i>fail to</i>)

Balance (i.e. symmetrical)

Complexity (i.e. simple)

Valuation (i.e. original)

GRADUATION

A. Force

See Table 2

B. Focus

Martin and White [6] also classified meaning-making resources into inscribed terms with explicit evaluation and evoked terms with implicit evaluation. The inscribed evaluative items can be coded as, for example, [+Force (Intensity)] when the Force mechanism is a positive emphasis to strengthen the statement, or [−Force (Intensity)] when the emphasis is negative. When it comes to the evoked ones, a letter “t” representing a token of evaluation should be added to the coding, such as [t+Force (Intensity)] (Table 3).

The present study employs the above framework to examine how attitude and graduation are constructed in the enrolment advertisements of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and Jiangsu University. In the following discussion, the university names are abbreviated as CUHK and JU and their publicity texts are renamed as Text A and Text B, respectively.

3 Analysis of Attitudinal Resources

3.1 Text A

Generally, Appreciation locutions dominate the list with a proportion of 77.78%, and most of its instances (12) are dealing with the value of the appraised entity (CUHK).

Table 4. Figure 1 Text A (Table Credit: Original)

	Instances	%
APPRECIATION	14	77.78%
<i>Composition</i>	2	11.11%
<i>Valuation</i>	12	66.67%
JUDGEMENT	2	11.11%
<i>Capacity</i>	2	11.11%
AFFECT	2	11.11%
<i>Dis/inclination</i>	1	5.56%
<i>Dis/satisfaction</i>	1	5.56%
Total	18	/

All of the evaluators, whether explicit or implicit, are focused on the tertiary elements with the attitudinal resources positively adopted to win over the prospective students' applications for admission (Table 4).

In Example 1, the president makes an anticipation of the possible emotional reactions of readers searching for information of interest on university websites. Formal language has been often considered the first choice in college advertising, but real readers usually prefer a simple and clear writing style [8]. The CUHK president directly shows kindness and appreciation to the audience, and employs second-person pronouns to create a conversational tone which motivates interpersonal interaction.

Example 1

Welcome to The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), and thank you for your [+AFFECT (interest)] interest in the University.

In Example 2, the president evaluates the achievements of university researchers, and the importance of this evaluation is emphasized by the following “acclaims” and “respect” that showcase CUHK’s highly-regarded position in the worldwide.

Example 2

...their [+JUDGEMENT (capacity)] achievements have [+FORCE (intensity)] continuously won the University international [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] acclaims and [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] respect.

In Example 3, the president integrates personal expectations for the future with positive statements about the university’s mission. This is a strong call for the readers’ next action.

Example 3

CUHK [+AFFECT (desire)] aspires to building a [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] better society through higher learning, and you are welcome to join us in this [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] noble project.

Table 5. Text B (Table Credit: Original)

	Instances	%
APPRECIATION	14	73.68%
<i>Composition</i>	2	10.53%
<i>Valuation</i>	12	63.16%
JUDGEMENT	5	26.32%
<i>Normality</i>	2	10.53%
<i>Capacity</i>	2	10.53%
<i>Tenacity</i>	1	5.26%
Total	19	/

3.2 Text B

Overall, both inscribed and evoked assessments point to JU with positive implications. The Appreciation items also prevail the list of Text B with an occupation of 73.68%. The majority of the appreciative terms are remarks on the worthiness of JU. In addition, the president incorporates personal judgment into the appreciative lexis to strengthen the compelling impacts on the readers. That is, the president shows a tendency towards contextualized emotions to assess people's behaviors by judging and the outcomes of their behaviors by appreciating [4] (Table 5).

The second president begins to assess the university's history and people and his "lacking" a direct interaction with the audience at the outset makes the enrolment message more formal but may gives the readers a sense of distance.

In Example 4, evoked judgments are given on the ability and reliability of the graduates, which reflects the university's educational philosophy to some extent.

Example 4

It is committed to educate talents with [t+JUDGEMENT (capacity)] a solid foundation of knowledge and skills, with [t+JUDGEMENT (tenacity)] a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to the society.

More appreciative items are exploited in Example 5 to highlight JU's availability in academic resources. Five consecutive epithets form several paralleled chunks which are grouped together as a convincing statement about the university's comprehensive strength.

Example 5

It equips itself with [+APPRECIATION (balance)] various disciplines, [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] renowned scholars, [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] innovative teams, [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] advanced teaching and experimental facilities, and [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] high-quality teaching resources.

The distributional features of Text A and Text B in terms of Appreciation and Judgment lexis are alike. Their evaluators are both closely attached to the background, the

people, and the resources of the institutions. The most significant difference lies in that CUHK emphasizes the students' individual development whereas JU underscores social participation. From an intercultural view, CUHK, influenced by the western culture to some degrees, is more likely to be individualism-oriented and values personal development. In contrast, JU, embedded in a collectivist culture, upholds the values of socialism with Chinese characteristics and it urges the young to shoulder the accountability of social construction as illustrated in Example 4.

4 Analysis of Grading Resources

4.1 Text A

The grading resources are all directed at the university's background and resources, and the Intensity items make up two thirds of total (Table 6).

The employed attitudinal meanings are intensified in two ways. One is by isolating which refers to the case that the up-scaling/down-scaling of intensification is realized through an isolated item; the other is by metaphor construing figurative meanings [6]. In Example 6, the president exploits the adverbial "still" with the specification of time and location to modify "rings". The quantitative appraisal equipped with appreciative evaluators reveal the bond between the university and the local community.

Example 6

The ideal...[+FORCE (intensity)] still rings true in [+FORCE (time)] today's [+FORCE (space)] Hong Kong, whose [+FORCE (intensity)] continued [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] success hinges on [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] openness and [+APPRECIATION (balance)] diversity.

In Example 7, CUHK is hailed as "a magnet for talents" followed by a range of implicit evaluations support this argument. Here, the metaphor is helpful in leaving the readers a deep impression of the university image.

Example 7

CUHK has proven to be [+FORCE (intensity)] a magnet for talents, [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] attracting local and international students and scholars to study, teach, and do research here...

Table 6. Text A (Table Credit: Original)

	Instances	%
FORCE	15	/
<i>Intensity</i>	10	66.67%
<i>Quantity</i>	5	33.33%
Total	15	/

Table 7. Text B (Table Credit: Original)

	Instances	%
FORCE	11	91.67%
<i>Intensity</i>	4	33.33%
<i>Quantity</i>	7	58.33%
FOCUS	1	8.33%
<i>Fulfillment</i>	1	8.33%
Total	12	/

4.2 Text B

In Text B, the Force items account for 91.67%, significantly higher than the figure for Focus. As the prevailing mechanism, most Quantity items (6) are specifying the university location. The Focus evaluators are also used to mitigate the process “integrate” by adding “seeks to” as an imperfection [9] (Table 7).

Example 8

The university [+FOCUS (fulfillment)] seeks to integrate social service into its schooling.

The intensification of meanings are also realized by isolating. In Example 9, the item “significantly” is up-scaled by an isolated premodifier “more”, and this underlines the profound effects of economic globalization. Another item “accelerated” is positively enhanced by an adverbial “only” which guides the evaluation focus to the products of global economic integration.

Example 9

Economic globalization has not [+FORCE (intensity)] only accelerated the international flow of capital, resources, knowledge and talents, but [+FORCE (intensity)] more significantly made [+FORCE (space)] the whole world an international community.

The quantitative evaluators with a high frequency of occurrence indicate the university’s enrolment orientation. The president highlights the domestically “key” position of JU (Example 10), and specifies its location “in Yangtze River Delta” with a superlative “the most developed” to sharpen the institution’s geographical advantages (Example 11). In this case, the target audience of JU is more likely to be the mainland students. The university’s enrolment report is consistency with this orientation. In the academic year from 2019 to 2020, international students at JU only account for 4.9%, while the figure for CUHK arrived at 27.7%, around 5 times as high as the former figure.

Example 10

Jiangsu University is a national [+APPRECIATION (valuation)] key university [+FORCE (space)] in China.

Example 11

Lying [+FORCE (space)] in Yangtze River Delta, one of [+FORCE (intensity)] the most developed areas [+FORCE (space)] in China.

The two presidents' attitudinal meanings are strengthened via the up-scaling of Force mechanisms. In this process, the two appraisers become the maximized contributors to the elevated value position [4]. The value position can be understood as an epistemic stance on the value of an appraised object, and it is taken by an evaluator and can be accepted by audience. The fundamental purpose of educational advertisements is to persuade the viewers to accept the advertisers' ideas and participate as members of the university [1]. That is why both Text A and Text B try to align the audience with the value position built on the evaluations.

5 Conclusion

This study examines how the CUHK and JU presidents construct attitudinal and grading meanings in their messages for enrolment.

In short, evaluators of Appreciation and Force are favored by the two presidents. The CUHK president prefers intensification of meanings, and profiles his emotional responses to the evaluated objects, while his counterpart at JU tends to quantify the evaluative meanings and diminish the boundaries of categorical meaning [4].

The present study is limited in the involvement of resources, the size of samples and the amount of universities, thus it can only present how attitudinal and grading evaluations are encoded in two advertising texts of two selected institutions. Future studies could be directed at the multimodal construction of the attitudinal, grading, and engagement evaluators in university advertising campaigns to involve visual elements into discussion and expand the current study.

Empirical implications mainly lie in the application of the Appraisal system [6] in advertising design for college enrolment. For institutions with area-restrained recognition, they can place the appraising emphasis on widely recognized deictic references to target at the audience within and around the specific area. Concerning institutions looking for an increase in international enrolment quota, it is suggested to prepare advertising products catering to the overseas students' common values and conventions. Feasible tactics for advertisement design include taking a conversational tone, adding more emotional feelings, and highlighting individual development with self-fulfillment. In this way, the publicity idea is more likely to be accepted spontaneously by international readers.

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