

An Analysis of the Website Profile of Oxford University——from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar

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Abstract: Website profile of university is a brief introduction to the university on its official website. It provides a comprehensive overview of the university for web browsers as well as helps the university to attract students to apply for it. This paper intends to construe the ideational function of the profile of Oxford University, which is one of the top universities in the world. In the light of Halliday's systemic functional grammar, detailed analysis will be carried out in terms of transitivity system. Through this analysis, it is hoped that this study can find out motives behind this linguistic form and help readers to have a better understanding of how ideational function is realized in this kind of profile.

Keywords: Ideational Function; Website Profile of University; Transitivity

1. Introduction

Developed by M. A. K Halliday, systemic functional grammar is one of the most influential linguistic theories in the world. Halliday (1985) holds that there are three meta – functions of language, namely, ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Each of them is used to fulfill some certain purpose. The website profile of university is a brief introduction of the university, which is the main way for the outside world to get information about this university on the Internet. As a kind of introductory publicity literature, university website profiles can narrow the distance between web browsers and universities. A high – qualified profile not only represents its information comprehensively and logically, but helps the university to shape its public image and increase popularity, which indicates that it plays a role in influencing students' choice for school applying (Li, 2020). Recently, sporadic studies have been done on university profiles, but studies of analysis on ideational function of website university profiles are not enough. This paper analyzes the realization of the ideational function of Oxford University website profile from the perspective of Halliday's systemic functional grammar and tries to reveal the motivation and attractiveness hidden behind this linguistic form, for the purpose of helping readers to understand the ideational functions in university website profiles effectively.

2. Data collection

As Oxford University is one of the top universities in the world and attracts elites all over the world, its profile can be seen as a representative and typical model to be analyzed to explore the linguistic character of this kind of profile. The corpora used in this paper comes from the official website of Oxford University. For the limit of the space, the author only takes the *Oxford's international profile* in the *About* column as language data. The profile provides an overview of this university, which includes its important features, advantages and aims. The analyzing process is done manually by the author. To ensure the reliability and validity of the corpora, a discussion with partners has been made before analyzing. The author first divides the whole text into clauses which will be analyzed in detail, then defines the transitivity process of each clause according to the Halliday's functional grammar. After the proportions of each process verbs are counted, the author analyzes the data to explore the linguistic character of this profile in ideational function.

3. Analytical framework

Mainly developed by M. A. K Halliday, systemic functional grammar (SFG) is a form of grammatical description which is composed of systemic grammar and functional grammar. Functional grammar aims to reveal that language is a means of social interaction (Hu, 2006). From Halliday's perspective, adults' language has three meta-functions; the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual functions. (Halliday, 1985) Ideational function enables human beings to picture the reality into their mind, to "make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them." (Halliday, 1985:101) It consists of experiential function and logical function and is used as a means to convey new information to the hearer (Hu, 2006:312). The experiential function is realized mainly through transitivity system and voice. This function not only specifies the available options in meaning but also determines the nature of their structural realization. Transitivity system, as the grammar of the clause in its ideational aspect, represents people's experiences and activities by six types of processes, participants and circumstances. The six transitivity processes are: material processes, mental processes, behavioral processes, relational processes, verbal processes and existential processes (Halliday, 2000). Since these six processes, together with the participants and circumstances, can represent people's inner and outer experiences and activities, the motives hidden behind the discourse can be explored and understood through the analysis of the transitivity system of the discourse.

4. Data analysis

In the selected profile, there are 434 words (including punctuation) in total. After analyzing this profile based on the transitivity theory, a total number of 29 processes are found, including 10 material processes, 13 relational processes and 6 mental processes. From the analytic result, it can be seen that relational processes occur the most frequently, which take up 44.83%, followed by material processes (33.48%) and mental processes (20.69%).

4.1 Material processes

Material processes refer to the processes of doing things, which involves an actor, a goal and an action verb. Due to the introductory character, university profiles present the current situation, achievements and characteristics about the university by using material processes. In addition, university profiles serve a publicity purpose, so action words are usually used to arouse browsers' interest. In the website profile of Oxford University, it uses action verbs to show the achievements of this university. For example:

- (1) The pace of globalisation has accelerated in recent decades.
- (2) Oxford academics have built untold numbers of research collaborations with international partners.
- (3) Oxford has defined the English language for many people around the world through the dictionaries and other books of Oxford University Press (OUP).
- (4) Our alumni... are spread across almost every country on earth.

The examples above show that the profile conveys its academic achievements to the browsers. "Accelerate" means to go faster, showing that Oxford has welcomed and enrolled much more international students in recent decades. "Build" and "define" stress the achievements of the university and its prominent status in the academic field. By using the word "spread", it shows that this university attracts students from all over the world and its graduates can work in different places around the world. All these processes stress the achievements of Oxford and can attract the potential students or applicants when they browse the website page.

4.2 Relational processes

Relational clauses are used to identify relationship or recognize attributes. As profiles serve to introduce and present information, relational processes are often used in this linguistic form. In the website profile of Oxford, relational processes rank the first, which mainly present the characters and features of this university and show its academic status. For example:

- (5) Our prowess in the sciences is particularly noteworthy.
- (6) We have been ranked number one in the world for medicine for five years running by the Times Higher

Education Supplement.

(7) Oxford now has a strong international character and a presence around the world unlike that of any other university.

The examples above belong to attributive relational processes, which are expressed by an attribute, a carrier and a relational verb. These examples show attributes and features that Oxford University has and what type it belongs to. The example (5) reveals that Oxford's achievements in sciences. The example (6) represents its leading position in medicine. And in example (7), "have" is used to show the university's international character and appeal students all over the world to choose it.

(8) This includes supporting mobility across our staff and student body through Erasmus and other means, and supporting international research collaborations on the basis of academic interest and need.

(9) Our alumni are more than 275,000 strong.

Example (8) and (9) belong to identifying relational processes which involve an identified, an identifier and a verb. The profile describes Oxford's dedication to the international academic world and great training outcomes through the relational process.

In addition, in the relational processes of this profile, the attributive relational processes are used more than those of the identifying. This represents that the profile emphasizes more on Oxford's attributes than its identity.

4.3 Mental Processes

Mental processes are used to express activities of one's internal world. Two participants are involved in the mental processes: A sensor and a phenomenon. The usage of mental processes in this profile creates an intimate relationship between Oxford and browsers and shortens the distance between these two parts thereby. Also, mental processes are used to describe what the students will benefit if they choose this university, which can be an attractive factor to them. For example:

(10) You may have heard about Oxford's history as the first university in the English-speaking world.

(11) ... also enjoy access to a range of international experiences while studying here. . .

The example (10) uses the second person "you" to make it like a face-to-face conversation between the university and the browsers. The profile uses "hear about" to show Oxford's well-known achievements and reputation. In example (11), the mental word "enjoy" implies what students in Oxford can benefit during their study and they will have a great time there.

5. Discussion

In the analysis of website profile of Oxford University, it can be found that the ideational function is realized by transitivity system. First of all, material processes, relational processes and mental processes are used in the profile, accounting for 34.48%, 44.83% and 20.69% respectively. This reflects the informativity and publicity of this type of text for the character of each process. Secondly, action verbs are used to describe the current situation of this university and relational processes are taken to describe features and attributes of this university, which gives browsers an overall and comprehensive introduction of Oxford University. This profile not only imparts information to the browsers but also attracts its potential students and influences their choices. Firstly, the action verbs used in the material processes are carefully chosen, such as "accelerate", "spread" and "build", which describe the university's fast developments in globalization vividly. It implies that it not only welcomes international students to go on their study there but has taken active actions to do this. These descriptions attract ambitious and aspirant students all over the to join this university and be a member of it, where they can receive excellent educational resources. Secondly, the profile describes the current status of Oxford and greatness of its achievements through relational processes. And the processes also show its attitude towards attributes and status. This profile uses more attributive relational process than that of identifying which implies that it cares more about what it has than what it is. This shows the aggressiveness of this university who keeps on improving itself, which can also be a factor to attract the young people who strive to further progress. In addition, this profile uses mental verbs to show how it can benefit the students who choose it. By showing its ambition and goals, it earns students' trust in this university. Finally, the use of second person and conversation-like

sentences helps to create an intimate atmosphere and narrows the distance between browsers and the university. All in all, the website profile of Oxford gives its browsers a comprehensive introduction, which is realized by the material processes and relational processes of its transitivity system. It also has its motives behind this profile: To appeal and attract students with lofty ideals all over the world to choose it and join it. And this motive is achieved by the carefully — chosen action verbs, the use of attributive relational processes and the mental processes. In a word, the introductory and publicity character of the website profile of Oxford is realized by the transitivity system.

As Oxford is one of the top and popular universities in the world, its profile can throw light on how to make a proper website introductory text which is both informative and attractive. In order to fulfill its informative task, it is supposed to use material processes and relational processes to present the development, features and achievements of the university. What is more, attracting potential students is also an important objective of the profile. In order to make the browsers feel attracted by the content of the profile and yearn for the university thereby, the university ought to take some strategies. First of all, action verbs in the material processes should be carefully chosen. Action verbs presenting outstanding features can draw a vivid picture in the browsers' mind and hold much appeal to them. Secondly, as most elites care more about the development prospect than the historical status, attributive relational processes should be taken more which imply the attributes of the university rather than the identifying relational processes which indicate the identity of it. Finally, mental verbs should be taken into use as they can give rise to empathy and shorten the distance between browsers and the university, which is also a good way to attract the potential students. In a word, such strategies above can be references for universities or English learners to write profiles which are supposed to be both informative and publicized.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, the author analyzes the website profile of Oxford University from the perspective of transitivity to understand the motive behind this profile and how it is realized. Through the analysis, it can be seen that the profile uses material (34.48%), relational (44.83%) and mental processes (20.69%) respectively. The motive behind the profile has been understood by this analysis, that is, to impart information and attract students. By using vivid action verbs, it introduces this university as well amazes its browsers. Through the use of attributive relation processes, it reflects Oxford's emphasis on its attributes and features. At the same time, mental words are used to show the ambition and attract the potential students of this university. In a word, the website profile of Oxford University serves not only as an information transmitter, but an attraction to the potential students.

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