

A Comparative Analysis of English Profiles of Chinese and Foreign University Websites Based on Transitivity System

Liang Chen

School of Foreign Studies, China Three Gorges University, Yichang 443000, Hubei, China
liangchen615@outlook.com

Abstract: *In the new era of higher education internationalization, international exchange has become the focus of colleges and universities. The English profile of university, as a specialized discourse, aims to publicize universities' popularity and improve reputation of universities. Therefore, this paper takes English profiles of China Three Gorges University and University of Birmingham websites as examples, analyzes texts of profiles (About Us) from the perspective of transitivity system and tries to figure out the similarities and differences and their causes of the university profile between CTGU and University of Birmingham. After analyzing, this paper found that: (1) The process types, the participants in transitivity system are regularly distributed in two universities. The process types of transitivity system are similarly distributed in them. Material process and relational process are used mostly, and the use of relational processes in the English profile of CTGU is less than that in University of Birmingham. At the same time, the distributions of participants in these two universities are different. We-our serves as the participants in most of transitive process clauses in the English profile of University of Birmingham website, while there is no use of pronouns, only "CTGU" as participant in the English profile of CTGU. (2) The major causes for the similarities and differences of the distribution of the transitivity system in English profiles of CTGU and University of Birmingham websites are the characteristics of the introduction itself, the different ways of thinking, the different culture backgrounds and different rights relationship between Chinese and western universities.*

Keywords: English profile, university website, transitivity system, SFG.

1. Introduction

With the development of globalization, the exchanges between our country and the world are unprecedentedly expanding. As one of the most widely used media, Internet has been permeating into various fields, including not only the field of business and commerce, but also the field of education. In the new era of higher education internationalization, international exchange has become the focus of colleges and universities. Besides the first-class disciplines, faculties and first-rate management, profiles on university websites also play a decisive role in international communications. Therefore, many universities take advantage of the websites to show their special advantages and promote their international image.

The English profile of university, as a specialized discourse according to the definition of discourse [3], aims to publicize universities popularity and improve reputation of universities. However, there are few studies on English profiles of universities [6]-[7]. Very few studies have been carried out from the perspective of systemic functional grammar. Therefore, analyzing Chinese and Foreign University profiles from the perspective of SFG has certain reference significance for improving the quality of the English version of Chinese university introductions on websites and promoting international image.

This paper will take English website of China Three Gorges University and University of Birmingham as an example, analyze texts of university profiles (About Us) from the perspective of transitivity system and try to answer the following questions: 1) What are similarities and differences of the university profile (About Us) between CTGU and

University of Birmingham from the perspective of transitivity system? 2) What are causes of similarities and differences of the university profile between CTGU and University of Birmingham?

2. Data Collection

To answer the research questions, data presented in this paper were selected from the online university introductions of China Three Gorges University and University of Birmingham. As for the selection of these two universities, firstly, as a student of China Three Gorges University, so I would like to choose it as an example to analyze. Then, based on my knowledge of systemic functional grammar, I browsed the English websites of some famous universities abroad and found that the English introduction of the University of Birmingham was representative and was comparable with that of the China Three Gorges University in language. Therefore, the University of Birmingham and China Three Gorges University was chosen to be primary source. Besides, due to limitations in article length, this article selects around 200 words of text from each of the two school introductions for analysis.

As for the collection of the data, quantitative method will be used. Initially, different processes will be counted manually since present computer technology fails to take the context into consideration, which may give rise to the mistakes in identifying the types of transitivity processes. After that, I will make a list to show all processes in each text respectively, and the participants and circumstances will be concluded there. Then, the frequency and the ratio of each item will also be worked out manually, and a separated table will be drawn.

Texts of English profiles of CTGU and University of Birmingham websites will be presented in the appendix to save space for the main body and keep the paper clear.

3. Analytical Framework

In Systemic Functional Grammar, Halliday put forward a set of meta-functions of language, which represent the basic functions of language. Halliday divides the meta-functions of language into the ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function [4]. Ideational function refers to the function of language to people's experiences in the real world and the inner world and it is mainly embodied by transitivity system. The transitivity system of language shapes the world of experience into a set of process types [4]. Each process type distinguishes the type of "going-on", or the process, participants, and circumstances [4]. It should also be noted that the boundary between each process is indeterminate.

According to Halliday, there are six types of processes: material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioral process, and existential process [4]. Material process is a process of doing or happening that involves physical actions. It is also the most common process in a language. Any material process has an Actor, the doer that "does the deed" [4]. Besides the Actor, the participants of material process sometimes include a second Goal, which the action is directed at. Mental process refers to "something that goes on in the internal world of the mind" [5]. The mental process has two participants: the sensor and the phenomenon. For example, in the clause "Mary liked the dog", "liked" is the mental process, Mary is the sensor and the dog is the phenomenon. Relational process serves to characterize and identify. It is used to show the relationship between two entities, suggesting that one thing is said to be something else. Attributive and identifying are the two types of relational processes. There are three kinds of process: verbal, existential and behavioral, which are less useful than the former three processes. The verbal process is the process of exchanging information through speech; the behavioral process is the process of (typically human) physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming and staring; the existence process is the process of indicating the existence of something.

4. Findings

4.1 Distribution of Transitivity Processes in English Profiles of CTGU and University of Birmingham

Transitivity system indicates the part of linguistic system that describes the relationship between the participants and verb processes by clause or simply by "who (what) does what to whom (what)". The type of process is revealed by the choice of the verb used in the clause, from which we can figure out transitivity relation and roles that the participants play in the clause. The choice of each process type can reveal the speaker's personal attitude and opinion about the world experience. In this part, process types and percentage in excerpted texts will be counted.

After a careful searching, process types and the percentage in

excerpted texts of English profiles of CTGU and University of Birmingham are clearly presented in Table 4.1.

Table 1: Process Types in CTGU and University of Birmingham

Process type	CTGU		University of Birmingham	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Material Process	10	66.7%	9	56.25%
Relational Process	2	13.3%	6	37.5%
Mental Process	3	20%	1	6.25%
Total	15	100%	16	100%

It can be seen from the Table 1 that among the 15 sentences in the English profile of CTGU, material process occupies the largest proportion with its percentage reaching 66.7% while relational process and mental process account for 13.3% and 20% respectively. In the English profile of University of Birmingham, material process constitutes the largest proportion which is 56.25%. Relational process ranks the second place with the percentage of 37.5% while mental process account for the smallest proportion of 6.25%.

4.2 Distribution of Participants in English Profiles of CTGU and University of Birmingham

As has been mentioned in the previous part, the transitivity system is defined as some transitive processes in which different participants involved. After analyzing the participants involved in the three transitive processes clauses, it can be found that personal pronouns "we" and "our", serves as the participants in most of transitive process clauses in profiles of University of Birmingham website, while "CTGU" serves as the participant in most of transitive process clauses in English profile of CTGU website. To be more specific, there are 11 "we-our" as participants in English profile of University of Birmingham but no use of pronouns only "CTGU" as participant in the English profile of CTGU website.

4.3 Similarities and Differences of Transitivity Processes and Participants

In terms of similarities, it can be seen that material process plays a dominant role in these two kinds of English profiles. Material process centers around the happenings of the world, whether in the past, in the present or in the future. Along with the core verb is its actor and goal, both two of which make up the goings-on of everyday events [3]. Therefore, it is natural for material processes to take a dominant status in both profiles of CTGU and University of Birmingham websites. Besides, the second most adopted process type for both two universities is relational process, which refers to a process of being or having. In other words, relational process either gives definition or points to a status of possession. This aligns with the nature of introductions writing, where introduction of the university is needed as background information. The least used process types for both two universities are mental process and both do not include behavioral process, existential process and verbal process.

In terms of differences, the relational process are more used in English profile of University of Birmingham than in English

profile of CTGU. The mental process used by CTGU is more used than mental process by University of Birmingham. Besides, personal pronouns “we” and “our”, serves as the participants in most of transitive process clauses in English profile of University of Birmingham, while there is no use of pronouns, only “CTGU” as participant in the English profile of CTGU.

5. Discussion

5.1 Functions of Transitivity Processes

Material processes exist in the clauses of happening or doing. The material process will go through the flow of events or a quantum of change with some energy input. Generally speaking, material process has three kinds: happening, creating or changing and doing (to) or acting. Examples of material process are as follows:

- (1) ...while the bachelor education ***started*** from 1978... (CTGU)
- (2) More than 100 years on, our Birmingham campus ***has grown*** to 672 acres... (University of Birmingham)
- (3) Having been approved by the Ministry of Education, CTGU ***was founded*** in June 29, 2000. (CTGU)
- (4) ...as well as a dedicated student hub where our students can ***access*** a range of support services if required. (University of Birmingham)

In the four examples above, Example (1) belongs to the type of happening, which lays an emphasis on the new occurrence of something or an event. In example (1), the writer chooses this type of material process to emphasize the new information- the founded or the history of bachelor education. Example (2) and (3) belongs to the second type: creating or changing. The writer uses this verb to introduce a new subject that comes into being. Meaning of the verb “change” is to make something or somebody different. In example (2), the writer introduces the change of Birmingham campus while in example (3), the writer uses this kind of verb to introduce the history of CTGU. The example (4) belongs to the type of acting. This type of clause construes the experience of performing or executing an action. Therefore, example (4) emphasizes student’s action that they can use a range of support services. All in all, from the four examples above, it is clear that material process as the most frequently used process type plays a major role in English profiles as it depicts the goings-on about the universities with a focus on the actors and goals, which aligns with the purpose of these news reports.

“Mental” clauses are concerned with our experience of the world of our own consciousness. They are clauses of sensing: a mental clause construes a quantum of change in the flow of events taking place in our own consciousness. Within the general class of mental clauses, there are three different sub-type of sensing: perception, affection and cognition. Through mental clauses, the speaker conveys the experience of inner world: personal perception and cognition together with attitudes or opinions about the outer world. Examples are given below:

- (5) CTGU ***adheres to*** the principle of promoting development through opening up... (CTGU)

- (6) Each year, we ***welcome*** more than 30,000 students from across the world. (University of Birmingham)

In example (5) and example (6), the sensor is “CTGU” and “we”. “adheres to” belongs to the category of cognition in mental process that construes the understanding development in the mind and “welcome” belongs to the category of affection in mental process that construes the experience of a happy feeling or emotion.

“Relational” clauses serve to characterize and to identify. As we have seen, material clauses are concerned with our experience of the material world and mental clauses are concerned with our experience of the world of our own consciousness. Both this outer experience and this inner experience may be construed by relational clauses; but they unfold this experience as “being” rather than as “doing” or “sensing”. In English profile of University of Birmingham, the percentage of relational clauses is 37.5%, while the percentage of relational processes in CTGU is 13.3%. There are two modes of relational process: attributive relational process and identifying relational process. Following examples are illustrated in details.

- (7) CTGU ***has*** 2 national level experimental teaching demonstration center... (CTGU)
- (8) We ***were*** England’s first civic university, a place where students from all backgrounds were accepted on an equal basis. (University of Birmingham)

Example (7) belongs to the attributive relational process, which there are many facilities in CTGU. Example (8) belongs to the identifying relational process. In the identifying relational process, the typical verb linking the two parts is “be”. The latter part defines the identity or significance of the former part. The two parts are of equal importance in the clause. The identifying clauses in relational process are reversible. That is to say, example (8) can be put in this way: England’s first civic university is us... That is to say, the latter part is a restatement of the former part. The section after “be” makes further explanation and provides more detailed information for the section ahead.

5.2 Functions of we-our as participants

We-Our-Us is always adopted when the speaker or writer tends to refer to both the writer himself and the audience. “We” and “Our” are more used in English profile of University of Birmingham than that of CTGU. For example:

- (9) ***Our*** size has changed, but ***our*** civic commitment has not. (University of Birmingham)
- (10) ***We*** also have beautiful, open spaces such as the Green Heart... (University of Birmingham)

The usage of “We” and “Our” in example (9) and example (10) helps the university of Birmingham build close relationship with the students. “We” and “Our” involves visitors (Students) as one group. This kind of use gives the impression that the writer is speaking directly to the readers and exemplifies “synthetic personalization” called by Fairclough [1]. Therefore, We-Our shows a deep inclusive meaning to regard the University and the Students as a whole, which contributes

to a better promotion effect. Comparing with CTGU, University of Birmingham gives students a closer feeling by using pronouns We-our as participants.

5.3 Causes of similarities and differences

The distribution results of transitivity system show that, both the two universities use material process the most. Why does this kind of similarity exist? In transitive processes, material process notifies the information that some entity does something, thus this process is naturally employed most in the introduction of university. Both the two universities use material process most with the aim of introducing their achievements and what they are doing to attract more students, so when it comes to specific events, the two universities naturally choose more material process clauses which could veritably and accurately expresses what wonderful work they have made before and what inspiring action they will take in the future. For example:

(11) At present, CTGU is carrying out the national education plan... (CTGU)

(12) As well as evolving study and education spaces, we have invested in cutting-edge living and social spaces.....(University of Birmingham)

By employing material process in example (11), the writer indicates that the inspiring action CTGU will take at present such as carrying out the national education plan, while University of Birmingham expresses what they have done something wonderful such as invested in cutting-edge living and social spaces by using material process, which indicates the importance this university places on students' living and living conditions. In transitive system, material process expresses the fact that "somebody does something to somebody or something in some aspects", which seems more objective than other transitive processes like verbal process and mental process. Thus, it is reasonable that the material process is employed predominantly in the two introductions, which is directly connected with the functions of this kind of text.

As for causes of differences, the distribution results of transitivity system show that mental process is used more in English profile of CTGU than in English profile of Birmingham. Relational Process is used less in English profile of CTGU than in English profile of Birmingham. Besides, personal pronouns "we" and "our", serves as the participants in most of transitive process clauses in English profile of University of Birmingham. The causes for the differences depend on different ways of thinking, cultural differences and differences in rights relationship in Chinese and western universities. In terms of mental process, CTGU choose the category of cognition while University of Birmingham choose the category of affection. the reason is maybe connected with the different cultural contexts of west and China. According to Hall, China is a high-context culture society, people in this country usually communicate with each other in an indirect and implicit way because the message is conveyed by the context [2]. Thus, the statements of affection such as "I love you" are rarely expressed. However, China is a low-context culture society, people in this country tend to communicate with each other in a direct and explicit way, that is, almost

everything needs to be expressed in language. Traditional, the westerners are more out-going and straight-talking, while Chinese people are easy-going and do not good at expressing their emotions publicly. Besides, the difference between relational process mainly because the difference of ways of thinking.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, firstly, there are some similarities and differences between the English profile of CTGU and that of University of Birmingham. To be more specific, the process types of transitivity system are similarly distributed in English profile of CTGU and University of Birmingham. Material process and relational process are used mostly, and the use of relational processes in introduction of CTGU is less than that in University of Birmingham. Besides, the distributions of participants in these two universities are different. We-our serves as participants in most of transitive process clauses in English profile of University of Birmingham, while there is no use of pronouns, only "CTGU" as participant in the English profile of CTGU. Secondly, the major causes for the similarities and differences of the distribution of the transitivity system in university introduction of CTGU and University of Birmingham are the characteristics of the introduction itself, the different ways of thinking, the different culture backgrounds and different rights relationship between Chinese and western universities. Based on this analysis, it can also be implicated that transitivity system of SFG can not only be used to analyze the text of university introduction, but also very useful to be used as a guidance for Universities in writing university introduction to promote their publicity, build a globalized and friendly image, and appeal to international students.

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Appendix 1 Excerpt of English Profile of CTGU

Website

Having been approved by the Ministry of Education, CTGU was founded in June 29, 2000. The history of CTGU can be dated back to 1946, while the bachelor education started from 1978, and the postgraduate and international student education began from 1996.

CTGU consists of 30 colleges, 72 undergraduate programs covering nine fields including science, engineering, medicine, arts, economics, management, law, education and fine arts. CTGU has 2 national level experimental teaching demonstration centre. 5 provincial and ministerial-level key laboratories on disaster prevention and reduction, construction and management of hydraulic project, design and maintenance of mechanical equipment, research and utilization of natural product, etc.

CTGU adheres to the principle of promoting development through opening up, organizes multi-level, wide range international cooperation and communication, insists the development path of internationalization, learning advanced educational concept and experience of other countries. It also ushers in high quality education resources, promotes the development of education reform, emphasizes the training of talents with international education background, promotes the international status, influences and the competitiveness of the university.

At present, CTGU is carrying out the national education plan, impelling the construction and development of connotation and vigorously implementing the four principles of “characteristic development, innovative reform, opening education and leading brand”, sparing no effort to realize the educational goal as “Building a high-level and comprehensive university with distinctive hydro-power characteristics”.

Appendix 2 Excerpt of English Profile of University of Birmingham Website

Founded in 1900, Birmingham represented a new model for Higher Education.

facilities. We were England’s first civic university, a place where students from all backgrounds were accepted on an equal basis. More than 100 years on, our Birmingham campus has grown to 672 acres, and we also now have a campus in Dubai. Each year, we welcome more than 30,000 students from across the world. Our size has changed, but our civic commitment has not.

Our Collaborative Teaching Laboratory is changing the way STEM subjects are taught and we have completed our new School of Engineering, and are nearing completion on our Molecular Sciences facility, among others. As well as

evolving study and education spaces, we have invested in cutting-edge living and social spaces for our students to help to connect our vast and diverse community. This includes new accommodation facilities such as Chamberlain Hall and The Green Community. We also have beautiful, open spaces such as the Green Heart, and The Vale Village on our hedgehog-friendly campus, as well as a dedicated student hub where our students can access a range of support services if required.

With world-class research and outstanding global education as our core mission, we will strive to increase the volume and quality of our research to make an even greater difference to the world around us. We will be the UK’s exemplary civic university, remaining firmly committed to our foundations in the highly diverse communities, people, and economy of the city of Birmingham and the West Midlands.