

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this study is to analyse advertisements of private institutions of higher learning in a local newspaper (The Star) using a genre-based approach. The researcher attempts to find out if there is a structure in these advertisements and if there is, to identify it and analyse the possible reasons for it. In this study, the findings are also compared with those of other studies to make it a more meaningful and comprehensive analysis.

In this chapter, the purposes of the study, its rationale and significance are described. It is to set the scenario for the significance of the research findings. The researcher's vocational experience as a full-time student counsellor in a secondary school contributes considerably as a source of reference to the background knowledge of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Malaysia as a Regional Centre for Higher Education

In 1986, there were less than 50 private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Currently, there are 591 private colleges and institutions and eight private universities in the country with a combined student population of 210,000 (The Star, March 18, 2000). This student population includes international students from China, Indonesia and other Asean countries. There

are about 7,780 teaching staff, local and foreign lecturers (New Straits Times, April 8, 2000). This shows that Malaysia, to a certain extent, has been successful in her quest to become a regional centre for higher education.

1.1.2 Opportunities for Higher Education

This rapid mushrooming of institutions of higher learning, particularly of the private institutions, has made available a wide range of educational opportunities for school leavers as well as for working people aspiring for professional advancement.

Education has brought about tremendous growth and expansion in the awareness of career and self-development among Malaysians. This has resulted in a very high need and demand for information and guidance on self-improvement and educational opportunities available.

In response to this demand, numerous sources of information on these educational and career opportunities are made accessible to the public through the various media, the newspapers, the Internet, radio and television programmes, road shows and education or career exhibitions.

a. Public Institutions of Higher Learning

Public institutions of higher learning are non-profit-making organisations. Except for Universiti Malaya which is corporatised, all the other

universities are fully subsidised and funded by the government. The general fees and tuition fees are very low. Getting a place in a local public university is as good as getting a scholarship by the general living standards of an average middle class Malaysian family, today, especially in the urban areas.

However, the enrolment into these public universities is centrally monitored by the Bahagian Pengurusan Kemasukan Pelajar also called the Unit Pusat Universiti (UPU) under the Ministry of Education. Acceptance into the various public universities is based on a merit point system where points are accredited to each applicant according to grades in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM). Admission to these public universities is, thus, very highly competitive and is given to the high achievers (academic and extra-curricular) based on a quota system which is determined by the Ministry of Education. People who apply for admission into a public university either cannot afford or do not choose to go overseas.

In 1999, there were only 11 public universities in Malaysia (Berita Publishing Sdn. Bhd., 1999) and not all of the applicants with SPM results would be successful. A small proportion of the SPM holders would continue with their studies in Form Six. Likewise, not all the students who apply for university admission with the STPM will obtain places. The SPM and STPM failures may attempt again at their respective examination, take up some training or trade or enter the employment market straightaway.

However, with the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia alone, these young men and women do not have much employment value. They do not possess any professional training or skills that can guarantee them of a secure and comfortable vocation suitable to their interest and aptitude or with good prospects of promotion in the future. Therefore, to prepare and equip themselves for a more viable, marketable or prospective profession, a big number of these youths enrol themselves into the private institutions of higher learning.

b. Private Institutions of Higher Learning

Students who do not obtain places in the public Institutions of Higher Learning enter private colleges as an alternative. There are many reasons why students opt for the private institutions. One of the main reasons is, that admission into the private institutions of higher learning, is much easier as their entry requirements are not as stringent or as competitive as those of the public universities. Moreover, registration of the students into their programmes is also much more flexible as there are several intakes each year. These institutions accept students based on their school's forecast results of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia or the respective school Trial Examination results. The students do not need to wait for their actual results to be released to embark on their tertiary education. In fact, they get to start four months ahead of the students who follow the normal course. Another determining factor is the assurance of being able to pursue the course of their

choice. The Form Five leavers have the advantage of not spending another two years in school to prepare for the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia which does not guarantee them of a place in a public university for a programme of their choice.

c. Factors Influencing Choice of Institutions of Higher Learning

The above situation and the highly motivated Malaysians who believe in investing in education, have caused the upsurge in the demand for educational opportunities. To meet this demand, far-sighted businessmen and academicians under the capable leadership of our prime minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad have set up numerous universities and colleges in the various parts of the country.

The very young adults will find it difficult to pick and choose from 591 private colleges and 8 private universities. To make the correct and best choice from this wide array of selection, the parents often study and consider many factors.

For the purpose of gathering further information for the background of this study, a survey was conducted in April, 2000 to identify the factors which influence the choice of a private Institution of Higher Learning. A questionnaire comprising 9 factors (Refer to Appendix A) was given out and answered by 30 Form Five pupils. The respondents indicated for each factor

whether it was important to consider before making a decision on the choice of a private institution of higher learning. The respondents were randomly chosen from Form Five pupils of a secondary school in Petaling Jaya. Results show that all the factors suggested in the questionnaire are considered important by at least some of the respondents. The following table summarises the results of the survey in order of frequency of respondents who agree with the statements concerning the choice of a private institution of higher learning, from highest to lowest.

Item No.	Factors which influence choice of Private College/ University	Frequency of Pupils who agree with statement. (%)
1.	Sufficient up-to-date facilities	100
2.	Quality course content	97
3.	Credibility and achievements of institution	93
4.	Affiliation with a well-known university	90
5.	Flexible programme structure	90
6.	Recognition by the National Accreditation Council	90
7.	Qualification and quality of lecturers	87
8.	Competitive fee structure	83
9.	Location of college/university	67

Table 1.1: Frequency of Pupils who agree with the factors of choice of a private Institution of Higher Learning in order of importance of factor (highest to lowest)

One other factor brought up by 15 % of the respondents concerning the choice of a particular private college or university, is the availability of scholarships or study loan facilities from the institution for the students from the lower income group.

i. Sufficient Up-to-Date Facilities

It is expected that a college should have sufficient and up to date facilities. These facilities should include lecture theatres and classrooms, student hostels, library, Information Technology and science laboratories, workshops, sports and recreation centres, cafeteria and a basic retail centre for essential stationeries and utilities.

ii. Quality Course Content

The course content should be of high quality and covers a substantial area of the field of the professional training required. A course outline of a degree programme for civil engineering, for example, should cover an essential combination of the relevant course subjects like geophysics, geology and chemistry.

iii. Credibility and Achievement of Institution.

Credibility and achievement are two qualities which require time to attain. The Institutions of Higher Learning which are older, more established and have survived the test of time, would acquire credibility through their achievements. These achievements will show in the academic performance of their students and the quality of the programmes in the college. A reputable college is one that produces youths who are well-trained and well-equipped with professional skills and expertise. The college ought to also ensure that their students are well developed in all psychosocial aspects. They fit the

criteria of future leaders and manpower needs of the nation. Stories of success or failure will get around by word of mouth or through the media and thus affect the name of the institution. These Institutions of Higher Learning have to maintain their high standards in order to upkeep their credibility and achievements.

iv. Affiliation With Well Known Local Public or Foreign Universities.

School leavers and their parents tend to view an Institution of Higher Learning to be more reliable if it offers courses that are affiliated with a reputable local public or foreign university. The affiliation assures them of some measure of control of the standards and quality of the education provided in the domain of course structure or content and the evaluation processes and examinations. Thus, there will be recognition of their certificates and qualifications.

v. Flexible Programme Structure (Credit transfer/ Twinning)

A flexible programme structure consists of a plan of the courses offered that allows a certain amount of freedom to the students to plan their academic path and strategies to get the best out of every ringgit they spend and the maximum benefit of the time they put in. The facilities come in many forms like credit transfers where students can do part of their studies in the local Institution of Higher Learning and complete the rest of the programme in an established foreign university overseas. These are 1+2 or 2+1 programmes.

The degree or diploma offered is from the foreign university. When such programmes were first launched, they were much sought after by students. However, the Asian financial crisis in 1997 caused a drastic decrease in the Malaysian Ringgit against foreign currencies especially of the developed and richer countries. Many families were affected and could not afford to send their children overseas. The enrolment rate of private colleges dropped. To solve the problem, private colleges came up with agreements with established foreign universities on various relevant conditions like course structure and evaluation criteria of their programmes. The private colleges then introduced total twinning 3+0 programmes where students can now complete their whole programme locally. In this way, the degrees awarded to these students are still considered foreign degrees.

vi. Recognition by the National Accreditation Council (L.A.N.)

The National Accreditation Council (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara) was set up by the Ministry of Education to monitor and regulate the operations of all Institutions of Higher Learning, especially the private ones. All Institutions of Higher Learning have to submit applications to this council and obtain recognition or accreditation for all the programmes offered. If the programmes meet the guidelines and requirements specified by the council they will be accorded accreditation by the National Accreditation Council (LAN). These programmes are thus recognised by the government of Malaysia. In other words, all the programmes offered in the Institutions of Higher Learning in

principle must be submitted for approval for accreditation before they can be offered to the public. Otherwise, they are not recognised. Therefore it is vital for the public to be aware of this factor.

vii. Qualification and Quality of Lecturers

A dynamic, highly qualified and dedicated academic team of teaching staff is an essential factor to guarantee quality education for the students. Students who have benefited from these teachers will be proof of the high standards of the college.

viii. Competitive Fee Structure

Finance is another important factor considered by potential students. A highly competitive fee structure will give any college an advantageous edge above others.

ix. Location of College/University (Convenience)

The geographical and strategic location of the college or university makes another determining factor for students and parents choosing a college. A good location offers practicality and convenience in terms of transportation, lodging and good facilities especially for out-station students. A safe, clean and healthy neighbourhood enhances an environment conducive to learning.

x. Scholarship and Study Loan facilities

Scholarship and study loan facilities offered by a private college or university attract brilliant scholars. This is particularly essential for those who have the academic achievement but do not possess the financial ability to pay for the extremely high fees of the private institutions.

The many factors discussed above make it difficult for students and parents to make a decision in choosing a programme and a college. It is thus, the task of the advertising personnel to help their clients, the colleges, to attract as many students to their institutions.

1.1.3 The Role of the Advertising Industry in Advertisements of Private Institutions of Higher Learning.

The Collins English Dictionary (1992) defines “advertising” as to present or praise (goods, a service, etc.) to the public, especially in order to encourage sales. Advertising is the promotion of goods or services for sale through impersonal media, such as radio or television (Collins English Dictionary 1992). Thus, it serves to make a new product or service available in the market, known to the public. It also attracts customers or clients to the product or service by informing them of their special characteristics or features.

The main target group of the advertisers of private Institutions of Higher Learning is the batch of Form Five and Form Six school leavers who have just completed their secondary education. The advertisements are printed at different stages, before each intake of students. These stages are also scheduled to coincide with the release of results of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia and Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia examinations. The target group is made up of students whose parents can afford and are willing to pay for the high fees and expenses incurred in pursuing a course in a private Institution of Higher Learning.

In the private education sector, advertising and marketing is most essential to bring in the students. The number of students enrolled into an institution will determine the amount of income brought in to finance the running of a particular institution. This in turn decides whether the institution can continue its operation. Every item in the institution, from the infrastructure and building or physical facilities right down to the salaries of the academic and non-academic staff is funded privately. There is no subsidy from the government. The student enrolment is, therefore, vital for the upkeep of every member of the staff or board of governors related to this business concern.

A potential student can be 'attracted' or 'invited' to make the choice of enrolling in a programme suitable for him/her in a particular private college/university. When he does so, he/she is engaging the services of the

college to help him/her achieve his/her ambition to pursue a particular professional training and qualification. The role of the advertising industry is, therefore, to service its client, in this case, the private Institution of Higher Learning (private college/university), by 'attracting' the attention of the potential 'students'.

Advertisements, particularly, advertisements in the newspapers, is of utmost importance to fulfil this role. Yearly expenses on advertisements in newspapers for private Institutions of Higher Learning may come in the range of from RM100,000/- to more than RM2,000,000/- (These are estimated figures based on confidential interviews with marketing personnel of several private Institutions). This budget does not include the cost incurred by the dissemination of information to the public and schools in the form of television and radio commercials, road shows, education exhibitions and distribution of printed literature (prospectuses, brochures, flyers, and posters). The size of the budget reserved for advertising by the private Institutions of Higher Learning shows the importance of presentation and promotion of their product to the public.

Competition is stiff among the almost 600 private Institutions of Higher Learning. In fact, the stiff competition has led to poorly managed institutions to be sold from one corporate company to another. The Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Abdullah Badawi had indicated that the merging of colleges

would be necessary to improve the quality of education and to ensure that Malaysia attains the ambition of become a regional hub of education excellence (The Star, March 18, 2000).

To ascertain that they capture the market in this type of economic condition, the advertisers will exhaust all avenues to introduce the institution and programmes offered by their 'clients' (the Institutions of Higher Learning) to their own 'clients' (the students). The main tool of advertisement is language, be it oral, visual or graphic. A successful advertisement uses effective language to capture and maintain attention of the 'client'. This would lead him to find out more information either through a telephone call, make an effort to go to an education exhibition or even to drop in at the institution concerned to source for more information. The language used is thus, most vital to achieve this reaction from the potential 'clients'.

1.2 The Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study the strategies in advertisements of private Institutions of Higher Learning using a genre analysis approach. It attempts to investigate if there is a particular structure in the advertisements of private Institutions of Higher Learning and if there is, to make a description and explanation of this structure.

Genre analysis is descriptive rather than prescriptive as it attempts to find out the strategies of the advertisements or the way the advertisements of private Institutions of Higher Learning are structured. Based on these structures, a pattern or model for a typical advertisement of private Institution of Higher Learning is presented.

This study also provides the possibility to understand the process of designing an advertisement of private Institutions of Higher Learning and the factors considered in determining its structure or pattern. It helps to explain how these advertisements are designed.

1.3 The Rationale of the Study

Advertisements of Institutions of Higher Learning represent a communicative event that involves two major economic activities in Malaysia today, that is, the private Institutions of Higher Learning and the Advertising Industry. Private colleges/universities engage the advertisers to help solicit interest in the public and to persuade potential prospects who are the secondary school leavers (SPM/STPM holders) to enrol in their institutions. They are interesting because they reveal the communicative purposes of these two communities and how they plan their moves or strategies to achieve this aim, that is to influence the clients.

Besides, the main instrument to achieve the aim of this communicative event is language. Thus, this study will benefit the English language teacher, particularly the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) practitioner whose task is to train and help learners acquire and equip themselves with the specific language needed in their professional duties. It helps the ESP teacher to:

- a. understand the organisation and structures of advertisements for private colleges/universities
- b. recognise the features of examples of these texts
- c. use the knowledge obtained from the analysis to develop suitable teaching materials (for the ESP teacher) for specific courses in the teaching of writing skills of advertisements.

For this study, advertisements on private Institutions of Higher Learning in a local newspaper are chosen based on several reasons. Most Malaysians read the newspapers every day for news or as a source of specific information. The newspaper is thus a most suitable medium to reach the masses. The printed advertisement in a newspaper is also a practical form of disseminating information on the private Institutions of Higher Learning as it can be read again for details and can be cut out for future reference (like a flyer or leaflet)

Advertisements promoting all kind of products and services are easily available in the newspapers, especially in the English dailies. The

advertisements on private Institutions of Higher Learning are quite important in these dailies. This is because private tertiary education involves serious decisions of a lifetime's investment and also a substantial economic budget for parents. The arrangement and layout of these advertisements are strategically planned in order to maximise the possibility of capturing the attention of the reader. The reader of a newspaper going through the news, articles and editorials is thus indirectly obliged to glance through them. Sometimes a reader buys a newspaper with an intention to source for specific information like classified advertisements on property for rent or sale, second-hand cars for sale or perhaps a cut-out coupon on a private college/university.

1.4 Approach

Swales (1990:58) states that genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. In another definition, Swales (1986:13) points out that these communicative events are socially recognised and the communicative purpose is 'mutually understood by the participants within that event'.

The communicative purpose of advertisements on private Institutions of Higher Learning is to catch the attention of the potential prospects who are secondary school leavers (SPM or STPM holders) and probably also their parents by presenting clearly and assuredly, information about the institution and its programmes. The ultimate aim is that the prospect makes a decision to

'purchase' or rather choose a course and enrol in the institution. By adopting the genre-based approach to investigate the communicative purpose, this study attempts to understand how this communicative purpose is achieved.

1.5 Research Questions

It is the aim of this study to give a description of advertisements of private Institutions of Higher Learning in a local newspaper. It aims to answer the following research questions.

1. Do advertisements of private Institutions of Higher Learning (displayed in print media) have a general structure?
2. Is it possible to define this structure?

1.6 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study will help the teachers of English for Specific Purposes to train novice copywriters of advertisements for private Institutions of Higher Learning. The new writer needs to understand the strategy of designing and structuring this type of writing. The Moves Structure Analysis is most useful and informative for a copywriter on a first assignment.

For the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher, the Moves Pattern, which is employed in this study is useful in curriculum planning. The Moves Pattern can be utilised for syllabus designers when designing teaching

courses for ESP students in the area of advertising particularly for private colleges/universities.

The strategies revealed can also be useful for evaluation purposes of advertisements by ESP teachers. The teachers of English for Specific Purpose who is equipped with a good understanding of the Move Structure system and the communicative events, can evaluate more accurately the writing of this type of advertisements.