

Critical Genre Analysis of 'About us' Texts on Insurance Companies' Websites

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Abstract

The promotional discourse online are interests for linguists. While most studies analyze texts through genre theory only, the multimodal characteristics included are ignored. Besides, more attention has been paid on advertisements, company's annual report, but little on promotional discourse such as About us texts' on top insurance company's websites. In this study, Critical Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis are both applied, attempting to explore the features of promotional discourse on Insurance websites.

Keywords

Green logistics; PEST analysis; Development model.

1. Introduction

With the innovation of media and technology, discourses online become the interest for linguists in recent years such as Bhatia, Costanza Cucchi and Yubin Qian. Bhatia focuses on Interdiscursive performance in digital professions by taking Youtube tutorials as the case(Bhatia, 2018). Costanza Cucchi analyzes the linguistic features of European Corporate Homepages reflecting culture, and the interaction between them(Cucchi, 2019). Yubin Qian applies Critical Genre Analysis(CGA) to analyze Financial Status and Business'discourse in corporate annual reports, finding the general features of language, types of interdiscursivity and professional culture embedded(Qian, 2020).

In recent ten years, Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) has been used in a wide range of aspects including financial discourse (Chan & Chong, 2016), academic discourse (Compagnone A), marketing discourse(Fairclough, 1993) and so on. However, studies about insurance company's promotion discourse according to CGA framework are rare.

Insurance company's Promotion discourses online are more available to people than traditional way. It is easier to construct interaction between the company and customers, contributing to their choice-making.

This study collects 20 About us Texts' on world's top insurance company websites. According CGA framework, combined with Multimodal discourse analysis, it aims to analyzes the general linguistic features of texts and the professional culture embedded in them.

The following questions are probed:

What's the move structure of the insurance companies' About us Texts?

What kind of discourse strategies are used to achieve communicative goal?

2. Critical Genre Analysis (CGA)

CGA origins from conventional genre analysis, which changes its focus and becomes more comprehensive. While the conventional one cares more about academic and professional genres of texts but little about context, CGA takes more consideration into the context's function

and attaches great importance to the relationship between text and context. So the definition of genre analysis has evolved, referring to a configuration of text-internal as well as text-external resources.

Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are two significant conceptions involved in CGA, the former pays more attention to the relationship across texts, the other refers to interactions across genres, professional practices and other elements outside texts (Bhatia, 2018).

Interdiscursivity is first put up by Fairclough, referring to the fusion relationship between genre, register, discourse and style in a particular discourse. It means complex elements connected such as meaning, grammar and mix of different discourses (Fairclough, 1993). However, Bhatia considers that the writing goal of authors may be achieved by using external-text resources rather than obeying the traditional principles and rules of genres (Bhatia, 2018). They create Generic hybridity for interaction, meeting their personal professional needs.

SS points out that analyzing genres from the aspect of text is limited, other factors should be included at the same time such as professional practice and culture. To be specific, the analysis should concern the levels in following diagram (Bhatia, 2017).

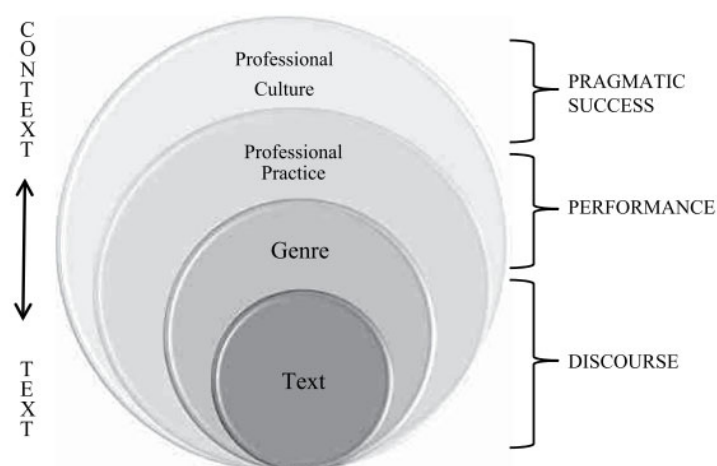


Figure 1. Levels of discourse realization (Bhatia, 2017)

Analysis of text includes internal-resources only. In spite of the context's awareness, just the text's construction is analyzed in this level such as grammar, semantics and other structures. It ignores the use of text and the interaction between the writers and readers. However, analysis of genre makes it clear that how text is constructed and how it applied in the real practice.

Bhatia develops this analytical framework from four levels: text, genre, professional practice and professional culture. Before its appearing, a lot of modifications has been made on three-space model (textual space, socio-pragmatic space, social-cultural space). This model is also of great significance because it connects discourse with practical use. Comparing these two models, the first one is more comprehensive and covers more widely. And these two are better than traditional way of analyzing (Bhatia, 2017).

This study will analyze the insurance company's about us text online according this framework, from following aspects: text, genre, professional practice, intertextuality and interdiscursivity, interpreting the nature of this kind of texts.

3. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Halliday believes that language's metafunctions can be classified into three, that is ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Inspired by this view, Kress makes an assumption that every mode has potential for meaning, playing a great role in communication

and representation. This assumption also shows three functions: 1. Each mode expresses meanings about the experiential world.

2. Each mode express meanings about social relations of those who participate in interaction and communication.

3. Each mode has the capacity for forming semiotic entities which cohere internally and with their environment(Kress, 2010).

In view of the discourse on the Internet with interactive meanings, this study pays more attention on the interactive meanings in About us' texts on Insurance company's websites.

Kress & VanLeeuwen believe that the interactive meaning between representative and interactive participants is achieved by three simultaneous subsystems, that is contact, social distance and attitude. The size of the camera can reflect whether the social distance between the communication objects is close or distant, and the shooting Angle can reflect the subjective attitude of the text producer and the power relationship between the communication objects (Kress&Vanleeuwen,2006).

4. Methodology

The aim of the study is twofold. First, we attempt to find the mainly move structures of the about us texts. Secondly, the strategies that discourse applies to achieve its communicative goal are also studied. In this study, we use a corpus with 20 about us texts.

4.1. Data Collection

The research data is collected from the top 100 insurance company's websites. This corpus includes 20 texts. Websites are the research focus because they contain more new information which spreads far. So the promotional function will be easily achieved on them.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. The Move Structures of the Texts

After analyzing these 20 texts, the main moves are summarized:

Move 1: Overview of the company

This move is a short introduction about the insurance company. It aims at telling browsers what kind of company it is and what it can serve.

Move 2: Achievement of the company

This move is generally interesting and attractive, which includes some key figures and awards the company is proud of. And the numbers' font is very huge which is very showy. All these can illustrate that this move attempts to tell readers that they do well in insurance profession and they will not disappoint the readers if they choose this company's services.

Move 3: Corporate Culture

In this move, insurance companies' values, purposes and brands are always presented. In most cases, these three aspects take philosophical sentences as their titles. And the beautiful language of specific content makes readers feel like reading a poem. It also shows their confidence to do better in the future.

Move 4: Governance

The governance move is about the company's management. It always includes board committees, executive management, commitment to transparency and shareholder. The fairness can be seen through these. The professional team may be more trusting.

Move 5: Sustainability

This move introduces their responsibilities on the planet. The charitable activities, environment protection activities and so on appear in this part with actual pictures of their action. It seeks to display what they are doing for the world and people.

Move 6: Contact& Location

The last move provides the telephone number and the company's location. It's a necessary move for promotional writing, which provides useful information for customers.

5.2. The Application of Multimodality

When describing what the company is doing for customers and how they work, the discourse always includes multimodal metaphors in pictures. Taking Prudential (an insurance company in UK) and Swiss Re (a famous insurance company in Swiss) as examples, they all show interesting meanings with multimodality.

In Figure 1, a lot of people comprise a whole part which looks like a bird. And this big flying one is held by two big hands. This metaphor expresses that the company can protect customers and employees with their hands, making all them feel like bird with happiness and freedom. Through this multimodal metaphor and the discourse containing what they do for these people, the picture and text makes the meaning better expressed when interacting with each other. That means only one mode cannot produce this good effect.

In Figure2, there are three men are climbing the mountain. The man on the upper holds the hands of the next one. And the text on the picture is "our leadership", which combines with the image, showing the equality and unity between leaders and employees.



Figure 2. Multimodal metaphor "bird"



Figure 3. Multimodal metaphor "our leadership"

5.3. The Application of Language Strategies

In texts, the pronouns used are mainly composed of "we". This language phenomenon indicates that this kind of discourse attempts to make the readers feel that the company can do a lot for them. In addition, a large of amounts of numbers are used in them for showing their scale, achievement and their role in the world. The numbers are in numerical symbols. So it makes people feel it is very big.

On the other hand, intertextuality exists in this kind of discourses. In some texts, the introduction about their corporate culture and value is like prose with beautiful language and philosophical meaning. However, the whole text may be inclined to promotional discourse. Taking Zurich company's value introduction as an example: "The world is at a crossroads. Not for the first time, not for the last time. But currently – we can all feel it. What's ahead is different from what got us there. Our old behaviors won't help us to build a better tomorrow. Replacing broken things with more broken things isn't a sustainable business model or life model. And, worse, if we lose the planet, we couldn't claim it back. It's time for a change - and people know. And we know it." In this part, the writing style of beginning is like a poem or prose but after this part, it may be more like a promotional text.

5.4. The Professional Culture

In this kind of discourses, interaction between company and potential customers is predominant. It aims at promotion these insurance company's advantages, improve people's awareness of insurance. Nowadays, with the risks increasing in the world, this kind of business becomes more important. And this kind of business indeed do some help for us.

6. Conclusion

Insurance company's promotional texts possess their own features. In this study, the move structures, multimodal application and linguistic features are analyzed according to CGA framework and multimodal theory. This kind of discourse shows its pragmatic function in the world through these features. And the companies included in this analysis are all famous top companies, so the research result has guiding significance for other companies or other areas in some way. However, this study also has some limitation that the depth and width of it are not enough.

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