

## **The Discourse of Brand Slogans of the Best 100 Universities in Asia 2019: A Systemic Functional Grammar Analysis**



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**ABSTRACT:** Brand slogan as a part of branding plays a defining role for universities to win fierce competition. It creates emotional bonding and memorability in the mind of potential students and stake-holders. This study investigates words choice and word arrangement used in brand slogans of 100 best universities in Asia 2019 by making use of the Systemic Functional Grammar's Experiential Metafunction. Results indicate that words most preferred for their brand slogans are patterned and are circled around: "Truth" (4/11%), "Integrity, "sincerity" (each 3/8%), and "Act", "creating", "creative", "diligence", "excellence", "global", and "justice" (each 2/6%); Verb (12/48%), Noun (11/44%), Adjective (1/4%), Prepositional phrase (1/4%). They are structured in Structures of Modification (10/40%), Structures of Complementation (9/36%), word (5/20%), and Structures of Predication (1/4%).

**KEYWORDS:** brand slogan, discourse, Systemic Functional Grammar, best universities in Asia

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

"A new study found a promising link between the number of universities in a country and GDP", according The Business Insider [1]. It is no wonder because the business of world university quality is the business of multi-billion generating and, accordingly, it becomes a major promise for economy remedy of nations. This means competition among world best universities is becoming fierce and fierce. Current world university ranking shows Asia, and the Pacific, can keep up with the pace and position themselves among world's best. According to The Times Higher Education [2] Tsing Hua ranks 22, National University of Singapore is ranked 23, Peking University at 31, University of Melbourne follows at 32, University of Hongkong at 36, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology at 41, and The University of Tokyo at 42. This map of ranking changes the direction of country destination for education from formerly in English-speaking countries to Asia and the Pacific. The Universityworldnews.com "Internationally mobile students head for Asia" [3] shifting of university destination from English-speaking countries to Asia such as China, Singapore and Malaysia due to financial growth among the middle class and demand for quality education. The same trend of year by year growth of universities in Asia was reported by The ICEFmonitor.com with the headline "Up and down the table: Growth trends across major international study destinations" [4]. At least two which affect the change, the demographic change and rise of the middle class in Asia. The New York Times reported "China's Looming Crisis: A Shrinking Population" [5] which is echoed by Nikkei Asian Review's headline "Asia's worst aging fears begin to come true" [6] and is confirmed by that of the Studyportal.com "Asia-Pacific steps up ambitions to attract more international students" [7].

Amidst such tough competition, branding is a must for universities to exist. To date, there have been a number of studies on slogans and brand slogans involving different research topics, perspective, and methods. Brand slogans related to place, city, and tourism, to mention some, involves categorization of slogans [8], country tourism slogan and logo [9], slogans of top tourism destination [10], brand slogan of region [11], brand slogan, logo and country positioning [12]. Linguistics-related analyses are such as, corpus analysis [13], rhetorical figures and linguistic devices [14]. Other works include slogan liking [15], vague brand slogan and customer response [16], and guideline for creating effective slogans [17]. As the literature shows, despite wealth of studies on brand slogans, those used by universities or higher education institutions (HEIs) are underrepresented. The current study addresses

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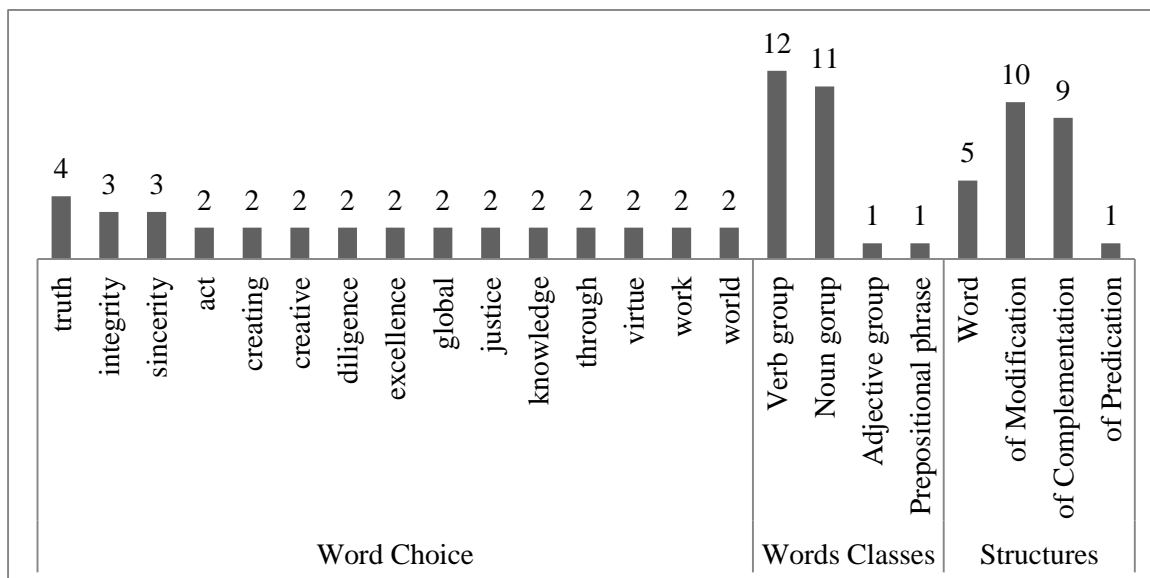
word choice and how the word choice is structured in the brand slogans of 100 best universities in Asia 2019 according to the Times Higher Education [18] from the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), the experiential or ideational metafunction, to be more specific.

### II. METHODS

Data are brand slogans collected from “The best universities in Asia 2019: the top 100” by the Times Higher Education. Among the 100 universities selected, 25 universities have brand slogans. They are analyzed through content analysis according to Krippendorff that is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”. [19]. The analyses focus on the lexicogrammar made use in the selected brand slogans which is then sub-divided into the word choice and the word arrangement. The word choice is analyzed in terms of the frequency of occurrence and its association. Association is about what is in people’s mind which is realized through the bond between word and concept as Richard and Ogden call it. Then, the words used are analyzed in terms of how they are structured to create effective memorability so that the brand slogans create a distinction among their competitors to attract prospective international students and stakeholders. The structures are divided into (1) word (WD), (2) structures of modification (MD), traditionally known as phrases, (3) structures of complementation (CP), intersection between phrase and clause where verb presents but lacks subject, and (4) structures of predication (PD), or clause, where subject and predicate present. The CP and PD are functionally approached with special emphasis on the ideational or experiential metafunction as described by Downing, Fontaine, Martin et al, Thompson, and Morley.

### III. RESULTS

Results of word choice and the structures used in the brand slogans of the best 100 universities in Asia 2019 is presented in figure 1.



**Figure 1: Realization of most preferred words used in the brand slogans collected.**

As can be seen from Figure 1, words chosen to create emotional bond and memorability to addressees are centered to a small number of words which can be categorized into three: the top preferred, second preferred and the third. “Truth” is used as many as 4 times and makes up 11%. “Integrity” and “sincerity” each occurs 3 times and share 8%. “Act”, “creating”, “creative”, “diligence”, “excellence”, “global”, and “justice” each emerges twice and occupy 6%; Noun (11/44%), Adjective (1/4%), Prepositional phrase (1/4%); Structures of Modification (10/40%), Structures of Complementation (9/36%), word (5/20%), and Structures of Predication (1/4%).

“Sincerity” and “Integrity” in MD “Sincerity” and “integrity” are used in Nanjing University’s brand slogan “Sincerity with Aspiration, Perseverance with Integrity”. This structure consists of two identical structures of modification. The first, “Sincerity” (N) serves as the head (H) which is post modified (M) by the prepositional phrase “with aspiration”. The like manner applies to the other one where, “Perseverance” (N) as the head (H) is post-modified (M) by the prepositional phrase “with integrity”. Both structures of modification is linked coordinatively by the implicit coordinate conjunction “,” coma.

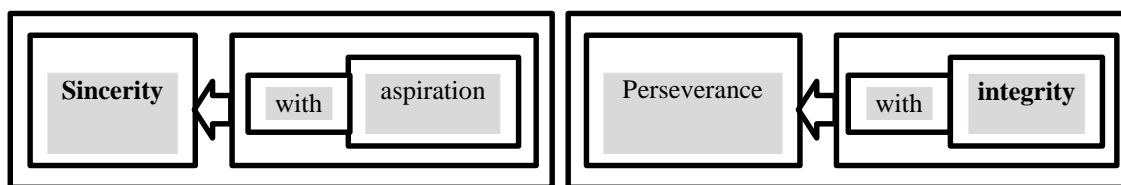


Figure 2. Analysis of the words “sincerity” and “integrity” structured in Structures of Modification.

In such structure, for the first structure of modification, the word “sincerity” as the H function as the element to catch attention, while the M gives additional information or attribute or quality to the H. It is in this way that the addressor, Nanjing University, builds emotional bounding and memorability to addressees through the chosen word “sincerity” which is loaded with association to state of being sincere, honest, free from hypocrisy (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sincerity>).

“Creating” “Global” and “Excellence” in CP

The three words emerge in Tohoku University brand slogan “Creating global excellence”. The brand slogan consists of verbal element “creating” which is realized as gerund, and structure of modification “global excellence” where “excellence” is the head (H) and is pre-modified by “global” (ADJ). The structure of modification “global excellence” serves as the complement or object of the verb “creating”. By arranging “excellence” as the head (H) modified (M) by “global”, the addressor, Tohoku University, intends to create emotional bounding and memorability to addressees that Tohoku University is associated with quality of being excellent or valuable quality (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/excellence>).

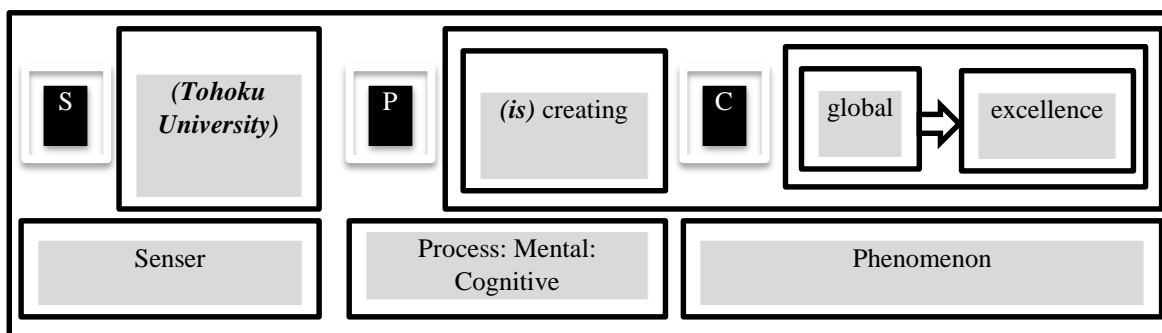


Figure 3. Analysis of the words “creating”, “global” and “excellence” structured in Structures of Complementation.

“Truth” in PR

Representational / Ideational metafunction: the propositional content of a message. Ways in which the speaker choose to represent the world. Seoul National University, “Veritas Lux Mea”, Latin for “Truth is my light.” Relational process, process of being, sub-category identifying.

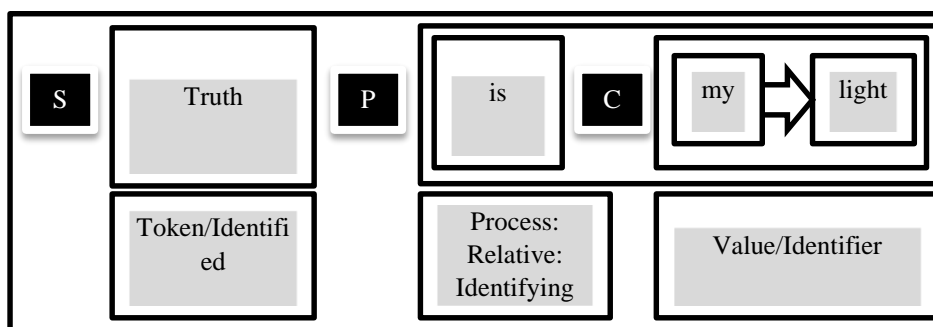


Figure 4. Analysis of the words “truth” structured in Structures of Predication.

In that structure, the entity “Truth” which is termed “token” is given value or identity which is termed “value” or “identifier” as “my light”. The verb “is” functions to relate the token “Truth” and the value or identifier “my light”. By so doing, the addressor Seoul National University intends to create emotional bounding and memorability to addressees through the chosen word “truth” (N). Addressees are emotionally bound through the content of the word “truth” i.e. quality of being true (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/truth>) is applicable to situations, events or persons related to Seoul National University becomes the university guidance “light”.

## IV. DISCUSSION

The current study has investigated words choice and word arrangement used in brand slogans of 100 best universities in Asia 2019 by making use of the Systemic Functional Grammar's Experiential Metafunction. As the results have shown, with regard with the structures, it is interesting that Structures of Modification (10/40%) and Structures of Complementation (9/36%), which are longer and more complex become those mostly used. Those of word, which is the shortest in structure, include the least preferred i.e. (5/20%). The Structures of Predication become also the least to occur i.e. (1/4%). That the Structures of Predication are amongst rarely used could be because they are lengthy. The fact that "word" is also the least used does not support Chi-Man and Hyeong-Yeon [20] that slogans of Korean regions failed creating distinctiveness because of complex morphological structures, Miller and Toman [21] where it was found that simple syntactical structures ease recall of slogans, and Bradley and Meeds [22] where it was found that simple syntactical forms enhanced slogan recall. Still another work which is not in agreement with this study's finding is the one by Hendriks, Meurs, and Poos [23] confirming that slogans with easy English are better remembered than those with difficult English. Referring to the finding that 100 best universities in Asia 2019 use specific "themed" words such as "Truth" (4/11%), "Integrity", "sincerity" (each 3/8%), and "Act", "creating", "creative", "diligence", "excellence", "global", and "justice" is not in line with Lever and Abbas [24] who found that world tourism slogans preferred using comparing and contrasting themes instead of similar ones.

## V. CONCLUSION

Brand slogan as a part of branding plays a vital role for universities to create emotional bonding and memorability in the mind of potential students and stake-holders. This study has investigated words choice and word arrangement used in brand slogans of 100 best universities in Asia 2019. Results show that they use patterned and "themed" words. Those are: "Truth" (4/11%), "Integrity", "sincerity" (each 3/8%), and "Act", "creating", "creative", "diligence", "excellence", "global", and "justice" (each 2/6%). In this particular regard, further studies contrasting themes preferred in different areas for example education and tourism worth doing which can shed light as whether or not the two areas differ in theme selection. Regarding word class, it was revealed Verb (12/48%), Noun (11/44%), Adjective (1/4%), Prepositional phrase (1/4%). In terms of structure, it was concluded Structures of Modification (10/40%), Structures of Complementation (9/36%), word (5/20%), and Structures of Predication (1/4%). This specific finding calls for further investigation such as why "words", the shortest and should be the easiest to recall, are not the most popular.

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