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Linguistic Characteristics of Educational Marketing Discourse

Irena CIOBANU [*], Daniel DEJICA[**]

Abstract: This article explores the linguistic characteristics of educational marketing discourse within higher education, examining how universities craft institutional identity through strategic language. Drawing on genre theory, phonological analysis, lexical profiling, and pragmatic frameworks, the study identifies how promotional texts blend informational and persuasive elements across formats. By analyzing rhetorical structures, syntactic patterns, and semantic choices, the article maps a genre framework for assessing institutional discourse. It concludes by outlining future research directions including corpus-based genre comparison, ESP adaptation, and multilingual promotional analysis—advocating for deeper inquiry into academic language as a performative tool for stakeholder engagement and institutional branding.

Keywords: Educational Marketing Discourse, Institutional Identity, Genre Analysis, Linguistic Profiling, Higher Education Communication

1. Introduction.

In the increasingly globalized and competitive arena of higher education, universities have assumed a dual role: as centers of knowledge production and as strategically branded entities competing for visibility and engagement across national and international markets. This evolution has fostered the emergence of a distinct type of discourse—educational marketing discourse—set up of specific genres, where institutional identity is crafted not just through information but through persuasion, emotional appeal, and stylistic innovation.

[*] Doctoral student, Doctoral School of Humanities, West University of Timișoara, Romania. E-mail: irena.ciobanu@e-uvt.ro
** Professor, PhD, Department of Communication and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Communication Sciences, *Politehnica* University of Timisoara, Romania. E-mail: daniel.dejica@upt.ro

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Drawing on interdisciplinary foundations, educational marketing language occupies a hybrid communicative space—adopting rhetorical conventions from advertising, corporate communication, and public relations while preserving the credibility and values inherent to academic environments. Seminal studies in strategic planning (Kotler & Murphy, 1981; Berry & Parasuraman, 1993) positioned education as a service-oriented sector, while later work in critical discourse analysis and branding (Fairclough, 1993; Chapleo, 2010; Kheovichai, 2013) emphasized how promotional texts reshape institutional ethos through highly stylized and semantically charged messaging.

This article explores the linguistic mechanisms that define educational marketing discourse as a genre—examining its typological features, lexical strategies, syntactic conventions, and genre-specific structures. Anchored in phonetics, semantics, pragmatics, and genre theory, the study provides an integrated framework for understanding how language performs institutional identity across formats and contexts.

Moreover, as universities increasingly communicate across multilingual, multicultural, and digital landscapes, the complexity of their messaging warrants sustained scholarly attention. The article concludes by outlining key research directions—ranging from comparative genre studies and corpus-based profiling to ESP adaptation and pragmatic analysis—that call for deeper engagement with the linguistic dynamics of academic promotion.

2. Linguistic Foundations and Interdisciplinary Frameworks

Understanding the formal features that shape the linguistic architecture of educational discourse facilitates discourse analysis and production, and shapes persuasive communication in institutional contexts. Section 2 examines the linguistic characteristics of educational discourse, focusing on phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic dimensions.

2.1 Phonetics and Morphology: Shaping Meaning Through Sound and Structure

The use of phonetic cues in educational branding reflects cognitive associations between sound and perceived value. As Kronrod (2022) demonstrates, voiced consonants like /b/ and /g/ often convey a sense of stability and prestige, while voiceless consonants like /p/ and /t/ communicate freshness and agility. These phonetic insights are evident in branding initiatives such as “GRADPathways” or “Xcel@Uni” where sound design complements semantic strategy (Kronrod, 2022).

Morphologically, word formation in educational marketing frequently employs compounding (e.g., “research-driven,” “future-ready”) and affixation (“interconnectivity,” “globalism”) to encapsulate institutional values in concise units. Such techniques echo classic observations on the productivity of English word formation in promotional genres (Bauer, 1983)

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2.2 Semantics and Pragmatics: Meaning Construction and Communicative Intent

Semantically, educational marketing texts often rely on high-frequency evaluative adjectives such as "prestigious," "transformative," "innovative," and "inclusive." These lexical choices function beyond descriptive roles, forming implicit claims about institutional excellence and student experience. This aligns with Fairclough's claim that promotional discourse strategically constructs meanings to reflect power and institutional ideologies (Fairclough, 1993).

Pragmatic elements—particularly those derived from Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969)—underscore the performative nature of educational language. Modal verbs such as "can," "must," and "will" assert institutional authority while promoting student empowerment. Recent studies emphasize the persuasive impact of pragmatic precision in academic recruitment texts (Kheovichai, 2013).

2.3 Syntax and Style: Structural Choices and Strategic Expression

Syntactic choices vary by platform. Websites and brochures tend to favor directive imperatives ("Explore programs," "Apply now"), while long-form speeches and reports employ complex, clause-heavy sentences with nominalization and abstract nouns. The promotional use of rhetorical questions ("Ready to lead?"), evaluative statements ("Our graduates shape tomorrow's world"), and second-person pronouns exemplifies synthetic personalization—a core component of marketing discourse (Fairclough, 2010).

Stylistic features also include repetition, parallelism, and dense modifiers, supporting persuasive aims and emotive resonance. Such stylistic coherence aligns with genre expectations and audience cognitive processing, as explored in discourse studies focused on reader engagement (Hyland, 2000).

2.4 Genre Theory: Structure, Moves, and Rhetorical Functions

Genre analysis, particularly Swales' framework of rhetorical moves and communicative purposes (Swales, 1990), proves instrumental in dissecting promotional texts. Educational marketing materials consistently perform moves such as establishing credibility, differentiating institutional identity, showcasing offerings, and soliciting action. This move-based framework finds practical validation in recent digital genre studies, where rhetorical structuring aligns closely with institutional messaging strategies.

The hybrid genre character of such materials—intertwining elements from institutional mission statements, corporate branding, and academic text—supports Bhatia's assertion that professional discourse often blurs disciplinary boundaries to achieve persuasive objectives (Bhatia, 1993).

More recently, Zhang (2017) conducted a genre analysis of Chinese university websites and revealed structured rhetorical progression across homepage components, substantiating the universality of Swales' move framework in digital educational discourse.

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2.5 Interdisciplinary Convergence and Linguistic Hybridization

Educational marketing discourse is not confined to linguistic theory alone—it borrows techniques from branding, semiotics, and cognitive psychology. Chapleo (2010) argues that successful university brands balance emotional and rational content, forming identities through lexical and stylistic coherence. Guimarães and Estima (2022) reveal that educational institutions use brand personality traits to communicate values like competence, sincerity, and excitement across digital platforms. This interdisciplinary hybridity reflects the genre's responsiveness to evolving communication ecologies. As digital media and global competition reshape how universities connect with audiences, the discourse must reconcile institutional tradition with immediacy, credibility with relatability.

3. Typological Features of Educational Marketing Language

Educational marketing discourse represents a blend of informative clarity and persuasive flair, marked by distinctive lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical choices. Unlike purely commercial advertising, its language must navigate dual functions: delivering academic credibility while fostering emotional engagement with diverse stakeholders—including students, parents, faculty, and international partners.

3.1 Informative vs. Persuasive Lexical Traits

At the core of educational marketing discourse lies an interplay between descriptive clarity and promotional persuasion. Informative terms often outline degree programs, facilities, staff qualifications, and research activities. These are paired with persuasive lexical items like “prestigious,” “cutting-edge,” “globally ranked,” and “transformative,” which strategically shape institutional identity. Chapleo (2011) highlights how emotional appeals through brand language signal differentiation, aligning institutions with aspirational values rather than solely academic offerings. Zhang (2017) likewise notes that Chinese university websites consistently deploy value-laden descriptors that construct social authority while inviting student connection.

3.2 Emotional vs. Rational Lexical Fields

The genre also draws from two overlapping lexical fields. Rational language appeals to logic and empirical credibility—e.g., “QS World Rankings,” “Nobel laureate faculty,” “98% employability rate.” In contrast, emotional lexicon engages identity, community, and aspiration: “join our inclusive campus,” “discover your purpose,” “ignite your potential.” Guimarães & Estima (2022) applied Aaker’s brand personality framework to show how educational institutions emphasize sincerity, excitement, and competence as dominant traits in digital branding. These traits are often linguistically manifested through lexical repetition and symbolic metaphors.

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3.3 Lexical Bundles and Semantic Clustering

Lexical bundles—recurrent word combinations—are typical of educational discourse, signaling fluency and coherence. Examples include “real-world experience,” “innovative curriculum,” “interdisciplinary focus,” “student-centered learning,” and “global perspective.” These clusters align with what Hyland (2009) refers to as "discoursal reflexes" of genre expectations (*Academic Discourse: English in a Global Context*. Continuum). Semantic clusters further contribute to thematic reinforcement. Words denoting movement (“path,” “journey,” “explore”) suggest growth, while references to scale (“world-class,” “flagship,” “leading”) assert dominance. The convergence of these clusters helps position institutions as both transformational and authoritative.

3.4 Strategic Vagueness and Institutional Branding

A notable typological feature is the use of strategic vagueness, often through phrases like “renowned faculty,” “state-of-the-art labs,” “generous funding,” or “top-tier support.” Zhang (2017) observed that such ambiguous markers allow institutions to suggest superiority without committing to quantifiable claims, serving as a buffer in competitive or comparative messaging. Similarly, Stensaker & D’Andrea (2007) found that many UK universities preferred aspirational statements over hard metrics, crafting identity through evocative slogans rather than concrete rankings (‘Branding in higher education: Exploring an emerging phenomenon’ in *EAIR Monograph Series*, 1).

3.5 Intertextual Echoes and Institutional Mimicry

Educational marketing texts often echo each other, creating a genre-wide intertextuality marked by uniform phrases, calls-to-action, and stylistic conventions. This creates challenges for branding differentiation, as highlighted by Kheovichai (2013), who analyzed corpus data showing language mimicry across universities and corporate job ads. Despite efforts toward uniqueness, institutions frequently converge on the same semantic field—risking sameness across digital platforms, brochures, and speeches. The genre’s linguistic typology is thus as much shaped by institutional goals as by shared communicative norms.

4. Genre Characteristics and Text Types

The promotional language of higher education does not exist in isolation—it emerges through a constellation of distinct yet interrelated genres, each shaped by medium, purpose, and audience expectations. Whether rendered through institutional websites, email campaigns, brochures, or speeches, these genres collectively construct and reinforce the public identity of universities. Drawing on genre analysis (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Dejica, 2011), genre classification (Dejica, 2020) and interdisciplinary studies of higher education branding (Stensaker & D’Andrea, 2007; Zhang, 2017), this section investigates the communicative architecture of educational marketing genres and the discursive functions they perform. This is supported by research that

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analyzes the linguistic characteristics of online institutional texts and their thematic development to construct institutional identity, such as the contrastive study on online tourism discourse by Dejica and Stoian (2016).

4.1 Multimodal Genre Range

Educational marketing discourse spans a wide variety of formats, each contributing uniquely to the institution's visibility, credibility, and appeal. Table 1 presents our typology of promotional genres commonly used by universities, classified by medium and communicative purpose. Institutional websites serve as dynamic hubs, blending text, multimedia, and interactive features to establish ethos and guide student navigation. Program brochures—whether printed or digital—offer curated information about academic offerings, paired with aspirational language to boost enrollment appeal. Rectoral speeches, usually delivered at ceremonies or annual assemblies, embody ethos construction, as institutional leaders narrate vision, achievements, and institutional character. Social media posts favor brevity and immediacy, engaging current and prospective students with visual storytelling, hashtags, and invitations to interact. Admissions emails are typically personalized and action-oriented, prompting recipients to take concrete steps in the enrollment process, such as scheduling campus visits or submitting applications.

Genre Type	Medium	Dominant Purpose
Institutional Websites	Digital (text + multimedia)	Credibility & Recruitment
Program Brochures	Print/Digital	Informational & Aspirational
Rectoral Speeches	Spoken/Transcribed	Ethos Construction
Social Media Posts	Digital (visual/text/audio)	Engagement & Visibility
Admissions Emails	Digital (personalized text)	Action Inducement

Table 1. Genres in Educational Marketing Discourse

4.2 Rhetorical Moves and Communicative Functions

Educational marketing genres rely on a set of rhetorical moves (Bhatia, 1993) to fulfill their communicative intent, shaped by the institutional narrative and audience profile. The first is *establishing ethos*, a move especially prominent in rectoral speeches, "About Us" webpages, and press releases. These texts often evoke institutional heritage, leadership, and mission values, aiming to construct authority and trustworthiness (Swales, 1990; Stensaker & D'Andrea, 2007).

The second rhetorical move centers on *showcasing offerings*. Here, materials such as brochures and program descriptions highlight tangible benefits: curriculum features, faculty expertise, facilities, scholarships, and alumni success. The goal is to transform institutional features into compelling reasons for student enrollment or partnership development.

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The third move involves *inviting engagement*. Calls-to-action such as "Book a campus tour," "Join our webinar," or "Start your application today" are often embedded across landing pages, social media posts, and email headers. These imperatives use direct address and simple syntax to reduce friction and enhance accessibility (Fairclough, 2010; Zhang, 2017).

Finally, *differentiation* is achieved through linguistic and visual cues that position the institution against competitors. References to international rankings, affiliations (e.g., Universitas 21), awards, or first-of-its-kind programs aim to assert exclusivity and innovation. As Chapleo (2010) and Guimarães & Estima (2022) note, such messaging must balance rational appeal with emotional resonance, forging institutional identity while connecting with prospective students' aspirations.

4.3 Genre Adaptation Across Platforms

As educational marketing shifts toward digital-first strategies, genres increasingly adapt their structure to suit the affordances of specific platforms. On websites, navigation menus and embedded videos offer layered storytelling, allowing users to control their exploratory path. Landing pages often feature chatbots, testimonials, and countdown banners, creating urgency and enhancing real-time interaction.

Social media genres bend traditional expectations by prioritizing narrative over institutional formality. Posts might spotlight student achievements, feature "day in the life" reels, or highlight community events through hashtags and emoji-rich captions. Baltezarević (2023) emphasizes this transformation, arguing that universities now rely on two-way communication via digital media to craft authenticity and immediacy.

Email communications further tailor genre expectations by employing personalization techniques—dynamic user names, segmented messaging, and streamlined design to increase conversion rates. This convergence of genres illustrates how educational institutions have begun merging branding, storytelling, and technical precision to engage audiences in increasingly dialogic ways.

4.4 Genre Constraints and Flexibilities

Despite their versatility, educational marketing genres are shaped by institutional norms and audience expectations that can constrain stylistic innovation. Formal tone, especially in rectoral speeches or regulatory communications, may restrict colloquial experimentation. Moreover, the multiplicity of target audiences—from students and parents to faculty and international organizations—requires layered messaging that avoids oversimplification or over-promising.

A further constraint arises from genre saturation. Studies by Askehave (2007) and Zhang (2017) found a high degree of lexical overlap across university websites, with descriptors like "inclusive," "leading," and "world-class" becoming genre clichés. This homogenization makes it harder for institutions to stand out and calls for new genre innovations—perhaps through localized storytelling, distinctive tone, or integrated cultural markers.

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Ultimately, while genres provide a scaffolding for institutional discourse, their success relies on strategic flexibility. Effective genre design reflects not only institutional values but also responsiveness to the evolving preferences of digital-native audiences and global academic stakeholders.

5. Research Opportunities in Educational Marketing Language

Despite an expanding body of scholarship on educational marketing, its linguistic genre remains notably under-theorized, with much of the research focused on branding strategies or promotional effectiveness rather than the mechanics of language itself. To address this gap, a series of interrelated research pathways can be pursued, each offering insights into the discursive structures and communicative strategies deployed across academic institutions.

One promising direction involves comparative genre analysis across institutions and cultural contexts. Basturkmen (2014) highlights the significance of replication studies in comparative genre analysis, underscoring how promotional texts vary across educational ecosystems. Studies by Yang (2015) and Mu & Zhang (2025) confirm that regional differences—whether in rhetorical structure, tone, or lexical density—reflect not just localized institutional identity, but also broader sociopolitical and market-driven pressures that influence the formation of promotional discourse. By examining promotional language from countries such as the UK, China, and Romania, researchers can contribute to a more refined typology of educational marketing genres and their rhetorical trajectories.

Corpus-based linguistic profiling represents another valuable path forward. Pomat (2025) emphasizes how corpus methodologies reveal dominant lexical patterns and promotional phrasing across social media and e-commerce contexts—approaches readily adaptable to university texts. Through frequency analysis of lexical bundles (Hyland, 2009), evaluative adjectives, and syntactic configurations, scholars can uncover entrenched genre conventions and shifting linguistic trends. Such studies could differentiate rhetorical strategies based on format—ranging from rectoral speeches to homepage texts—thereby illuminating the dynamic relationship between genre architecture and communicative intent.

The increasing internationalization of higher education brings multilingualism and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) into sharper focus. Costa and Mastellotto (2022) examine how ESP supports linguistic accessibility within English-medium instruction, an issue directly relevant to the translation and localization of promotional materials. The role of ESP in shaping institution-specific terminology—such as “flagship programs” or “future-ready learners”—warrants further investigation, particularly in multilingual contexts where language must mediate institutional identity and global outreach.

Equally important are pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches to educational marketing language. LoCastro (2012) underscores the value of pragmatics in decoding institutional tone and interpersonal dynamics. Lenchuk and Ahmed (2014) argue for greater cultural sensitivity in the teaching of pragmatic

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competence, a framework that can be extended to the analysis of politeness strategies, modality, and ethos construction within recruitment campaigns and rectoral messages. These elements reveal how universities position themselves within hierarchies of authority, inclusion, and innovation over time.

Finally, the proliferation of digital platforms has ushered in a new era of interactive media and semiotic layering. Özbölük and Kurtoğlu (2019) explore the semiotic potential of digital branding, noting that universities increasingly rely on multimodal strategies—including emoji-rich captions, testimonial videos, and hashtag campaigns—to forge authenticity and immediacy. As Berlanga-Fernández and Reyes (2024) argue, digital semiotics now plays a vital role in shaping the narrative structure of promotional discourse, especially on platforms like Instagram and YouTube. Analyzing the interplay between visual cues and linguistic framing across channels can therefore yield critical insights into how genre boundaries are renegotiated within digital ecologies.

Collectively, these research avenues illuminate the evolving communicative frameworks of higher education promotion. Whether through cross-cultural genre studies, corpus analysis, ESP adaptation, or digital storytelling, each approach invites us to rethink the linguistic strategies that shape institutional identity and audience engagement in a globalized, media-saturated academic landscape.

6. Conclusion: Mapping a Linguistic Framework for Educational Marketing

Educational marketing discourse reveals a sophisticated interplay between form and function, where institutional credibility, aspirational messaging, and audience sensitivity converge in language. By analyzing its phonological structuring, lexical preferences, rhetorical moves, and genre variations, this study has illustrated how linguistic strategies shape and reflect the evolving identity of academic institutions.

The genre's hybridity—noted in its borrowing from advertising, public relations, and institutional writing—offers both opportunities and constraints: while it enables emotionally resonant and stylistically diverse messaging, it also risks homogenization through formulaic expressions and overused brand descriptors, such as *world-class*, *innovative*, or *inclusive*, which may dilute institutional distinctiveness.

Through our typological and genre analysis, we have proposed a foundational linguistic framework from which both practitioners and scholars can better assess and refine promotional texts in higher education. Furthermore, the research opportunities identified herein—including cross-cultural genre comparison, corpus analysis, ESP integration, and digital semiotic mapping—point toward fertile terrain for interdisciplinary inquiry.

In reframing educational communication not merely as branding but as language-in-action, this article argues for a renewed scholarly focus on how words enact institutional vision, engage stakeholders, and negotiate authority. Educational marketing is no longer simply informational—it is a discursive practice that reshapes what it means to teach, learn, and belong within the academic sphere.

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