

Speech Act Analysis: Pakistani Private Universities as a Case in Point

Sumra Musarrat Jabeen Satti¹, & Dr. Tabassum Saba¹

¹ Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan

Correspondence: Sumra Musarrat Jabeen, Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan. Tel: +92 3315005831. E-mail: sumraashfaq610@gmail.com

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Abstract

The marketisation of higher education has received mushrooming growth in not only Pakistan but all around the globe for the last few years. Most of Pakistani universities are modifying prospectuses' discourse to market their image and establish credibility in the competitive academic environment under the influence of marketization. The present study aimed to analyse speech acts in the educational discourse which were manifested in the recognition and reputation of universities. In the current study, the researcher has used prospectus discourse as the prime source of data to evaluate its significance in an educational environment. This study has employed a qualitative exploratory paradigm to analyze the data collected from prospectuses of Pakistani private universities. In this context, the present study has explored variations of linguistic characteristics i.e. speech acts which have been embedded in the administrative discourse to represent universities in the Pakistani academic market. The current study has attempted to employ speech acts as interpretive tools to investigate how persuasive language is used in the academic discourse of Pakistani private universities. The findings have revealed that the text of academic discourse is aligned with the commoditized practices of marketisation in the current scenario prevailing in Pakistan. The present study has also highlighted the hidden ideological perspective incorporated and displayed through speech acts in the educational discourse of Pakistani private universities.

Keywords: speech acts, Pakistani private universities, university prospectus, educational environment, academic discourse, marketization, commodification, university representation

1. Introduction

The present study aimed to investigate the persuasive linguistic strategies, which were excessively employed in prospectuses of private universities. Most of the Pakistani private universities are accelerating the marketisation process to get a maximum number of enrollments as they have started commercializing the academic discourse. The focus of the private educational sector has shifted from providing information to convincing potential students through the amalgamation of linguistic and persuasive strategies. The researcher has employed speech acts to examine linguistic manipulation as a research strategy in the current study. Furthermore, this study has highlighted different types of speech acts aligned with the marketing practices as incorporated in the prospectuses' discourse of private universities in Pakistan.

In the Pakistani context, the pressure of marketisation has forced universities to adopt a market-driven role as the private educational sector appeared to undergo branding for their independent identity and managing their financial constraints which encouraged the researcher to investigate how specialist informants manipulate linguistic resources while transforming prospectuses' discourse for discursive marketisation. According to Brockbank (1996), prospectus discourse was considered a modest booklet, however, Steele (2009) mentioned that university prospectus has been converted into a glossy brochure under the influence of marketisation (Bok, 2004). This transformation encouraged the researcher to investigate the variation of linguistic resources as the language of the prospectus is found in close proximity to promotional directories. For example, private universities have started aggressive market campaigns to attract a maximum number of students. Zhang (2017) took the inculcation of marketing practices as a shift from informational exchange to persuasive exchange; although it has never been the noble purpose of higher educational institutes.

Speech act theory was proposed by the renowned philosopher Austin (1955) who presented several lectures on speech acts which were compiled in a book titled "How to do things with words". Many philosophers such as Searle (1969), Leech (1983), Levinson (1983), Allan (1986), Vanderveken (1990), and Cutting (2022) have extended Austin's work as a foundation for academic proliferation to advance the scope of study.

A speech act is considered to be the "minimal unit of language communication or minimal unit of actual language use" (Searle & Roudledge, 1969; p. 119; Eslami, Raeisi-Vanani, & Sarab, 2022). Moreover, it goes beyond the meanings of a sentence rather it also deals with the meaning of act in utterance as part of conversation (Nosa, 2018). According to speech act theory, speech acts identify reference points instead of recognizing each utterance as reflected in Searle's research (1975). Likewise, speech act theories were primarily developed in connection with spoken interactions but Black (2006) argued that these theories are not irrelevant or out of context for written discourse or texts. She further explained that the terminology 'speech act' is not only concerned with the act of speaking rather it

includes the context of the situation, participants, communicative situation, discourse and paralinguistic features making interaction meaningful; Leech (1983) while Yule (1996) labelled it “contextualized speech”. According to Black (2006), it is of worth importance that communicative purpose should be achieved rather than focusing on the grammatical correction of utterances (Purba et al., 2023). For example, Dickens desired to make social conditions better through his writing (Cook 1994, p. 45), so writers/speakers attempt to show an inclination towards the communicative function of language.

2. Literature Review

Yule (1996) has classified five types of speech acts as representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, assertives and declaratives for the speakers to acquire in an utterance (Chejnov á 2021). The researcher has provided an overview of speech acts in relation to the present study and a brief description is mentioned underneath;

Likewise, the interpretation of speech acts is condensed by Searle (1980) “Speech-act theory is an account of the conditions of intelligibility, of what it means to mean in a community, of the producers which must be instituted before one can even be said to be understood” (p. 245).

Moving on to the concept of metaphor, which is deeply rooted in the human mind to manifest its work (Paprotte and Dirven 1985; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Mey, 1994; Pilkington, 2000). Black (2006) stated that previously metaphor was described as ‘saying one thing but meaning another’ and it is usually prevalent in different types of discourses. Carter (2004) illustrated that metaphors are proliferated in everyday language use as connected with the human mind. Furthermore, context plays an important role in differentiating between literal and metaphorical utterances being a ‘scalar phenomenon’ while some of the metaphors do not require any interpretive effort as traditionally connected with speakers’ or writers’ genuine creations (Black, 2006).

Moreover, the language is used to convey purposes besides sharing and communicating beliefs and ideas (Cooper, 1986 & Mey, 1994, p. 301; Herman et al., 2024). The social function of metaphor is for the original creation to be judged by the power of imagination, the tendency to evoke mood, or maintain internal balance (Black, 2006). Consequently, it generates a new array of original thinking and boosts imaginative power like “journey is more important than the destination” cited by Black (2006).

In relation to the present study, the Pakistani private universities are using conceptual metaphors to influence the readers to think about their career, their future and their objectives of professional life underpinning the concept of improving their personal lives too. The language of prospectuses employs conceptual metaphors as these features structure the thinking of individuals as metaphors are immersed in the human cognitive system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Furthermore, professional jargon is also part of frequent metaphoric utterances; however, the prevalence of metaphoric expressions may be viewed as a way of stimulating interpersonal connections, speed and economy from the pragmatic orientation.

2.1 Speech Act Theory

The methodological choices for the present study were made to address the prevalent persuasive linguistic strategies in the academic discourse of universities from different types of speech acts under the umbrella of speech act theory (Searle, 1969). Furthermore, the researcher unearths the stylistic and pragmatic factors employed by the text producers through the ways of justifying discursive marketization by private universities in the Pakistani context. In this context, situational appropriateness is important for any speech act to be formulated, which are labelled as “felicity or appropriacy conditions” (Searle, 1969, p. 66; Putri, 2018; Murphy, 2015).

2.1.1 Representative Speech Acts

These speech acts are used for descriptions and statements to communicate ideas, beliefs and thoughts (Black, 2006). In other words, speakers/writers share their understanding on their own of perceiving the world or considering the real conditions prevailing around them. For instance, universities represent themselves by describing the campus, providing information about the courses and introducing staff members who are the representatives of the respective universities.

2.1.2 Directive Speech Acts

These speech acts are conventionally used to influence the readers or hearers to take some action which may include advice, request, or command; somehow like cause and effect situation (Black, 2006). For instance, universities use phrases like “Think about your future....” in the academic discourse of university prospectuses to create an impact on the readers to consider and reconsider their decision, all these influences are made through the language of prospectuses in the Pakistani private universities as series of language events occur as socially situated phenomenon.

2.1.3 Commissive Speech Acts

These speech acts are employed to commit to some promising and future actions such as oaths, promises etc. Now-a-days, private universities are increasingly incorporating commissive speech acts in their academic discourse of prospectuses to captivate the attention of potential students by making long-term promises and providing a guarantee to make them enable for highly paid jobs and so many other benefits in relation to their future endeavours.

2.1.4 Expressive Speech Acts

These speech acts are used for expressing attitudes and emotions of speakers or writers such as thanks, congratulations, explanations and so on (Searle, 1969, p.121). The expressive speech acts are commonly used in the introductory part of prospectuses’ discourse. The

welcome note of university high-ups usually congratulates students for choosing “the best university or making the best choice” which is a common example of expressive speech acts.

2.1.5 Declarative Speech Acts

Black (2006) called these speech acts ‘unique’ as their ‘successful performance’ depends on writers/speakers’ alignment with uttered propositions (House et al., 2021). For instance, private universities keep on declaring their decisions according to the changing social conditions i.e., offering scholarships and benefits for the high achievers, announcing and advertising MoUs with other educational organizations to work in collaboration for the mutual benefit of two organizations by declaring students as the first beneficiaries.

3. Methodology

This study has followed the qualitative research methodology which falls under the interpretive research philosophy. It is considered to be the most common research methodology which permits the researcher to comprehend meanings and interpret the social context (Lee & Lings, 2008; Rony et al, 2024). Moreover, it was appropriate to investigate the linguistic variations embedded in the prospectuses’ discourse of the Pakistani private universities.

3.1 Research Design

The present study has employed textual research design for an in-depth understanding of language and its social context of university prospectuses while considering the linguistic variations for ideological reasons. The researcher remained a passive observer to find the textual variations embedded with discursive practices and explore how language is used for persuasive purposes in the prospectuses’ discourse of private universities.

3.2 Data Source

The researcher has used prospectuses as a prime source of data collection; textual research design has been incorporated into the current study.

3.3 Instrument of Data Collection

The researcher has employed a purposive sampling technique to collect data from prospectuses of Pakistani private universities. The purposeful sampling technique is appropriate for the research on all types of promotional material (Hui, 2009; Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993; Munthe et al., 2024). The researcher has used observation as the primary source of data collection. It is a systematic and purposeful way to observe a phenomenon as it occurs in a natural and controlled situation (Kumar, 2011; Judijanto et al., 2024).

3.4 Data Collection Method

The researcher has collected prospectuses in both hard and soft form. Some of the universities publish their prospectuses only on their websites which could be downloaded with convenience.

3.5 Data Analysis Methods

As the current study has followed a textual research design, the researcher conducted analysis by deeply immersing and observing the prospectuses many times for a thorough understanding. The current study has analyzed prospectuses’ data through speech acts which were excessively employed in the academic discourse of private universities synchronized with their marketing purpose.

4. Data Analysis through Identification of Speech Acts and Findings

The minimal unit of language used for communicative purposes is explicated as a speech act by Searle (1969, p. 119). It is more than the formal properties of meaning as it includes the intended meaning of conversation as well (Black, 2006).

The researcher has explored different speech acts identified by Yule (1996) and employed in the prospectuses’ discourse of the Pakistani private universities. The present has highlighted the communicative functions of language through speech acts; and how text producers have skillfully conveyed the information to the stakeholders by considering the situational context as per the requirements of modernization in the current scenario. In this regard, a brief description of speech acts and tactful usage in the language of prospectuses are extracted by the researcher as given below:

4.1 Representative Speech Acts

These are merely the descriptions, illustrations and statements (Black, 2006). These statements are used to communicate the ideologies and perspectives of the text producers. The examples are taken from the purview of the Pakistani prospectuses as stated below;

Table 1. Examples of Representative Speech Acts

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- “The University of Lahore believes in delivering excellence in research and learning (UoL)”
 - “As a UoL graduate, you will be technologically connected to knowledge through the best available computer networks (UoL)”
 - “University of Management and Technology is here to help you to become great, truly exceptional (UMT)”
 - “Grand Asian University (GAUS), a project of the Islam group, was conceived after I perceived that the most effective way to advance society is through education (GAUS)”.
 - “Ibadat International University (IIU) is a federally chartered dynamic university in Islamabad, the Capital of the Islamic
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Republic of Pakistan (IIU)”.

- “Over the past three decades, it has evolved to become a leading university in the region that offers undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs (LUMS)”.
- “Iqra University aims to instill in students a culture of continual learning and innovation through transforming their mindset and shaping their personalities (IU)”.
- “At AKU, students flourish in as supportive environment that fosters intellectual excellence, welcomes pluralism and encourages service to those in need (AKU)”.

The researcher has identified different speech acts in the discourse of prospectuses from the purview of the Pakistani context, the above-stated instances fall under the representation speech acts which are used to represent something in terms of description or statements for demonstration.

The researcher has highlighted the excessive usage of university names along with acronyms in these examples i.e. “The University of Lahore (UoL)”, “University of Management and Technology (UMT)” etc. to leave a long-lasting impression on the mind of readers; the researcher found this strategy as a tool to create formal distance between stakeholders i.e. university and students. In addition, it also revealed the dialogical nature of discourse unlike the traditional language of prospectuses in the past. For instance, it is mentioned that UoL “believes in delivering excellence”, “UMT is ready to help you to become great”, “LUMS has evolved as leading university in the region”, “IIU is a dynamic chartered university in Islamabad” etc.

The researcher has found that the dialogical nature of prospectuses discourse creates a positive impact on the students to take admission to a university whose core objectives are aligned with their interests. The researcher has found that the majority of Pakistani private universities are transforming their academic discourse to make students comfortable by replacing the authoritative discourse of the past in university prospectuses.

The present study highlighted the captivated and dynamic representation of private universities to convince potential applicants for the right decision. In this regard, words like “great”, “dynamic”, “evolving”, “leading” etc. are excessively incorporated to transform the minds of newcomers to make them decisive about the respective university.

4.2 Expressive Speech Acts

These speech acts are employed to express the communicator’s attitude like congratulating, sort of expressing pleasure, hope, wish, and desire as these exhibit the interpersonal function of language (Black, 2006). A few instances of prospectuses’ discourse are given below;

Table 2. Examples of Expressive Speech Acts

- “This university is about students, and I will be actively involved in your academic lives (UoL)”.
- “It is indeed a pleasure to congratulate you on your well-deserved selection to this prestigious institution (UMT)”.
- “I congratulate you on deciding to study at the Grand Asian University, Sialkot (GAUS)”.
- “We want to be a good partner in your professional life and successful career”. “I wish you a pleasant stay at our university! Best Regards (IIU)”.
- “We also urge you to see yourselves as part of the world beyond the campus gates, and to gear your learning towards serving others (LUMS)”.
- “The university prepares its students for the challenges of the 21st century through its academic excellence (IU)”.
- “I warmly felicitate to explore the various opportunities that we offer at the University of Mianwali (UM)”.
- I believe the Agha Khan University has something invaluable to offer you: an education that will expand your horizons, challenge your assumptions, equip you with new capacities, and prepare you for personal and professional success (AKU)”.

The aforementioned samples represented expressive speech acts where text producers have shared their attitudes, desires, and felicitations on choosing the respective university. The researcher has found the particular linguistic constructions such as personal deixis “I” by one of the high officials claiming to be personally involved in the academic pursuits of students for their improvement; linguistic choices i.e. “immense pleasure”, “congratulate”, “warmly felicitate”, “urge”, “beyond the campus gate” demonstrated the expressive attitude of the university management which implicitly persuade the applicants for making the right choice. The researcher has found that these expressive speech acts are commonly employed in the prospectuses to make students realize that they can avail something invaluable, explore the innovative research practices and all the necessities required for academic excellence for making their professional career successful. The researcher found that these persuasive strategies are prevalent in the prospectuses for the good reputation of universities and students are warmly welcomed by the high officials as an illustration of a kind gesture which makes them feel valuable treasure for the respective university.

Moreover, these expressive speech acts also include hope, desire, belief and wish of the top management as mentioned in the examples above, “I wish you a pleasant stay...” Or “I firmly believe...”, these acts are employed to elucidate the emotional attachment of university’s top management with the students; the researcher found it persuasive tactic which has no connection in the real life appliances. Furthermore,

private universities are well aware of the psychology of modern students, as these applicants prefer the educational places where the concerned officials and top management are empathic to them and it is one of the main reasons that private universities are transforming the language of prospectuses in the current scenario. The researcher has exemplified how stylistic variations aligned with pragmatics are employed as interpretive tools for the analysis of extracts taken from the prospectuses.

4.3 Directive Speech Acts

These speech acts are used for giving directions, commands and instructions (Black, 2006) and the communicator attempts the respondents to take desirable action through advice, request or directives (Searle, 1969; p. 121). The examples of directive speech acts are mentioned below:

Table 3. Examples of Directive Speech Acts

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- “This university is about students, and I will be actively involved in your academic lives (UoL)”.
 - “It is indeed a pleasure to congratulate you on your well-deserved selection to this prestigious institution (UMT)”.
 - “I congratulate you on deciding to study at the Grand Asian University, Sialkot (GAUS)”.
 - “We want to be a good partner in your professional life and successful career”. “I wish you a pleasant stay at our university! Best Regards (IIU)”.
 - “We also urge you to see yourselves as part of the world beyond the campus gates, and to gear your learning towards serving others (LUMS)”.
 - “The university prepares its students for the challenges of the 21st century through its academic excellence (IU)”.
 - “I warmly felicitate to explore the various opportunities that we offer at the University of Mianwali (UM)”.
 - I believe the Agha Khan University has something invaluable to offer you: an education that will expand your horizons, challenge your assumptions, equip you with new capacities, and prepare you for personal and professional success (AKU)”.
 - “You will always find the university management, faculty and administrative staff to assist and guide you, not only during your stay at the campus but after becoming the proud graduate of this university (UoL)”.
 - “Complete and submit your home assignments regularly. Read and understand the course material, old assignments, quizzes, and old test available in the learning management system (UMT)”.
 - “I invite you to explore the corridors of GAUS which will give you glimpse of a perfect future (GAUS)”.
 - “Beyond academics, we will aspire to build a space where our students can grow in an environment built on compassion, empathy, and diversity of thought (IIU)”.
 - “We encourage you to explore the wide range of transdisciplinary programs at the five schools, consider your options, and above all, get on the fast track to a genuinely world-class professional career (LUMS)”.
 - “I invite you to explore the following pages to learn more about what we do and how you might become a part of AKU family (AKU)”.
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As the data shown above, these illustrations reflect the desired action which university officials expect from prospective students. For instance, “complete your home assignments regularly” demonstrated the concern of the high officials about what is expected from students; however, students are being invited to avail the opportunities of transdisciplinary programs, exploration of new learning programs etc. The researcher has highlighted the discourse patterns where the top management of the university desires the potential to take action in favour of the respective university and pragmatically, these speech acts are intentionally used by the text producers to make students’ minds about the right decision. These speech acts are employed implicitly as an ideology is beamed with the variation of linguistic choices and specific linguistic constructions are used to convince the students of the modern times as UoL mentioned that cooperative faculty members are available for their guidance not only during the stay of students rather a university provides the life-time ownership for them. Similarly, UMT emphasized the completion of tasks on time by highlighting that students are required to be committed to their work so that they can become successful professionals. Moreover, GAUS claims to provide pathways where students can foresee their future from the spectacle of the respective university while IIUI explicates the additional learning facilities for the students to explore diversity instead of restricting them to a holistic horizon. Furthermore, LUMS motivates the students to look for “transdisciplinary programs” for their betterment required for times ahead and also emphasizes considering the available choices whereas AKU uses the term ‘AKU family’ and how students can be part of it by illustrating what they are doing in academics. The researcher investigated the directive speech acts as mentioned in the chunks above; “Complete and submit your home assignments regularly. Read and understand the course material”; “I invite you to explore the corridors of GAUS”; “We encourage you”; and “Consider your options” represent the implicit ideology of the university officials so that prospective students can make a commendatory decision in their favour. In other words, students are directed to make favourable decisions and the ideological perspective is encoded through the manipulation of linguistic resources.

4.4 Commissive Speech Acts

These speech acts include commitments and promises for future actions (Black, 2006). These are employed to reveal the reliable image of universities as the excessive usage of commissives is discovered by the researcher in the prospectuses. Following are the extracts from the prospectuses to demonstrate the incorporation of commissive speech acts;

Table 4. Examples of Commissive Speech Acts

- “At the UoL, you will be taught by dedicated professors who are determined that you become competent as a professional in order to assume a leadership role with qualities that should distinguish you from any graduate of any other university in the world” (UoL).”
- “We are committed to maintain academic excellence through a coalescence between the latest and traditional methods, techniques and mediums of teaching (UMT)”.
- “GAUS, a new generation university, is committed to nurturing talent, strengthening academics and research by adopting unique and innovative practices to continue to redefine academic excellence (GAUS)”.
- “We are committed to create a learning environment conducive to student’s holistic development (IIUI)”.
- “The university will offer you a whole range of clubs and societies to pick from in terms of sports, drama, debates and much more (LUMS)”.
- “The university is dedicated to providing faculty, staff and students with the environment and infrastructure that help them develop their potential for scholarship, creative work, professional realization and social service (IU)”.
- “The University of Mianwali is committed to providing modern infrastructure and state-of-the-art-facilities to enable the students to update their knowledge in various scientific disciplines by providing access to contemporary technology (UM)”.
- “With deep roots in educational history and culture, AKU is committed to encouraging personal and professional growth, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as instilling a life-long love of learning (AKU)”

The researcher found the imprudent usage of commissives in the language of prospectuses as the private universities are making promises and commitments by providing the glossy image of respective universities. It can be observed that linguistic choices such as “committed”, “dedicated”, “strengthened” etc. are frequently incorporated into the discourse of prospectuses. These particular linguistic choices create a sophisticated image of the university for the target audience. The present study highlighted how text producers are persuasively incorporating captivating language to assure students of their academic and professional excellence. For instance, UoL claims that dedicated faculty members can make students true professionals by inculcating leadership qualities in them so that students can differentiate themselves from other university graduates not only in Pakistan but also around the globe. The researcher analyzed the commitments of the private universities as these can make the minds of students selecting the respective universities. In the challenging academic environment, the majority of the students excel in their professional lives and look for uniqueness to make their career and achieve their target objectives.

Likewise, UMT demonstrates its pledge or commitment to sustaining its “academic excellence” by maintaining the balance through the amalgamation of the latest and conventional trends to provide students with a conducive environment. Moreover, GAUS employed evaluative linguistic choices such as “a new generation university”; “unique and innovative practices” and “redefining academic excellence” which reflected its ideological perspective that GAUS follows the trends of modern times by reshaping and redesigning the traditional ways of teaching and learning which are the pre-requisite for a successful career in times ahead. Hence, it replicates the notion of a university concerned with the needs of a new generation.

Aligned with the previous notion, many private universities are making promises with prospective students as mentioned in the afore-mentioned data; IIUI pledges for a “conducive environment” whereas; LUMS explicates the extra-curricular activities besides academic pursuits; IU states “professional realization” and creativity for acquiring uniqueness. Likewise, UM commits to providing “modern infrastructure” for the advancement of “scientific technology” whereas AKU promises to refine the critical insight and “problem-solving skills” required for their professional recognition.

The researcher examined the commissives employed by the private universities in their educational discourse to attract potential applicants to take admission in the respective universities and these commitments are encoded with the beams of ideology for a commendatory response from the applicants. The researcher discovered the excessive linguistic variation for promotional purposes and the linguistic choices i.e., committed and dedicated were incorporated into the academic discourse of the majority of the private universities as exemplified in the above-mentioned data.

4.5 Declarative Speech Acts

Black (2006) considers these speech acts unique as successful usage depends on the communicator and the prevailing circumstances of the situational context; these speech acts include declarations (Searle, 1969; p.122). The researcher has found declarative speech acts in the language of prospectuses as stated below;

Table 5. Examples of Declarative Speech Acts

- “The University has now expanded internationally with its first move to Uganda providing support to set up a medical school. We believe that internationalization is an important step towards ensuring that experiences are shared both academically and intellectually” (UoL).
- “The University of Management and Technology is among the leading universities not only in Pakistan, but also in Asia as per the QS Asia ranking (UMT)”.
- “GAUS is going to sign MoUs with academic institutions and industries to provide its students international exposure and job opportunities at global level (GAUS)”.
- “Our students will leave this campus with skills, knowledge; and drive to become leaders in their fields and to lead lives of impact in the world (IIUI)”.
- “LUMS continues to be an intellectual hub, rich with varying perspectives and impactful ideas (LUMS)”.
- “What the university seeks to offer to students is an exciting, self-fulfilling and challenging life time learning experience (IU)”.
- “The university intends to launch its M.phil/Ph.D programs in selected disciplines in near future for which the preliminary work has already been completed (UM)”.
- “Whether you choose to attend our programs in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, or the United Kingdom, you will find our facilities, teaching, and overall learning environment, both stimulating and engaging (AKU)”.

The researcher has provided examples where private universities are making declarations to attract applicants for enrollment in respective universities such as International expansion, future plans about the introduction of new higher education levels, MoUs with other renowned educational organizations etc. These persuasive strategies are used to create a charismatic image for the readers as it is the need of an hour to get affiliation with the educational places which can make students flourish and bear academic excellence in the age of intense competition among the private universities.

Majority of the private universities highlight their declarations frequently to show their evolution, collaboration and expansion, which is considered a source of attraction for the students of modern times. For instance, UoL explicates the collaboration with International awarding bodies to signify the difference with other educational institutes. Furthermore, UMT claims to be the leading university in the “Asian QS ranking” whereas GAUS render its declaration of MoUs so that students can be facilitated for International opportunities. Moreover, LUMS declares itself the “intellectual hub” meant to ensure production of the professionals and intellectuals while UM proclaims to launch its educational programs at higher educational levels soon. In the same context, AKU highlights the stimulating and conducive environment for learning not only in Pakistan but in different countries as well.

The researcher identified these declarative speech acts as persuasive strategies of the text producers, which excessively explicate their future plans, collaboration with International educational organizations, MoUs and the expansion of university projects are provided so that students can get information about these universities. In the current scenario, Pakistani students are eagerly searching for International opportunities to get exposure for their professional growth and intend to maximize their potential so those students can easily be inclined towards universities, which provide them with International gateways. The prospectuses of the Pakistani private universities are embedded with declarations to persuade maximum applicants to enroll in the respective universities. In this regard, the marketing techniques of the corporate sector have been employed for the favourable outcome as desired by the high officials of the private sector.

Majority of the Pakistani private universities have transformed the prospectuses’ discourse under the influence of marketisation. The researcher observed dialogical discourse patterns, excessive repetition of acronyms, personal pronouns and persuasive messages. Moreover, the current study highlighted that modern private universities claimed to be meant for a new generation by adopting marketing tactics of the corporate sector to construct their independent identity. The prospectuses of private universities execute promotional features to persuade potential applicants through marketing tactics in the most appealing manner. In a nutshell, Pakistani private universities have set the parameters for success i.e., the huge number of enrollments to survive in the competitive environment of academia which has actually diminished the noble purpose of universities.

5. Discussion

The present study has investigated how Pakistani private universities are excessively employing marketing strategies in academic discourse to market their image to prospective students. This study has highlighted speech acts’ variation employed for promotional purposes and private educational sector has been incorporating marketization as a discursive strategy to survive in the competitive market of academia.

Although the overall global economic and political situation of the country affects the educational sector, resultantly, the private universities faced constraints. However, to overcome these financial challenges; these academic institutions started adopting the marketing strategies of the corporate world through its reaching to the corporate sector for sponsoring finance pertaining to research pursuits appears to be logical but it poses a question on the academic integrity (Redfern, 2017). Moreover, Smyth and Hattam (2000) argued that once a university has altered its contribution as a “knowledge production” commodity in the economy of knowledge, it would turn academia into a “hustler”. Redfern (2017) took up this stance with the “loss of intellectual freedom”.

Through the implementation of Searle’s (1969) speech act theory, the researcher has investigated the persuasive linguistic strategies, lexical resources, syntactical structures and discourse patterns of the corporate sector which played an important role for the higher educational

institutes in the present situation. Moreover, the communicative functions which remained the centre of attention for the academic discourse of prospectuses were informing (comprehensive information about the university, its courses and accomplishments), convincing (applying persuasive techniques with selected lexical choices) and greeting (warmly welcoming) students. These functions of language were synchronized in the prospectuses' discourse of the private Pakistani universities. In this regard, the plentitude of persuasive techniques was incorporated into the educational discourse to get the desired response from the applicants which, in, turn, might increase the number of applicants aligned with Fairclough's (1993) phenomenal research where he observed the evolution of discourse from authoritative to conversational or personalized transition coupled with marketization.

The researcher has explicated that Pakistani private universities are looking for the language of corporations for self-promotional activities to convince maximum students as "customers" and the collaboration of academic and business culture is dominant in the discourse patterns of the Pakistani prospectuses.

6. Conclusion

The present study conducted speech act analysis to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic constructions in terms of lexical and syntactic choices, communicative functions and discourse patterns influenced by the latest trends of marketization. The researcher investigated the persuasive language embedded with corporate terminologies and organization structures of the prospectuses of Pakistani universities. In this regard, the researcher found the amalgamation of discourses borrowed from the different fields such as tourists' guide, management, marketing etc. mainly from the corporate sector domains in the prospectuses. The speech act analysis demonstrated that academic and business culture discourses are completely infused in today's time in the prospectus's Pakistani educational institutes. In this context, all private universities are putting efforts to persuade the maximum number of students by implementing marketing strategies in the corporate world. This study has found that marketisation has become an accepted practice in academia and private educational sectors are openly commercialising the prospectuses' discourse through marketing campaigns, advertising strategies and showing concerns towards the needs of modern scholars. The present study left few questions for scholars, teachers and stakeholders; Are we going to default in academia because of excessive marketisation to overcome the default in economy? ; Are private educational sectors going to compensate financial constraints at the loss of their academic integrity?; Are private universities making their prospective students 'Brand Conscious' ? The current research encapsulated the marketing tactics of Pakistani private universities through linguistic manipulation in the prospectuses discourse and revealed the linguistic exploitation for their hidden ideological purposes.

7. Recommendation for Future Researchers

Future researchers can conduct interviews of prospective students how they process the information of prospectuses and take a decision about a particular university. Furthermore, a comparative study can be conducted for two different countries from the perspective of marketisation.

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Authors' contributions

Sumra Mussarat Jabeen Satti was responsible for data collection, data analysis and Dr. Tabassum saba contributed to the conceptualization and execution of the study by thorough proofreading, editing and revising the draft systematically.

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