The promotional English of British and Indian University Websites

‘Promotional’ culture increasingly permeates contemporary discursive practices, one of these being the marketization of higher education as shown by the similarities that can be found in university and corporate websites. Along with globalizing trends and an “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities” (Giddens 1990: 64), the World Wide Web also brings forth the complex relationship between local and global perspectives.

University websites (UWs) have been studied in their graphic component (Callahan 2005), in relation to business related lexis (Mautner 2005) and in the choice of language(s) used to present information to international audiences (Callahan and Herring 2007).

This project focuses on how British and Indian universities mediate their identities in the Web global context, by analysing the verbal component in the About Us (AB) sections of the Universities’ websites. The choice of Indian UWs is related to the role played by British linguistic and cultural legacy as well as to India's increasing economic competitiveness.

Starting from textuality as a place where social practices and values are expressed, the study aims at identifying the promotional strategies employed in UWs at both micro- and macrotextual level. Moreover, it examines the relationship between local and global perspectives (Andersen 2004; Appadurai 1996 and 2001; Bauman 2000).

The targeted web of resources to be analysed includes advertising discourse, evaluative language, lexical features and pattern variability across cultures. The study is being carried out following the approaches provided by text linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and corpus linguistics.

From a methodological viewpoint a survey of the available sources has been carried out. Data are being collected from ‘4International Colleges & Universities’, an international higher education directory and search engine, that includes worldwide education organizations officially accredited or recognized by national or regional bodies. The aim of the website is to provide an approximate popularity ranking of universities based on the popularity of their websites, which has been deemed useful given the purpose of the present study.

One hundred and sixty UWs (75 British and 85 Indian UWs) have been collected so far and the texts have been grouped into two subcorpora (British and Indian UWs). Although pictures and graphics play an important role in the language of websites, these features will be dealt with in more general terms in the research project introduction, since the main focus of the study is on lexical choices and their relationship with both cotext and context.
The AB sections analysed display a certain degree of variability as far as diatypic features are concerned, as suggested by the presence of two main textual patterns: a) narrative/descriptive; b) message/letter.

With reference to advertising discourse features, the AB texts analyzed are characterized by the recurrence of one of the most important moves of promotional genres ‘offering a product description’ (Bhatia 1993 and 2004) that is good, positive and favourable, a move realized to a large extent through evaluative adjectives:

(a) By continuing to invest in internationally **excellent** research and by providing an **outstanding** learning environment […] (University of Glasgow, UK)

(b) I invite you to explore our site and see for yourself the many resources available that makes the University **unique** (Osmania University, IN)