The Language Of Student Complaints Procedures In The UK Higher Education Sector – Developing the Data and Methodology Chapter

Overview of the Research

❖ This research focuses on the language of policies, regulations and guidance documents that outline student complaints procedures in Higher Education, focusing on:

- The extent to which regulatory, policy and guidance documents used to convey student complaints procedures in the Higher Education sector be considered individual genres? (Using Swales' (1990) definition of genre)
- How obligation and commitment to act is conveyed to readers?
- Whether university mission group* impacts on how obligation and commitment to act is conveyed to readers?
- How power relationships between user groups are represented and whether these align to the internal hierarchies of Universities as perceived by the user groups?
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> * University mission group refers to a group of universities that usually have a similar origin, ethos and ambitions. This research focuses on the Russell Group (research intensive) and Post-92 (Polytechnics given university status following the 1992 Education Act)

The Data

❖ The original research plan was to explore documents relating to academic appeals processes as well as student complaints procedures but, due to the greater availability of documents relating to student complaints procedures across document type and mission groups (see tables below), the decision was made to focus on student complaints procedures only:

Group	Academic Appeals – No. of Universities Where Docs Available			
	Regulations	Policies	Student Guidance	Staff Guidance
All universities (55 in Total)	34	17	13	3
Post 92 (35 in Total)	25	10	4	0
Russell Grp (20 in Total)	9	7	9	3

Group	Student Complaints – No. of Universities Where Docs Available			
	Regulations	Policies	Student Guidance	Staff Guidance
All universities (55 in Total)	15	32	17	3
Post 92 (35 in Total)	11	19	9	2
Russell Grp (20 in Total)	4	13	8	1

❖ The data used in the research will include

- Corpora representing document type and mission group (see table opposite)
- focus groups consisting of academic staff, administrative staff, students and SU representatives
- One document per corpus will also be used for drill-down analysis

❖ A Pilot Study has been completed before the main analysis to assess the suitability of data and methodology.

❖ Data for the Pilot Study consisted of corpora containing documents from London-based universities only and the omission of focus group data (to avoid overuse of participants) and no individual document analysis

❖ Corpora used in the main analysis (English universities) and Pilot Study (London universities) are as follows:

Corpus		Word Count English Universities	Word Count London Universities
Docs from Post-92 & Russell Group Universities	Regulations	46,832	11,437
	Policy	137,212	30,558
	Student Guidance	26,490	6,428
	Staff Guidance	4,905	368
Docs from Post-92 Universities	Regulations	36,237	2,253
	Policy	88,445	15,984
	Student Guidance	17,756	3,706
	Staff Guidance	4,012	0
Docs from Russell Group Universities	Regulations	10,595	9,184
	Policy	48,767	14,574
	Student Guidance	8,734	2,722
	Staff Guidance	893	368

The Methodology

❖ Qualitative and quantitative approach
❖ Text-driven genre analysis (Swales (2004)
❖ Critical Genre Analysis (Bhatia (2012)
❖ Corpus Linguistics methodologies (using Wmatrix4 and Antconc)
❖ Functional Linguistics informed analysis
❖ Also informed by Hyland's (2009) research on engagement with in academic writing
❖ Use of LogRatio and Log-Likelihood statistics

❖ Points for discussion in the analysis are:
- Relative frequencies
- Keyness
- Use of Multi-Word Expressions (MWE) using Baldwin and Kim's (2010) approach to analysis – L1,R1; L3,R3; L5,R5
- Use of collocates of *university*, *student* and *complaints* using Brezina et al's (2015) 7 characteristics (distance, frequency (using a random co-occurrence baseline (Brezina (2018)), exclusivity, directionality, dispersion, type-token ration, connectivity) – L1,R1; L3,R3; L5,R5
- Outcomes of Move Analysis (Using Upton and Cohen's (2009) approach)

- Inclusive 1st person, 2nd person pronouns
- Expressions of modality
- Use of interrogatives
- Use of conditionals
- KWIC
- Transitivity
- Hierarchical representation
- Data from focus groups
❖ For the Pilot Study, collocate, MWE, focus group data and individual documents were not analysed

Current Issues

❖ Despite relatively small corpora and the lack of a staff guidance corpus for Post-92 universities, the pilot study has provided interesting outcomes. With this in mind, and that focus groups are likely to be London-based, should the focus of the main analysis be on documents from universities in London rather than across England as currently planned?

❖ Should a single focus group be held with all document users in attendance or multiple interviews held with individual users?

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