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# How Do Welcome Statements Differ from Mission Statements?: The Salience of Genre

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In a work titled "Mission Statement," a well-known author lauds organizational efforts "to distill our identity through client-centric solutions and synergy," argues that "it's mission-critical to stay incentivized," and warns that "if you can't think outside the box you'll be downsized." The advice may sound like it comes from a management guru, but it is a parody by "Weird Al" Yancovic (2014). Authors with a more traditional academic background have approached mission statements with similar humor. Birnbaum (2001) identifies mission statements as pivotal in academic "management fads," whereas Spicer (2018) prefers the term "business bullshit."

While Yankovic (2014), Birnbaum (2001), and Spicer (2018) depict mission statements with witty humor, each stages a critique of his own ilk. In "Mission Statement," Yancovic enthusiastically repeats the admonition that "we much monetize our assets" – or did he say "asses?" It is not clear. The latter may be more *à propo*, as "monetizing" is a euphemism for liquidation. In Yancovic's parody, corporate buzzwords and neologisms generate oblivious enthusiasm for self-inflicted harm—in the case of "monetizing our assets/asses," unemployment. Birnbaum's (2001) critique is more direct. He notes the use of mission statements in management fads as varied as benchmarking, continuous quality improvement, and strategic planning; then he concludes that "although they may not appear to have a political purpose, academic management fads are solutions that further specific ideologies" (p. 225). They "contain political conflict by establishing procedures that appear to be rational, and therefore fair" (p. 155). Spicer (2018) argues that mission statements lack a "connection to any world in which an actual person lives. There are only meaningless abstractions" (p. 27). Consequently, the real-world things that organizations do—indeed, the very things that matter—are lost.

Without an understanding of the constraints and affordances of management practices, organizational actors risk alienation from the very values they hold dear. Parodies such as Yankovic (2014) and scholarly critiques such as Birnbaum (2001) and Spicer (2018) call attention to the practice-values disjunction often sustained by managerial discourses. To the extent that these works provoke critical reflection, they may encourage organizational actors to reconstruct practices according to professional or academic values. We pursue similar aims in the project described below.

The main goal of this project was to demystify community college mission statements as a management genre. Specifically, we sought to identify key linguistic properties of mission statements and to explain how these properties function toward managerial purposes. Consistent with systemic functional linguistics (SLF), we understood the linguistic properties of mission statements to be motivated by social context (Halliday & Webster, 2009). Here, social context includes the immediate contexts of text production as well as inter-institutional norms, systems of meaning, and power dynamics. As a management genre, mission statements evidence a recontextualization of practices from military and business contexts within a professional and educational context. To understand the implications of this process, we pursued a synthesis of methods associated with textual analysis (Fairclough, 2003), genre and register analysis (Biber & Conrad, 2019), and corpus-assisted discourse studies (Baker et al., 2008; Taylor & Marchi, 2018).

Data included a target corpus of 920 community college mission statements (47,943 words), a domain-specific corpus of 632 "welcome statements" published on websites by community college presidents (173,534 words), and a general reference corpus extracted from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (16.53 million words) (Davies, 2017). All data

were collected in 2017. We used specialized corpus linguistics software to generate standardized word frequencies and to tag each corpus for parts of speech (Brezina, Timperley, & McEnery, 2018). We then identified the words and parts of speech that were statistically underrepresented and overrepresented in mission statements compared to each reference corpus. We then interpreted the findings using Fairclough's (2003) framework for analysis of genre.

The findings for this project are extensive. In this manuscript, we only report on three specific findings. First, we verified similarities between mission statements and welcome statements; both address four domain-specific topics: educational processes, academic structures, geographically defined service areas, and occupationally defined social roles. Second, overuse of grammatical metaphor in mission statements omitted participants and processes—reducing dynamic human interactions to "things". Third, subordinate clauses were overrepresented in mission statements, leaving key institutional process unasserted and taken for granted.

Based on these findings, we conclude that while mission statements address the same topics as welcome statements, they realize different rhetorical strategies. The conventions of the genre assume rather than establish the effects of organizational processes, rendering potentially contestable assertions as background knowledge. While Spicer (2018) has already established that mission statements are written to be noncontroversial, we describe this function in linguistic terms. We disagree with Spicer, however, that mission statements are "meaningless" (p. 27), because genre itself is central to meaningful language use. At issue, then, is *how* mission statements are meaningful and *to what effect*.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we establish a basic history of the mission statement as a popular concept, and we survey the treatment of mission statements in the literature on higher education and organization and management studies more broadly. Then we

explain how genres shape norms for interaction. First, though, we reflect on the context of community college mission statements, explain how genre is defined in linguistic terms, and summarize the methods of researchers who have used corpus linguistics to examine management genres.

## Conceptual Framework

**Mission Statements**

**A brief history**. The concept of *mission* has a long history in military, religious, and diplomatic traditions. In the mid- to late 1900s, the concept of *mission* was familiar to veterans returning from World War II and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. In popular culture, *mission* became a household term during the Apollo space missions. Also, mission was central to the plot of the TV series "Mission Impossible" (1966). The characters of Star Trek famously pursued a mission "to go where no man has gone before" [*sic*] ("Star Trek," 1966). Although the protagonist of "Mission Impossible" ostensibly chose whether to accept his missions, understandings of mission as nonnegotiable lingered from longstanding military, religious, and diplomatic traditions. Soldiers do not deliberate on whether to carry out their mission as ordered; nor do they approach a mission halfheartedly. Missions are a duty to be accepted without argument and carried out ardently regardless of personal cost.

It was within this cultural context that Drucker (1973) recommended the mission statement as a management practice. Drucker asserted that an organization's mission should be defined by senior managers, communicated throughout the organization, and deployed as a basis for all organizational planning, design, strategy, and accountability systems (see also Drucker, 2002).  Further promoted by popular authors such as Peters and Waterman (1982), missioning became a prevalent management practice in the 1980s (Lundberg, 1984) and soon appeared as a

management strategy within higher education contexts (Keller, 1983). Higher education

management fads such as benchmarking, continuous quality improvement, and strategic planning

all centered on mission statements (Birnbaum, 2001). Today, mission statements rank among the

top management practices worldwide (Rigby, 2017).

**Research on mission statements in higher education**. Two general rationales for the

use of mission statements can be distilled from the higher education literature, according to

Morphew and Hartley (2006). In the first rationale, mission statements consolidate a shared

vision, which (a) inspires organizational members, and (b) establishes the basis for projecting a

consistent image to constituents. In the second rationale, mission statements "help organizational

members distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that

do not" (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 457). One of the earliest studies of mission statements in

higher education was Evans (1990), who described the endeavors of one community college

undergoing the process of formulating a mission statement. More recently, Abelman and

D'Alessandro (2008) focused on the extent to which mission statements represented a clear,

compelling, and shared mission; clarified organizational complexity; addressed relative

advantage; and described observable goals. Abelman (2011) utilized a similar framework when

analyzing mission statements of tribal colleges.

In addition to the two perspectives recognized by Morphew and Hartley (2006), scholars

have critiqued the managerialist and market fundamentalist assumptions inherent in mission

statements. Ayers (2005) critiqued the introduction of neoliberal discourses into community

college mission statements. He argued that traces of neoliberalism found within many

community college mission statements contradict longstanding community college discourses

such as equity and social justice. In an analysis of 421 community college mission statements,

Ayers (2010) later found that larger and more urban community colleges were more likely to describe organizational mission within a global context.

**Discourse analytical research on mission statements**. Mission statements have also been studied by linguists. Koller, Hardie, Rayson, and Semino (2008) compiled a 30,000-word corpus of mission statements from the top and bottom 50 of the 2003 Fortune Global 500 Companies. They used the specialized linguistics software to identify semantic domains and common metaphors in the data. When they compared the corpus of mission statements to a reference corpus, RELIGION and POLITICS metaphors emerged as statistically overused (log-likelihood 6.63, p < 0.01).  Later, Koller (2011) analyzed the same data using systemic functional grammar and Aristotelian rhetoric as analytical frameworks. First, she ascertained the semantic domains that were statistically overused in mission statements. Second, she examined the semantic and collocational profile of words referring to employees. Third, she subjected two mission statements to a manual textual analysis. Patterns emerging in the target corpus included (a) a transitivity in which the company unilaterally acts on employees with self-interest even while claiming mutual benefit; (b) flattering and superlative representation of employees to represent company value; and (c) construction of an ideal employee and a deontic modality which obliges employees to live up to it.

## Genre and Recontextualization

In this analysis, we regard genres as institutionalized ways of acting and interacting with language (Fairclough, 2003). In this view, genres are <u>not</u> categories of text types, say for example, the gothic novel. In fact, the author of a text may creatively make use of more than one genre. Bram Stoker's (1897) *Dracula*, for example, is organized as a series of letters penned by the main characters. While there is creativity in mixing, or hybridizing genres, there are always

constraints. The job interview is a good example (Fairclough, 2003): the potential employee is expected to respond politely to questions—not interrupt; to say good things about herself—not list her shortcomings; to discuss topics related to the job—not her dog Fido; and even to display appropriate body demeanor and attire. A job-seeker who violates one of these conventions may remove herself as a viable candidate for the position. Similarly rigid norms for interaction are structured by genres such as submissions to academic journals, doctor-patient interviews, and corporate quarterly reports. The "rules" of a genre may be carefully documented as in the example of corporate quarterly reports, or they may be tacitly accepted cultural norms.

As we explained above, the concept of *mission* originated with military, religious, and diplomatic institutions but during the mid- to late 1900s was recontextualized within other domains of the cultural milieu. One consequence of recontextualization is that the norms of interaction typical of one practice are visited upon another practice, often with substantial contestation (Bernstein, 1990; Fairclough, 2015). For the recontextualizing institution, this may include an appropriation of new organizational repertoires, or ways of acting or interacting with language. Assumptions are not necessarily factual. They may also relate to ideologies and value systems: Value systems and associated assumptions are inscribed in particular discourses (Fairclough, 2003). These new management discourses became new genres and new ways of interacting, for example, in team meetings (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 195).

As a management genre, mission statements may legitimize new assumptions or value systems, such as a managerial assumption that "anything which enhances 'efficiency and adaptability' is desirable" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 58). Textually, this may also include assumptions on the part of the authors of a text that the content they write into a text is true or accurate. "Such claims may or may not be substantiated. People may mistakenly, or dishonestly,

or manipulatively make such implicit claims" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 40). Recontextualization

registers as a negotiation of discourses, genres, and styles that animate organizational processes

(Wodak & Fairclough, 2010). Further, recontexualization can be examined and explained—at

least in part—in these terms.

**Functional Linguistics**

From the view of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), language is organized around

interrelated clusters of systems (Halliday, 2002; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday & Webster,

2009). Each system provides a range of options. To use language, one must choose among the

options in each system. Also known as metafunctions, these include ideational, interpersonal,

and textual systems. First, the ideational function is used to construe experience, that is, for

"making sense of what we perceive as 'reality', both the world outside us and the world of our

own inner consciousness (Halliday & Webster, 2009, p. 272). Second, the interpersonal system

"enacts social and personal relationships: setting up both immediate and long-term interaction

with other persons, and in this way establishing each one's identity and self-awareness"

(Halliday & Webster, 2009, p. 272). Third, the textual function "gives substance to the other

two…it creates discourse: formulating a distinct 'semiotic reality' in which [the ideational and

interpersonal systems] are combined into a single flow of meaning, as spoken or written text"

(Halliday & Webster, 2009, p. 272). Thus, a text is meaningful because it isolates a repertoire of

meanings from the total range of meaning potential available within the language. Particularly

important for the purposes of the present analysis, text is meaningful only to the extent that

ideational and interpersonal systems are brought into coherence; and this occurs vis-à-vis the

textual system. Without this organization, there is no text—only an incomprehensible set of

unrelated clauses and words.

In the sense that SFL views grammar as multifunctional, Fairclough (2003) views texts as multifunctional. Critical discourse analysis, however, is not simply concerned with identifying the properties of individual texts; it also aims to show how texts relate to social practices. This is accomplished analytically by distinguishing three ways in which texts "matter" within social processes. These three "ways of meaning" reflect a refined interpretation of the three systems of meaning identified in SFL. These include styles, discourses, and genres. Styles relate to the identification function of texts. Fairclough (2003) describes styles as "ways of being." Discourses are ways of representing aspects of the world from certain perspectives. Discourses are partially identifiable by their vocabularies, because "discourses 'word' or 'lexicalize' the world in particular ways" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 129). Finally, genres are ways of acting and interacting with language.

Higher education scholars have used critical discourse analysis to interrogate systems of power and ideology (e.g., Ayers, 2005, 2010; Kuenssberg, 2011; Quinn, 2011). These researchers have successfully critiqued representational aspects of texts, but most have overlooked the salience of genre. It is important to address this oversight, because "genres are important in sustaining the institutional structure of contemporary society," including relations among higher education, private industry, governments, and media, among others (Fairclough, 2003, p. 32). Given the importance of genre, it is the focus of the study described herein.

## Research Methods

Genre has been studied by researchers from a range of fields including communications (Pälli, Vaara, & Sorsa, 2009), cultural studies (Hall, 2007; Slack & Grossberg, 2016), literary theory (Bakhtin, 1986; Derrida, 1980), and linguistics and discourse analysis (Bhatia, 2017; Biber & Conrad, 2019; van Leeuwen, 1993) to name only a few. These and other researchers

have considered genre as a mode of linguistic variation resulting from stylistic choice, custom or

tradition, and a context-motivated variety of language use (Biber & Conrad, 2019).

Regarding the latter, some researchers have distinguished between genre and register

(Halliday & Webster, 2009). Biber and Conrad (2019), for example, state that "the genre

perspective focuses on the conventional structures used to construct a complete text within the

variety (for example, the conventional way in which a letter begins and ends)" (p. 2, emphasis in

original). Fairclough (2003) uses the term *genre* throughout his work, however, his work should

be differentiated from the genre approach described in Conrad and Biber (2019). Fairclough

(2003) does consider the overall structure of a text type; however, he also analyzes linguistic

structures at the level of the clause. As such, Biber and Conrad's overview of approaches to

language variety is a poor fit with the nature of Fairclough's analytical method.

Both Fairclough (2003) and Biber and Conrad (2019) focus on grammatical and lexical

properties of texts, using SFL. Both consider genre to be an artifact of, or motivated by social

context. A main difference is that Fairclough prefers close, detailed analysis of individual texts,

whereas Biber and Conrad prefer comparative analysis of large corpora using computer-executed

statistical algorithms. Also, Fairclough's approach is oriented to critical theories such as Foucault

and Marx. His aims are emancipatory, whereas the work of Biber and Conrad is descriptive and

explanatory. In this sense, Fairclough's work is similar to Bhatia (2017), who describes his work

as critical genre analysis. According to the latter, Fairclough's goal is to address societal

structures of inequity and oppression, whereas Bhatia's goal is to demystify specialized genres

typical of specific professions.

**Corpus-assisted discourse studies**. The purpose of this analysis was to demystify

community college mission statements as a management genre. Our methodology was informed

by corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS), which we then focus specifically on analysis of genre. CADS has been described as "a novel, integrative combination of methodologies traditionally associated with corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA)" (Baker et al., 2008, p. 273). According to Partington (2010), this combination of methods allows a researcher to discover non-obvious meanings. Baker et al. (2008) describe the combination CL and CDA methods as "a useful methodological synergy" (p. 273). We also relied on recent advances in corpus assisted discourse studies related to research design (McEnery, Xiao, & Tono, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Marchi, 2018), statistical analysis (Brezina, 2018; Gabrielatos, 2018; Gries, 2015; Hardie, 2014), and data interpretation (Mulderrig, 2011, 2012).

**Genre analysis**. Specific to analysis of genre we focused on various levels of text organization, including the overall structure of a text; semantic relations across large stretches of a text; formal relations between clauses and sentences; and simple sentence structure, including types of exchange, speech function, and grammatical mood (Fairclough, 2003, 2015). Consistent with Biber and Conrad (2019), we pursued a comparative approach, taking large corpora as data. Four research questions structured our analysis.

1. What words are statistically overrepresented in both mission statements and welcome statements compared to a reference corpus?

2. What parts of speech are statistically overrepresented in mission statements compared to (a) welcome statements and (b) a reference corpus?

3. What words are statistically overrepresented in mission statements compared to welcome statements?

4. What do the syntactic and lexical patterns identified above suggest about the properties of mission statements as a management genre?

The analysis involved three general phases. First, we examined the institutional and societal contexts in which texts of a genre are produced. This phase included a review of related literature and consideration of the how mission statements function toward organizational processes. This understanding of context informed the second phase of our analysis, which was to identify a suitable domain-specific reference corpus. For reasons explained below, we chose to populate this corpus with community college presidents' welcome statements. Also in the second phase of our analysis, we identified a general reference corpus, which included written genres in the Corpus of American English (Davies, 2017). COCA includes texts from 1990 to 2017. Since our data were collected in 2017, we only used the 2017 data from COCA. Third, we identified lexical similarities between mission statements and welcome statements by comparing each to the general reference corpus (COCA). The purpose of this phase was to establish the shared "aboutness" of both corpora; that is, to verify that both corpora addressed the same or similar topics. Fourth, we conducted a domain-specific analysis by comparing the corpus of mission statements directly with the corpus of welcome statements. The final phase was interpretive. It was structured by Fairclough's (2003) framework for analyzing genre. In this phase, we pursued a trial-and-error process of generating running hypotheses; constantly testing running hypotheses against data; and then rejecting, revising, and accepting key themes.

**Corpora/Data**

**Mission statements**. Data included a target corpus of 920 community college mission statements (347,943 words) retrieved in two stages. In the first stage, we used IPEDS to generate a list of associate degree granting colleges in the USA.  Approximately half of these colleges posted mission statements to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; the others provided the URL for their mission statements. We followed these links to compile mission

statements for the remaining colleges. One disadvantage of using IPEDS was that it only

included mission statements *per se*, not statements of values, vision, or philosophy. As a

consequence, texts in the mission corpus were relatively short—52.9 words on average.

**Domain-specific reference corpus**. Using a reference corpus of welcome statements

allowed us to compare mission statements with a large corpus within the same  institutional

domain (Bhatia, 2017; Biber & Conrad, 2019). This increased the likelihood that differences

would represent genre and not specialized institutional vocabularies. The domain-specific corpus

included 627 "welcome statements" published on websites by community college presidents

(173,534 words). The average number of words per welcome statement was 294.27.

**General reference corpus**. Finally, we compiled a general reference sub-corpus from the

Corpus of Contemporary American English  (Davies, 2017). COCA is a 560 million-word

corpus consisting of 20 million words for each year between 1990 and 2017. COCA is a balance

of spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic genres. For our study, we selected only

the written genres collected during 2017 (16.53 million words).

**Analysis**

We calculated and compare standardized frequencies of words and parts of speech for

each corpus. For parts-of-speech tagging, we used WMatrix4, which has 96 to 97% accuracy

(Rayson, 2008).  We also used #lancsbox 4.5 (Brezina et al., 2018) to tag parts of speech because

its tagger identifies a slightly different set of items.  We also used #lancsbox 4.5 (Brezina et al.,

2018) as well as quanteda and spaCyr packages for R (Benoit & Matsuo, 2019) to visualize the

data.  Comparing the results of three different packages provided a check the analysis and

interpretation of data. Words and parts of speech that were statistically more likely to appear in

one genre compared to the other were regarded as key items. In other words, key items are words

that are statistically overrepresented in one corpus compared to another. Significance for

comparison of standardized word frequencies was set at $p \leq 0.0001$, $G^2 \geq 15.13$. We used a log

ratio as an effect-size statistic (Hardie, 2014). For parts of speech, significance was set at $p \leq$

$0.01$, $G^2 \geq 6.63$.

Statistical procedures for identifying similarities between two corpora do not exist; in

fact, "when the focus is similarity, statistical significance testing is irrelevant—and useless"

(Gabrielatos, 2017, p. 5; see also Gabrielatos, 2018). One way linguists address this problem is to

identify shared key items through comparison to a third corpus—a reference corpus

(Fitzsimmons-Doolan, 2009; Taylor, 2013, 2018). Accordingly, we compared the corpus of

mission statements with COCA, compared the corpus of welcome statements with COCA, and

then extracted the words and parts of speech that were overrepresented in both (Taylor, 2013,

2018). Given the size of COCA, we could not use WMatrix to identify key words. Instead, we

used quanteda and spaCyr packages for R (Benoit & Matsuo, 2019). Again, significance was set

at $p < 0.0001$ ($G^2 \geq 15.13$).

The statistical analyses produced tables of key words and parts of speech that were

statistically overrepresented in mission statements. These data were complex and not inherently

meaningful, however. In the final phase of analysis, we sought to consolidate these results into

salient themes. Toward this end, we generated running hypotheses, which we compared against

the data using collocation analysis and concordance analysis. Each is described below.

Collocation refers to a phenomenon when words occur together with statistically

significant regularity. In other words, when one word is present, there is statistical probability

that the collocate will occur close to it in text. It is useful to identify collocates in a corpus

because, as linguists have long recognized, words take on meaning only by the "co-text" in

which they occur (Firth, 1957). By identifying a key word with its collocates, a researcher can explore various uses and meanings of a term in a large corpus.

It is important for analysts to follow collocation analysis with qualitative, concordance analysis; otherwise researchers may fail to identify unexpected or multiple meanings. A concordance is a list of all the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus, presented within the context in which they occur; "usually a few words to the left and right of the search term" (Baker, 2006, p. 71). Concordances also present the most frequent word combinations and allow data to be sorted in a variety of ways. Through multiple sorting strategies, an analyst can explore patterns in the data (Baker, 2006, 2010). A benefit of concordance analysis is that it allows researchers to group key words into semantic categories, or groups of words which carry similar meanings (Baker, Hardie, & McEnery, 2006).

**Findings**

Table 1 presents a summary of the data. In this table, the tokens column reports the total count of words in the corpus. The types column, on the other hand, reports the unique words. For example, the word *college* occurs 919 times in the mission statement corpus. This number reflects *college* as tokens. The word *college* would only be counted once in a count of types.

**Similarities**

To assess similarity between the corpus of mission statements and the corpus of welcome statements, both were compared to COCA. The analysis returned 570 key words in the mission statement corpus, and 1,399 key words in the welcome corpus ($p \leq 0.0001$, $G^2 \geq 15.13$). The number of words appearing as key in both mission statements and welcome statements was 331. As expected, the two corpora addressed common themes. The top shared key words are listed in Table 2. In the interpretive phase of this study, we grouped these shared key words into the

following seven themes: (a) educational processes, (b) socio-spatial, (c) labor-industry-nexus, (d)

individuals and roles, (e) academic structures, (f) adjectives, and (g) pronouns and grammar. C

**Differences: Key Parts of Speech and Lemmas**

Compared to welcome statements, mission statements demonstrated overuse of three

parts of speech and 241 words. We considered key words to be those that were statistically

significant at $p \leq 0.0001$ ($G^2$ 15.13) and that occurred more than 24 times. One hundred fifty-fine

words were overrepresented in mission statements, and 251 overrepresented in welcome

statements. The 251 words *over*represented in welcome statements can be interpreted as words

that are *under*represented in mission statements. Table 3 displays the key words, relative

frequencies, and log-likelihood values for the top positive and negative key words. Mission

statements and welcome statements also differed in their use of parts of speech. A direct

comparison of mission statements to welcome statements revealed an overrepresentation of 11

parts of speech in mission statements. For a summary, see Table 4.  Give space limitation, we

will comment on only two of these key parts of speech.

**Nouns**. The second most overrepresented part of speech in the corpus of mission

statements, compared to the corpus of welcome statements, was nouns. This included common,

singular nouns ($G2 = 668.14$; log ratio $= 0.44$) and plural common nouns ($G2 = 358.05$, log ratio

$= 0.63$). Among the most frequently used nouns were *access, advancement, delivery,*

*engagement, enrichment, instruction, preparation, and success* (see Chart 2). These words

represent the actions of accessing, advancing, delivering, engaging, and so forth, respectively;

yet, the syntactic form is noun. Another set of nouns included *access*, *diversity*, *excellence*,

*quality*, and *vitality*. These concepts might more congruently be expressed with adjectives,

because they represent qualities. Again, however, they take the syntactic form of nouns. A salient

theme in the data, then, was the use of nouns to represent things, and the use of nouns to represent qualities.

Halliday and Webster (2009) refer to the use of one part of speech in the place of a different, more congruent part of speech as grammatical metaphor. One advantage of using nouns in the place of verbs is that a clause can be reduced to a single word. Grammatical metaphor is more efficient. According to Halliday, grammatical metaphor of this sort is basic to scientific communication. If a scientist had to rephrase the entire process of each aspect of a phenomenon under investigation, she would be unable to make clear, concise assertions. On the other hand, grammatical metaphor prevents the scientist from having to re-state the participants and processes involved. Though the syntax is more efficient, it also elides important aspects of context. It also provides the author with plausible deniability. As Halliday famously has stated, "you can argue with a clause, but you cannot argue with a nominal group."

**Coordinating conjunction.** The second overrepresented part of speech in mission statements was the coordinating conjunction, which appeared with a relative frequency of 8.29 in the corpus of mission statements compared with 5.35 in the corpus of mission statements. Of these, 3,973 instances of coordinating conjunctions, 3,825  (96.3%) were the word *and*. The coordinating conjunction or occurred only 96 times (relative frequency = 0.02) in the corpus of mission statements, compared with 1,134 appearances (relative frequency = 0.64) in the corpus of welcome statements. The use overrepresentation of *and* suggests a logic of equivalences in which various elements are set equal (Fairclough, 2003). Examples include *traditional and nontraditional students*, *problem-solving and technical skills*, *educate and prepare*, *programs and services*, *communities and the workforce*, and *evaluating and improving*, among others.

**Subordinate clause**. Using #lancsbox we also identified a statistically exceptional prominence of what the Penn Tagset lists as WDT or *wh*-determiner. Words tagged as WDT mostly included *that* and a few instances of *which*. The relative frequency of WDT in the mission statement corpus was 102.05, compared to a relative frequency of 57.43 in the welcome statement corpus. To explore this finding further, we ran a collocation analysis, which appears in Chart 1. The collocation chart presents three dimensions of the relationship between that and the words that occur close to in with statistical regularity:

1. The distance between the node (that) and its collocate indicates the strength of association.

2. The darker shade of color indicates the frequency in which the node pairs with the collocate.

3. The position of the collocate indicates the position of the collocate relative to the node in the text.

Collocates to the left typically include nouns, such as *experience, college, education, activity, environment*, and *program*, among others. Collocates to the right are most frequently verbs, such as *prepare, support, lead, promote, enhance, empower, provide*, and *meet*. This collocation analysis, along with a concordance analysis, suggests that the word *that* marks subordinate clauses in mission statements.

One pragmatic effect of a subordinate clause is that it presupposes that the implied action in the clause is true. Four examples are below:

1. PCC is dedicated to providing progressive solutions <u>that</u> lead to increased productivity and enhanced individual employment.

2.  PCC is a student-centered learning institution <u>that</u> offers opportunities for access and

success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For example, the *that*-clause in Sentence 1 above realizes at least three presuppositions: (a) the

college offers solutions to problems that can be defined in terms of productivity and

employment; (b) the college's graduates are the population with such problems; (c) the solutions

are some sort of educational program or activity. The *that*-clause in Sentence 2 realizes similar

presuppositions: (a) the college's educators offer programs to one or more target publics,

presumed to be students; (b) as opportunities, those programs are uncommon—not routine ,

mundane events like driving to work or waiting in line at the grocery store, (c) there are barriers

that must be removed before a student can participate in educational programs; (c) if students

participate in those programs, they will be successful.

According to van Dijk (1995), meanings embedded in *that*-clauses are "simply the set of

tacit cultural knowledge that makes discourse meaningful" (p. 273). Talmy (2000) argues that

the new information presented in a main clause only makes sense when situated within the

background knowledge conjured up through subordinate clause. If stated outright, the

assumptions listed above might be contested; however, because the assertions are relegated to a

subordinate clause, there is no assertion to be denied.

> Precisely because they pertain to knowledge or other beliefs that are not asserted, but
>
> simply assumed to be true by the speaker, they are able to 'introduce' ideological
>
> propositions whose truth is not uncontroversial at all….They allow speakers or writers to
>
> make claims without actually asserting them, and, moreover, take specific beliefs for
>
> granted although they might not be. (van Dijk, 1995, p. 273)

Context only makes sense when common assumptions are activated.

**Discussion**

In the examples above, the semantics of nouns such as *opportunities*, *access*, *success*, and *productivity* complement the assumptions embedded in *that*-clauses. Indeed, we believe the pairing of these two syntactic forms are typical of the grammar of mission statements. Following SFL, this grammar is not arbitrary but is motivated by the context of situation (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Fairclough, 2003; Halliday & Webster, 2009). It is thus important to consider how and why these linguistic patterns occur uniquely in mission statements.

The use of subordinate clauses to activate background knowledge not only brings background knowledge into context, it also establishes the background as true. From a cognitive perspective, the more these cognitive structures are activated, the more taken for granted they become. As such, repeated use of background knowledge in subordinate clauses has the pragmatic effect of concretizing unasserted and empirically unexamined claims into assumed truth. Subordinate clauses, then, may be useful in establishing a truth regime with phantom origins.

As an established management genre, mission statements have both historical and spatial dimensions. According to Fairclough (2003), genres link practices within and across institutions. They form genre chains, or "different genres which are regularly linked together, involving systematic transformations from genre to genre" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 216). Unlike presidents' welcome statements, mission statements are required by accrediting agencies, drive college planning, and are used as an authoritative source for justifying highly consequential decisions such personnel decisions. They exist within a managerial imaginary in which nouns such as *assessment*, *access*, and *development* are familiar and require little explication. These terms are well known and seem like common sense, yet they are unasserted, unexamined, and not

questioned. It is important to understand mission statements and as part of genre chains, because these genre chains facilitate action at a distance: "change in genre chains is an important part of social change" (Fairclough, 2006, p. 53).

CDA is an academic movement with emancipatory sociopolitical aims. Reflecting their analysis of management texts, Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) stated that social scientists have a responsibility "to subject to debate what presents itself as given and obvious, and to expose to critique all the social agencies which impose themselves on people" (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 207). In contrast to CDA, this project had no emancipatory intent. Instead, we wanted to revisit an unremarkable management practice, to reconsider its peculiarities, and "to make the familiar seem strange again" (Mills, 1959). Ultimately, we want to provoke critical reflection among the professionals who use mission statements (Bhatia, 2017). We also hope to animate conversations about how the pragmatic effects of mission statements square off against professional and educational values.

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Tables

Table 1

*Description of Target and Reference Corpora*

| Corpus | Purpose | Texts | Tokens | Types |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mission statements | Target corpus | 920 | 47,943 | 4,149 |
| Welcome stmts. | Domain-specific reference | 627 | 173,534 | 12,556 |
| COCA 2017 | General reference | 13,744 | 16.5 M | 6.1 M |

*Notes*: [1] COCA 2017 is a subcorpus of COCA, including written genres collecting during 2017

Table 2

*Top Shared Key Items Ordered by Log Likelihood in Mission*

|  | COCA | Mission | | Welcome | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Word | Relative Frequency | Relative Frequency | Log Likelihood | Relative Frequency | Log Likelihood |
| college | 3341 | 1287 | 9269.93 | 2892 | 17301.61 |
| community | 4528 | 1017 | 6393.13 | 1654 | 7691.57 |
| learning | 1402 | 622 | 4550.86 | 610 | 2991.92 |
| education | 2596 | 679 | 4416.22 | 1042 | 4994.22 |
| educational | 550 | 450 | 3614.68 | 665 | 4230.37 |
| and | 396863 | 3878 | 3559.57 | 8192 | 2285.27 |
| students | 3948 | 620 | 3490.55 | 1744 | 8646.15 |
| opportunities | 797 | 387 | 2834.69 | 456 | 2421.08 |
| programs | 1436 | 426 | 2826.96 | 928 | 5127.19 |
| technical | 766 | 377 | 2765.05 | 428 | 2255.6 |
| mission | 1068 | 358 | 2428.11 | 177 | 580.81 |
| quality | 1648 | 368 | 2267.99 | 278 | 924.43 |
| diverse | 564 | 290 | 2114.75 | 125 | 467.17 |
| student | 1962 | 328 | 1860.71 | 924 | 4659.74 |
| workforce | 218 | 234 | 1852.08 | 296 | 1895.03 |
| development | 2944 | 345 | 1750.31 | 208 | 391.41 |
| services | 2745 | 318 | 1604.71 | 421 | 1336.06 |
| success | 1485 | 259 | 1478.05 | 643 | 3150.16 |
| provides | 1484 | 254 | 1440.96 | 146 | 352.23 |
| lifelong | 121 | 179 | 1409.02 | 65 | 317.87 |
| accessible | 237 | 186 | 1388.46 | 74 | 310.67 |
| academic | 650 | 211 | 1387.21 | 436 | 2414.72 |
| needs | 2164 | 262 | 1336.84 | 316 | 975.08 |
| transfer | 624 | 202 | 1323.9 | 414 | 2284.74 |
| providing | 1060 | 220 | 1308.33 | 211 | 757.94 |
| communities | 1139 | 213 | 1230.99 | 175 | 552.17 |
| economic | 2321 | 242 | 1170.93 | 123 | 176.2 |
| provide | 3153 | 258 | 1141.11 | 357 | 949.67 |
| career | 1955 | 224 | 1117.93 | 597 | 2587.7 |
| environment | 1239 | 188 | 1019.94 | 165 | 481.1 |
| excellence | 107 | 136 | 1013.17 | 163 | 1039.98 |
| comprehensive | 465 | 155 | 1003.22 | 94 | 335.26 |
| skills | 949 | 174 | 992.01 | 351 | 1622.86 |

Charts

Chart 1

*Key Items: Mission Statements Compared with Welcome Statements*

Chart 2

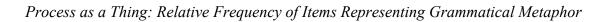*Key Items: Mission Statements Compared with Welcome Statements*

Chart 3

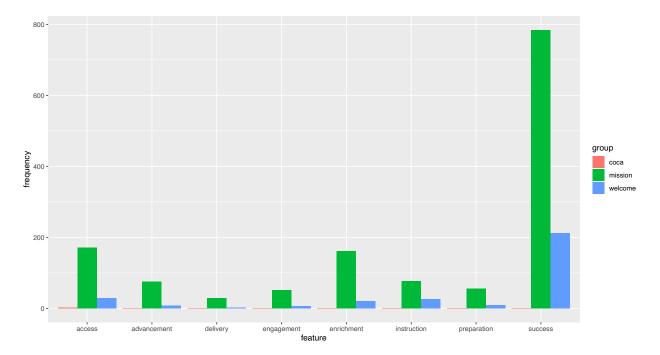*Process as a Thing: Relative Frequency of Items Representing Grammatical Metaphor*

Chart 4

*Quality as a Thing: Relative Frequency of Items Representing Grammatical Metaphor*

Chart 5

*Collocation Analysis of THAT*