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# Discursive production of teaching quality assessment report

## A Critical Discourse Analysis

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To produce a teaching quality assessment (TQA) report in the TQA practice launched by the Chinese Ministry of Education the assessing group is naturally in an authoritative position, but the assessed university does not remain absolutely passive and dominated. To investigate this struggle of power over each other in producing the TQA report, the present research examines the discourse aspect of the TQA practice by observing the discursive strategies each party deployed. It is found that both parties resort to institutional power in their discourse practice, and that the assessed university incorporates promotional genres into its self-assessment discourse while the assessing group recontextualises the promotional statement in its authoritative TQA report. It is concluded, based on this case study, that the assessing group's authoritative TQA report is largely influenced by the self-assessment of the assessed university.

**Keywords:** TQA report, critical discourse analysis, discursive strategies, power relations

### 1. Introduction

This article explores the discursive strategies involved in the production of a teaching quality assessment (TQA) report. The TQA exercise examined here was launched in 2004 by the state Ministry of Education to maintain high quality of teaching in Chinese universities. The Ministry sends a team of experts (assessing group) to the university and, after inspecting the teaching situation, the team produces an assessment report. The TQA exercise is largely a “discourse practice” as the whole process in which TQA report is produced heavily involves discourse. By discourse I mean the “semiotic element of social practice” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999: 38). Discourse in this sense is essentially language in use, be it written

or spoken, but it is by no means identical to language. It is more than language, in that it highlights the semiotic moment of social practice in its articulation with other non-discursive moments and suggests the involvement of power relations. This is particularly the case with the TQA practice, where the two parties involved (the assessing group and the assessed university) are in a structured relationship and both resort to discourse to exercise their power over each other in the process of assessing the teaching quality and producing the TQA report.

Two research questions may thus be raised: (1) how is the TQA practice affected by both the assessing group and the assessed university so far as discourse is concerned? (2) what discursive strategies are manipulated (by both parties) in producing the TQA report? I attempt to answer these questions by using the analytical frameworks developed in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially the method of investigating the interdiscursive relationships between discourses. I will first spell out some relevant premises of CDA, with reference to its theoretical account of power relations and analytical methodology; then I will examine some of the discursive strategies applied in the production of a TQA report. I will bring this paper to a close by highlighting some points drawn from this study.

## 2. Critical discourse analysis

### 2.1 Dynamics of power relations

Where there is contention over and challenge to power, language is involved, and thus power is often discussed in conjunction with discourse. Many CDA researchers have investigated the ways in which discourse (re)produces social domination. Fairclough (1989), for example, discusses “power in discourse” and “power behind discourse”. “Power in discourse” is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants. An example might be that the medical staff use technical terms to put pressure on patients. “Power behind discourse” involves the whole social order of discourse, put together and held together as a hidden effect of power. In the case of doctor-patient encounters in hospital, for example, “power behind discourse” is the power effect whereby this discourse type with specific properties comes to be imposed upon all of those involved, medical staff as well as patients, by the medical institution or system itself. Fairclough’s discussion of “power behind discourse” suggests that power is institutional, that is, it is the institution, the relatively durable set of social relations, that endows individuals with power, status and resources of various kinds (cf. also Bourdieu 1991).

Power has a changing nature, and power at all levels (e.g. of a particular situation, of a social institution, or of a whole society) is won, exercised, sustained, and lost in the course of social struggle (Fairclough 1989). That power is not stable but changeable entails that, on the one hand, power can be maintained and exercised and, on the other, can be resisted and challenged. Bourdieu (1991) examines how power is exercised and maintained through symbolic power, an ‘invisible’ power that is ‘misrecognized’ as such and thereby ‘recognized’ as legitimate. In the routine flow of day-to-day life, he observes, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of legitimacy that it would not otherwise have. Symbolic power, therefore, presupposes a kind of *active complicity* on the part of those subjected to it. Dominated individuals are not passive bodies to which symbolic power is applied. Rather, they believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it. As for the modes of resistance and challenge to power, one effective mode is to gain access to knowledge. In his study of the doctor-patient relationship, for example, Fairclough (1989) notes that the patient needs to obtain professional knowledge of medicine before he can challenge the doctor who exercises power over him or her.

Power is an indispensable concept in all CDA approaches (Wodak 2007), and to examine the way power is won or lost CDA draws on the analysis of discourse. For CDA, discourse gains power by the use powerful people make of it, and therefore it is only by way of discourse analysis that one can gain a proper understanding of how power is exercised and resisted. In this respect, a focus of attention for analysis in CDA may be discursive strategies, strategies social agents apply in their use of discourse to exercise and resist power. In analyzing the “Austria First” petition (Reisigl & Wodak 2001), for example, Wodak and her group made an interdiscursive and intertextual analysis of discursive strategies (see below). In this study, I will adopt a CDA methodology to examine the discursive strategies that contribute to the dynamics of power in the discourse practice of TQA.

## 2.2 CDA methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has developed different versions, with Fairclough, Wodak, van Dijk, and Chilton being the leading figures and Billig and others following (Blommaert 2005). These versions, though sharing in one way or another the principles of CDA summarized in van Dijk (1993) and Fairclough and Wodak (1997), are distinctive in their methodologies and approaches in applying these principles to their own practical research. Fairclough (2003:209–210), for example, formulates his CDA methodology in a 5-stage analytical framework. To

examine power relations from the perspective of discourse, Fairclough suggests that the order of discourse first be examined.

Order of discourse, according to Fairclough (2003:206), is a social structuring of semiotic difference — a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning. In China's educational system, for example, the relationship between the Ministry of Education and universities are structured, with the former being dominant, and the latter dominated. This hierarchical relationship is seen in their ways of using language to make meaning: the ministry's and the university's assessment of the same university's teaching quality, when being different, are also hierarchical, with the former being dominant or authoritative and the latter marginal, oppositional, or 'alternative' in the order of discourse in TQA practice. Thus, the examination of different ways of making meaning may reveal a social ordering. Fairclough (2003) calls this examination of order of discourse "structural analysis" in his CDA methodological framework. He believes that the involvement of order of discourse in the analysis of discourse results in the exploration of the interdiscursively mediated connection between what is going on socially and what is going on in the text. In other words, the analysis of order of discourse helps understand how the social is structured.

In addition, the analysis of discourse in Fairclough's methodology also involves what he calls "the textual/interactional analysis", the analysis of actual conversations, interviews, written texts, television programmes and other forms of semiotic activity (Fairclough 2001). The textual analysis includes both linguistic/semiotic analysis of text and interdiscursive analysis of interaction. The linguistic analysis concerns the analysis of the text, including the analyses of whole-text language organization, clauses combination, clauses and words. Interdiscursive analysis works both paradigmatically in identifying which genres and discourses are drawn upon in a text, and syntagmatically in analyzing how they are worked together through the text.

Slightly different from Fairclough's approach, Wodak's discourse-historical approach (see, for example, Reisigl & Wodak 2009) integrates textual analysis with the investigation of power and ideology in a more explicit way. In her (and her group's) investigation of racial discrimination in Austria (e.g. Reisigl & Wodak 2001), the focus is on the interdiscursive and intertextual relationship between discourses in different fields of action, and the discursive strategies employed to achieve the purposes of different genres associated with these fields of action. For example, they examined the interrelationship between the discourse about the "Austria First" petition and the discourse about the "national security", the interrelationship between texts and topics in a discourse, and the interrelationship between text in one discourse and that in another. In so doing, they investigated the discursive strategies employed in producing the anti-Semitic discourse.

Though it is not the task of this paper to discuss the similarities and differences of the various approaches and methodologies in doing CDA (but see Tian 2009), the above brief review helps highlight the point that an effective way of doing CDA, so far as discourse production is concerned, is to investigate social structures by way of examining discursive strategies. Fairclough's analysis of order of discourse and Wodak's examination of the interrelationship between discourses are all good examples. Following this tradition, the present study looks both at structured power relations and discursive strategies. Specifically, it investigates the interdiscursive relationships between "discourse *about* teaching quality" and "discourse *of* teaching quality".

### 3. The data

#### 3.1 TQA practice

The recent TQA practice in Chinese universities started in the year of 2004 and all the universities were expected to undergo such a TQA exercise in the following 5 years. The initiative for this exercise comes from dissatisfaction with the then *status quo* of teaching quality in higher education. As a result of the large expansion of student recruitment in universities at the end of 1990s, university facilities, teaching staff and administrative staff were inadequate to needs. Teaching quality could not be maintained, with resultant concern on the part of higher administrative echelons and the universities themselves. Against this background, the Ministry of Education launched a TQA exercise to improve and maintain standards.

The TQA discourse practice normally goes through three phases: (1) the assessed universities observe their own teaching quality according to the set assessment criteria in terms of, for example, efficient facilities, qualified teachers, and a clear uniqueness of the university; (2) a team of experts (assessing group) is sent to the university to inspect the teaching situation and produce a report; and (3) the Ministry of Education announces, based on the assessment report, the assessment result, scaled from A to D, indicating excellence (A), good (B), pass (C), and fail (D), respectively.

#### 3.2 TQA report

The TQA report taken as data for analysis in this study was produced by the assessing group of experts after the inspection of a university in northern China. The report consists of 5 parts: (1) description of the team's work, (2) general comment, (3) main achievements, (4) features of the university, and (5) hopes and

suggestions. The assessment contents are mainly expressed in three parts (the second, third and the fourth). An English version<sup>1</sup> of the three parts is provided in the following for close examination.

Text 1. Excerpt of the TQA report: an English version

## II. The general comment

In the past years, the leading group and the faculty of the university worked under the leadership of the municipal city government and, with a realistic approach and pioneering spirit and liberated minds, they have contributed to produce new ideas and made remarkable achievements in disciplinary construction, talent training and capital construction of the campus. Thus, the conditions and the level of the university have been improved and its reputation has been increasingly raised.

Acquiring a clear understanding of the TQA principles and adopting a down-to-earth working style, the University has taken effective measures in maintaining high teaching quality while earnestly applying the TQA guideline, which emphasizes construction, reform and management in the TQA process. In the process of this assessment, the comprehensive strength and solidarity of the university have been enhanced, and the university has taken on a new look and gone a step further in every aspect of work.

## III. Major achievements

1. With a scientific outlook on development as its guide and running the school to the satisfaction of the people as its aim, the University, based on its twenty-three years' experience in school-running, has updated its educational thoughts and conceptions, and formulated its own guiding principle. The University has attached much importance to undergraduate teaching by setting teaching as its central task. It is very wise and practical for the University to have positioned itself as a teaching-oriented educational establishment with undergraduate education as its core competence and the nurturing of interdisciplinary, application-oriented talents as its aim, to have positioned itself as a multi-disciplinary university focusing on management, economics and engineering, while promoting the construction of a well-balanced disciplinary structure, and to have positioned itself as a university which serves the economic development in the local area as well as throughout the country.
2. Placing much emphasis on disciplinary construction and constantly optimizing disciplinary structure, the University has formed a disciplinary composition with its preponderant disciplines as the pillar. It has earnestly promoted the reform of teaching content, curriculum system and teaching methods and means, and attached much importance to the utilization and popularization of modern teaching technologies. As a result, the University has achieved a lot in curriculum construction with eight city-level Excellent Courses set up and many city-level Outstanding Achievements acquired. Meanwhile, the University has also emphasized practical teaching and established many bases for student training and practice, which fosters innovative awareness and practical ability.
3. The University has strong awareness of teaching quality, a sound and standard management system and a well-developed and well-operated teaching quality assurance and

supervision system. It also has a well-structured and qualified teaching management team with strong awareness of service, which ensures the teaching reform and construction.

4. The University has given high priority to faculty building. While placing emphasis on the training of in-service teachers, it has taken such measures as “Qianbai Talent Project” and successfully attracted 222 qualified teachers from both home and abroad, optimizing the structure of the teaching staff. The teachers of the university, dedicated to their jobs, have fulfilled their duties of imparting knowledge and educating students, and contributed to improve their teaching level.

5. Thanks to the University’s efforts in fostering the academic atmosphere and good environment, the students have been working hard and making progress. In addition, by stressing students’ research training, the University has equipped students with innovative spirit, practical ability and high social adaptability, which resulted in students’ high employment.

6. The University has raised funds through different channels and increased its investment in the capital construction of the campus, in the building and reconstruction of teaching facilities and in the purchase of advanced teaching and research apparatus and equipments. The improved conditions and the environment of the campus have met the needs of teaching and research.

#### IV. Features of the university

To the needs of social development and the characteristics of modern business, the University has actively adapted itself to the changing job market and firmly adhered to its educational ideology that students are trained to be equipped with business orientation and professional capability, with theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and with honesty and originality. In short, the University has developed its features of turning its students to interdisciplinary and application-oriented talents in modern business.

The TQA report is potentially decisive for the Ministry’s final assessment result, which in turn is also seen as an index of the university’s social prestige and therefore affects student recruitment and the university’s application for further funding. For that reason, the assessed university makes efforts to influence the assessing group. The production of the TQA report is thus not a simple process in which the assessing group alone operates. The complex of the process of the TQA discourse practice is unavoidably a process of power struggles and power legitimacy. To examine such a process of discourse production, the present study concerns itself with the discursive strategies applied by both parties in producing the TQA report. Two research questions have been formulated at the beginning, and I attempt to answer them by looking at: (1) the deployment of institutional power by the two parties, (2) the incorporation of promotional genres into the self-assessment discourse by the assessed university, and (3) the entextualisation of topics in the TQA report by the assessing group.



## 4. Discursive strategies

### 4.1 Deploying institutional power

Commissioned by the state Ministry of Education, the assessing group is obviously in a dominant position which entitles them to give their own judgment on the situation of the teaching quality of the assessed university. Its dominant position is explicitly expressed in the TQA report, which begins:

受教育部委托，以++教授为组长的普通高等学校本科教学工作水平评估专家组一行11人，于2006年+月+日至+月+日，对++大学进行了为期6天的实地考察。

Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, the general higher education teaching quality assessing group, which is composed of 11 experts and headed by Prof. ++, made a field inspection in the university from + to +, 2006.

These are the first few lines of the assessing group's TQA report. By stating openly that the group is commissioned by the state Ministry of Education and composed of experts, the report consolidates the collective power of the team both administratively and academically. The fact is that the assessing group did have power and authority to investigate all aspects of the educational process in the university. This group, composed of 11 administrative officials and/or academic experts, spent six days inspecting the teaching quality in the university concerned. They inspected the university's teaching facilities such as the laboratories, the library, the classroom building, the IT centre, the stadium, the students' dormitory, and the dining hall. They went to different schools and administrative offices, and talked with some of the companies which had employed the university's graduates. They also had various talks with the university leaders, representatives of the retired staff, the administrative staff, the academic staff, and the students. They examined the students' theses and examination papers, the score recordings, and other archive files. They observed classes and tested randomly chosen students' English and computer abilities. After all this "field work", they made their assessment of the teaching quality. What is implied by the above quotation suggests that the assessment made by this group is sound, reliable and authoritative. In this sense, power is in the first statement of the report itself.

This assertion of legitimate authority is made strategically at the start of the report. But it is also repeated at the end of the report in the way in which it gives suggestions to the city government. It reads:

建议++市政府进一步加大对++大学的政策支持和经费投入，改善办学条件，优化周边环境，推进++大学“五年前进一大步、十年跨上新台阶，力争2020年跻身全国财经类大学前列”办学目标的实现。

We suggest that the city government make more investment in developing the university so as to improve the teaching condition and the environment, helping the university to realize its goal of becoming one of the key universities in finance and economics in 2020.

Here the word “suggest” (建议 *jianyi*) is a frequently used Chinese speech act verb — it performs an act of suggesting. In fact, this short piece of text *is* a speech act, whose “felicity conditions” are stated in the opening assertion cited earlier. It is known that the city government has the same status as the Ministry of Education and is responsible for the development as well as the administration of the assessed university. The very act of the assessing group’s suggesting to the city government appears to imply that it has at least equal status with the city government, if not higher. However, the use of the verb “suggest” indicates a tentative stance — it is not explicitly a “request”, let alone an “order”. While the assessment team’s status *vis-à-vis* the city government may not be completely explicit, it is worth noting that, with regard to the university, a secondary message may also be given, *viz.* that the assessment team has at least a degree of authority with respect to the city government.

The other party in the TQA practice, the assessed university, seems to be in a dominated position. This is natural, as it is the university that is to be assessed. However, the university attempts to be less so. In the university’s working report, the university’s president is making use of the institutional power he possesses to be less dominated, if not (and actually not) fully dominated. First he makes it explicit that the university is an institution that has the local government’s support:

我代表++大学就学校本科教学工作向各位专家和领导汇报。……(列举了各级领导的关怀之后) 对此，我们常怀感激之情。

On behalf of the university I report our work to the experts and leaders present. ... [after listing the guidance and concerns of leaders at all levels] I’m very gratified for the above listed guidance and concerns from leaders at all levels.

As can be seen, the President at the beginning of his report indicates that his report is made “on behalf of the university”. This implies that the self-assessment of the university’s teaching quality is not his personal opinion or judgment, but the judgment of a group, which also consists of administrative and academic experts. Indeed, he lists the support, guidance and concerns of leaders at all levels, and expresses his gratitude. In this respect, the university is not fully dominated because it has power, power endowed by the institution itself and symbolized in the “guidance and concerns from leaders at all levels”.

The university’s discursive strategy of deploying institutional power in this way has effect on the production of the TQA report. By challenging the assessing

group's powerful position, the university makes the assessing group aware that both parties have power — they are not situated at opposite poles, being either dominant or dominated, but are situated somewhat on a scale. In such a structured power relationship, the assessing group will take the university as an institution that has collective power behind it, and has to accept the legitimacy of power on the university's part. Once the legitimacy is recognized and accepted, the production of the TQA report becomes a process in which both parties rather than the assessing group alone work on the report.

#### 4.2 Incorporating a promotional genre

Three months ahead of the assessing group's on-spot inspection, the university has two similar articles published in the local and national newspapers, publicizing the efforts they made to raise and maintain teaching standard. The article that appeared in the local newspaper *Tianjin Daily* (page 14, 15 August 2006) begins with two questions:

作为一所建校只有20多年的高等院校，如何在激烈的市场竞争中站稳脚跟，实现可持续发展？如何顺应改革开放和现代化建设的需要，培养适应经济发展和社会需求的有用人才？

As a university that has only a little more than 20 years of history, how can it survive the fiercely competitive market, and achieve sustainable development? How can it accommodate to the needs of open-door reform and modernized construction and turn its students to elites who are useful for social and economic development?

Then the article itself provides answers to the two questions:

++大学在办学实践中得出的答案是：必须牢固确立人才培养是学校的根本任务，必须坚持以教学工作为中心，必须把提高教学质量作为学校工作的永恒主题。

++ University has got the answer in its administration: they hold it a must to set student education as the unique task of the university, teaching as the central work of the university, and raising and maintenance of teaching quality as the ever-lasting theme.

Following the question-answer stage, but still in the beginning paragraph, the article puts forward the article's main theme, spelling out the various efforts the university has made to raise and maintain teaching standard.

他们围绕着这一主题，不断深化教学改革，加强教学管理，加大教学投入，努力构建师资队伍，加强学科建设，提高科研水平，促进教学质量稳步提高，探索一条“质量立校、人才强校、特色兴校”的发展之路。

The University has been concentrating on this by deepening the teaching reform, strengthening teaching administration, and increasing the teaching budget. The university has also been attempting at steadily raising teaching quality by enrolling more qualified academic staff, by building strong disciplines and by producing more high-standard research achievements. In fact, the University is exploring a developmental route that has features of being “outstanding with quality, strong with academic staff, and prosperous with uniqueness”.

The main body of the article then reports the university's efforts in seven sections, headed by such subtitles as:

1) 指导思想以提高教学质量为中心 2) 筑巢引凤以优秀师资保证办学水平  
3) 完善制度以监控督导保证教学质量 4) 创新管理优化现代人才培养模式  
5) 狠抓科研提高教育教学整体水平 6) 加大投入不断增强办学实力 7) 形成特色复合型应用人才获好评

1) Guiding policy centered on raising teaching quality; 2) By attracting excellent staff to ensure teaching quality; 3) Perfect system to supervise, guide and ensure teaching quality; 4) Innovative management to fine the educational mode; 5) By emphasizing research to raise the overall teaching quality; 6) By big investment to enhance the teaching capacity; 7) The uniqueness of the university has its multi-capacity graduates welcomed.

Finally in the last paragraph, the article concludes by stating that the university is forming its own distinctive identities and intends to make even greater progress.

经过多年努力，++大学以商学为主的应用学科的综合优势正在凸显，以培养复合型应用人才的理念和办学特色正在形成。面对新的目标和征程，他们将迈出新的步伐，创造新的业绩，迎接更加美好的明天。

After several years of hard work, ++ University is becoming more prominent in terms of its commerce-centered applied disciplines. Its philosophy and uniqueness of turning students into graduates of comprehensive and applied knowledge is being formed. Towards new goals, the university is making new steps. It will make new achievements in the near future.

So far as the organization of this newspaper article is concerned, four stages can be identified, i.e. Question, Answer, Account, and Conclusion. Stages are sequences of speech acts that cluster together (van Leeuwen 1993), and “texts which are doing different jobs in the culture will unfold in different ways, working through different stages or steps” (Eggin & Martin 1997: 236). The four-stage based structure appears to resemble the structure typically found in certain forms of promotion

and advertising. An article advertising medicine, for example, begins with a question: how to cure this or that kind of disease, then provides the answer, which everyone knows is to use that medicine. It then describes the medicine and emphasizes the efficient treatment it claims to have. This article is almost exactly of the same kind. Like any promotional text, it has the question-answer structure: it first raises the question “how can it [the university] survive the fiercely competitive market, and obtain sustainable development?” and “how can it accommodate to the needs of the open-door reform and modernized construction and turn its students to elites who are useful for social and economic development?” These questions are concerns of students, consumers of education, and by raising these questions the article seems to speak on their behalf. However, the consumer’s “voice” is then answered by the newspaper article itself: “it is a necessity to set students education as the unique task of the university, the teaching as the central work of the university, and the maintenance and rise of teaching quality as the ever-lasting topic.” Further, the article claims that the university has been working in this direction and has achieved an outstandingly welcome outcome. Throughout the article are reported the efforts the university has made to raise and maintain a high quality of teaching and the relevant achievements they obtained.

The promotional nature of this newspaper article is also highlighted in its title, which reads:

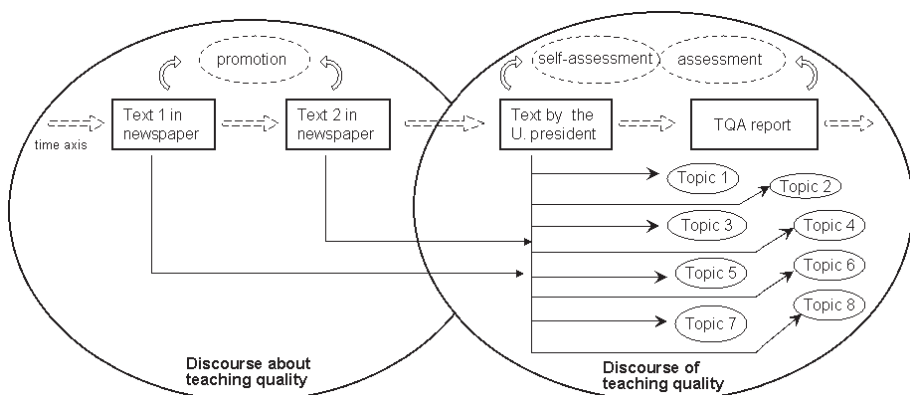
优秀商贸人才的成长沃土 — ++大学提高本科教学质量工作纪实

The Fertile Land for the Growing up of Excellent Business Elites: Report on the ++ University’s Efforts to Raise Teaching Quality

In the title, the university is metaphorically described as fertile land, which implies that this particular university is the right place for students to be trained into business elites. Then what types of elites? The attribute in the clause “excellent” further expresses a claim that the university is the right place where excellent business elites can grow up. The subtitle brings into focus the university’s efforts to raise teaching quality, indicating that the focus of this article is on these efforts. The whole rationale of the title is then built up: the university is a fertile land for excellent business elites to grow up because of the university’s high level of teaching quality.

Facilitated by the newspaper, this promotional article impresses the public with the high teaching quality achieved by the university. No doubt it does good for the university, and it is reasonable to attribute the publication of this article to the power of the university. However, it is not exactly part of official act, but part of the TQA practice. It will be seen that the incorporation of this promotional genre into the TQA practice has become a discursive strategy that works efficiently in the production of TQA report.

The incorporation of the promotional genre into the TQA practice can be better accounted for in terms of genre chain. Genre in its discourse aspect is a way of acting, and the term “genre chain” refers to the fact that different genres are regularly linked together, involving systematic transformations from genre to genre (Fairclough 2003). In the British welfare reform process, for example, the genre chain consists of speech <press releases> — (media reports) — document <press release> — (media reports) — speech <press release> ... . That is, a document such as the Green Paper on welfare reform is likely to be prepared for and followed by speeches on the part of important ministers, but each of these (like the document itself) comes with its own press release ... and each subsequent move in the chain is responsive to media reactions to earlier moves (see Fairclough 2001: 255). This conceptualisation of genre chain applies to the case of TQA practice, where the newspaper articles (NAs), the president’s working report (WR), and the TQA report as different genres appear one after another: NAs → WR → TQA report, transforming eventually from the NAs through the WR to the TQA report. Along a time axis (see in Figure 1 the dotted line arrows), the text of promotional genre appears first, then the self-assessment genre, and then the genre of TQA report. The promotional genre (the dotted oval in the left hand big oval) is eventually transformed, recontextualized, and appropriated into the genres of the university’s self-assessment and the assessment of the assessing group (the two dotted ovals in the right hand big oval). That is, the way of selling and boasting is incorporated into the modest but assured way of self-assessment, which in turn is recontextualized in the way in which the final and decisive TQA report is made. This transformation of genre from one form to another is what Fairclough (2003) calls “genre chain”, which contributes to “facilitating the exercise of power” (Fairclough 2003: 31), and applies to both parties involved in the TQA practice.



**Figure 1.** Interrelationship between discourses in the TQA practice (based on Reisigl & Wodak 2001: 39)

### 4.3 Entextualising assessed topics

Entextualisation refers to the process by means of which discourses are successively or simultaneously decontextualised and metadiscursively recontextualized, so that they become a new discourse associated to a new context and accompanied by a particular metadiscourse which provides a sort of “preferred reading” for the discourse (Blommaert 2005: 47). The concept of entextualisation is useful for examining the production of the TQA report. In the TQA practice, two discourses are involved: the discourse *about* teaching quality (illustrated in Figure 1 as the left hand big oval), and the discourse *of* teaching quality (the right hand big oval in Figure 1). The former includes two texts (illustrated as the two square boxes in the left hand big oval), and the latter two texts (illustrated as the two square boxes in the right hand big oval). The TQA report assesses the teaching quality of the university in terms of eight topics, which, surprisingly, are decontextualised from the “discourse about teaching quality” (specifically from the text of local newspaper article examined above) and then recontextualised into the “discourse of teaching quality” (into the text of the university’s working report and the assessing group’s TQA report as well). This new discourse *of* teaching quality has become a “text” in that it is lifted out of its newspaper setting and transmitted together with a new context of assessment that adds new meanings to the topics and statements made about the topics.

Let me first identify the topics each discourse addresses before further discussion. With reference to “the discourse about teaching quality”, the topics concerned can be summarized from the newspaper article examined above (see 4.1). Each subtitle of the article addresses a topic and the last (subtitle 7) involves two. In sum, the eight topics are:

- Topic 1: guiding policy
- Topic 2: academic staff
- Topic 3: the surveillance system
- Topic 4: management of teaching
- Topic 5: the emphasis on research
- Topic 6: investment
- Topic 7: uniqueness of the university
- Topic 8: the university’s graduates

With reference to “the discourse of teaching quality”, I will summarise the topics in each text. The topics of the university’s working report (WR), summarised from its subtitles (see Table 1), are as follows (illustrated in Figure 1 as the small ovals in the right hand big oval):

- Topic 1: guiding policy (subtitle II)  
 Topic 2: academic staff (III-c)  
 Topic 3: the surveillance system(III-b-v)  
 Topic 4: teaching administration (III-b-c)  
 Topic 5: the emphasis on research (III-b-iii)  
 Topic 6: investment  
 Topic 7: uniqueness of the university (IV)  
 Topic 8: the university's graduates.

The bracketed Roman numerals and English letters following the topics are the corresponding subtitles in WR. Topic 6 (investment) and Topic 8 (graduates) are not found directly related to a subtitle, but they are addressed in some parts of the WR. For example, in the part concerning teaching (III-a, see below), it is reported that the university has put teaching in an important position, and investment is enlarged for raising teaching facilities. Parts of the course reform (III-b-ii, iv), of the teaching learning style (III-e), and of the students education (IV) all contribute to the “product” of the university, which is of course the graduates.

**Table 1.** Section subtitles of the University's working report (self assessment)

Chinese original version	English translation
一、学校发展历程	I. The history of the university
二、办学指导思想	II. The guiding policy for the university
三、评建工作成效显著	III. The achievements gained in the TQA practice
1、教学工作的中心地位更加牢固	a. Teaching: the central work of the university
2、教学改革不断深化	b. Teaching reform is getting deepening
(1) 强化培养目标要求, 提高专业建设水平	i. emphasizing the training goal to raise the level of major construction
(2) 深化课程体系与教学内容的改革, 全面加强课程建设	ii. strengthening course construction by deepening the reform of course system and teaching contents
(3) 加强教学研究, 促进教学改革	iii. strengthening teaching research to stimulate teaching reform
(4) 突出实践要求, 强化能力培养	iv. emphasizing practice and the students' practical competence
(5) 加强教学管理, 强化质量监控	v. strengthening teaching administration and the quality control system
3、师资队伍发生了显著变化	c. Teaching staff outstandingly improving
4、育人环境进一步优化	d. Teaching environment much better
5、进一步促进了教风、学风建设	e. Teaching and learning style further improved
四、人才培养和办学特色	IV. Students education and the features of the university
五、未来展望	V. Prospects for the future



In addition to the university's working report (WR), the TQA report is also within "the discourse of teaching quality" (see Figure 1). The topics of the TQA report can be summarised from the three parts of the report (see Text 1). Eight topics are then identified (see in Figure 1 the small ovals in the right hand big oval):

Topic 1: university's attitude toward the TQA practice

Topic 2: guiding policy, the teaching and the university's type

Topic 3: specialties, the taught courses and the practice modules

Topic 4: teaching administrative regulations and the administrative staff

Topic 5: teaching staff

Topic 6: students' learning style, the extra-curriculum activities

Topic 7: facilities and the environment

Topic 8: features of the university

It can be seen that the eight topics in the TQA report are closely related to those of the newspaper articles and the university's working report (WR) in terms of decontextualisation and recontextualisation. Let us take a closer look at the WR and the TQA report. Topic 2 of the TQA report (guiding policy) is decontextualised from the university's WR subtitled II; Topic 3 (the specialties, taught courses and the practice modules) is decontextualised from the WR's subtitles ii and iv; Topic 4 (the teaching administrative regulations and the administrative staff) from the WR's subtitle v; Topic 5 (the teaching staff) from the WR's subtitle c; Topic 6 (the students' learning style) from the WR's subtitle e; Topic 7 (the facilities and the environment) from the WR subtitle d; and Topic 8 (the features of the university) from the WR subtitle IV. These topics, while decontextualised from the university's working report and recontextualised in the TQA report, carry a "metadiscursive complex" that adds a "preferred reading" (Blommaert 2005: 47) to these topics.

Let me take Topic 5 (the teaching staff) for a detailed analysis of this process of entextualisation. The text addressing this topic in the newspaper article reads:

多年来，++大学.....着力打造一支结构合理、素质优良的高水平师资队伍。.....经过多年努力，该校教师队伍在学历结构、年龄结构、学缘结构、知识结构、职称结构等方面得到明显改善。

For many years, the university [...] has attempted to build up a team of teachers of high standard, which features a reasonable structure and excellent quality. [...] Now the teaching staff is significantly improving in terms of structure in, among others, education, age, graduation, knowledge, and scholarship.

What is stated in this text is the process in which the university attempts to build up a team of teachers of high quality, and the statement made is that its teaching staff is improving in many aspects. When this topic is decontextualised from this "discourse *about* teaching quality" and recontextualised into the "discourse *of*

teaching quality”, the building-up process and the improvement in teaching staff are spelled out in the subtitle (III-c) of the university’s working report as “Teaching staff outstandingly improving”, and further turned to a conclusion in the university’s working report:

经过学校不懈努力，师资队伍数量增加、质量提高、结构优化、朝气蓬勃、发展趋势好。

After constant hard work, the number of teachers in the university increases, the quality is raised, and the structure is better. The teaching staff is highly spirited and the university enjoys a good developing tendency.

This assertive conclusion is further decontextualised from the context of “self assessment” of the working report and recontextualised into the context of authoritative assessment of TQA report. It is this context, the context of authoritative assessment, that adds new meanings to the statement about teaching staff improvement in TQA report, a meaning of decision and authority at least. The TQA report reads:

学院高度重视师资队伍建设，有规划、有措施，实施了“千百人才工程”，从国内外引进高水平教师222名，并重视对在职教师的培养，师资队伍结构趋于合理，且发展趋势好。广大教师教书育人，爱岗敬业，教学水平不断提高。

The university has given high priority to faculty construction. While placing emphasis on the training of in-service teachers, it has taken such measures as “Qianbai Talent Project” and successfully attracted 222 qualified teachers from both home and abroad, optimizing the structure of the teaching staff. The teachers of the university, dedicated to their jobs, have fulfilled their duties of imparting knowledge and educating students, and contributed to improving their teaching level.

This restatement concerning the topic of “teaching staff” in the TQA report may be superficially seen as a repetition of the topic stated in the newspaper article and the university’s working report. For example, “the number of teachers is increasing” in the university’s working report is restated as “222 qualified teachers have been recruited” in the TQA report. However, seen from the perspective of entextualisation, the restatement serves as a discursive strategy for producing the TQA report. What really matters here is the new context created in the process of entextualisation. The same statement made about the same topic has different meanings in different contexts because context as “subjective construct” contribute to the construction of meaning (van Dijk 2008). In this case of TQA report production, the similar statement about the topic of teaching carries fundamentally different weight. By entextualising the topics the assessing group turns the university’s self assessment to its authoritative assessment.

## 5. Conclusion

The task of this paper was to examine the discursive strategies, and I investigated three of them manipulated in producing the TQA report: deploying institutional power, incorporating the promotional genre, and entextualising topics and texts. As social agents are structured in social practice, these strategies were investigated in connection with their power and influence over each other in the TQA practice. By way of conclusion, it might be useful to note that this study gives priority to investigating the process of discourse *production*, and therefore may not be the whole story from the perspective of CDA. However, the discussion of the genre chain, the entextualisation, and the way power works through discourse will, it is hoped, contribute to the development of the CDA analytical framework, and practically to the investigation of ways in which discourse is produced in the complex of social practice.

## Note

1. This version is made with the help of my colleague Gao Cun. The Chinese original text is not provided here for limited space, but is available from the author.

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