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## Promoting a city's core values using evaluative language

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The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government launched the Brand Hong Kong campaign in 2001 to promote Hong Kong as an Asia's world city. Among the various initiatives of the campaign is the promotion of the core values of the city through both the text and images on the Brand Hong Kong website. The present study analyzes specifically the textual components of the website by drawing upon appraisal theory as the analytical framework. The findings indicate that evaluative language has a substantial presence and a key role to play in the government's promotional effort. The types and functions of the evaluative resources used and the implications for the discipline of applied linguistics are discussed.

**Keywords:** appraisal analysis, promotional discourse, city branding, discourse analysis, applied linguistics

香港特別行政區政府於二零零一年推出香港品牌運動以推廣香港成為亞洲國際都會。透過香港品牌網頁中的文字和圖像來推廣香港的核心價值，是這個運動的其中一個項目。本論文主要分析了香港品牌網頁中的文字，採用了評價理論作為分析架構。研究結果顯示評價語言在政府的宣傳工作中扮演了一個重要的角色。同時，本論文亦探討了評價語言的種類和功用，以及其在應用語言學中的含義。

**關鍵詞:** 評價理論，宣傳話語，城市品牌建設，話語分析，應用語言學

## Introduction

Promotional discourse has attracted considerable research interest in the past few decades (e.g. Fairclough 1993; Bhatia 1997, 2004; Erjavec 2004; Ding 2007). This could partly be attributed to the characterization of the contemporary culture as promotional or consumer culture (Wernick 1991; Featherstone, 1991) and the “colonization of discourse by promotion” (Fairclough 1993: 142). Upon such characterization and colonization, discourse has also been regarded as a tool for selling goods, services, people or ideas (Wernick 1991). Previous research in promotional discourse has focused on various aspects including, for example, the move structures of both the promotional

genre like sales letters and the informative-promotional hybrid genre like philanthropic letters and book blurbs (e.g. Bhatia 2004, 2005), the grammar used (mood, modality, and transitivity) in constructing genres of public discourse like university brochures and leaflets (Fairclough 1993), and the discourse semantics – the use of evaluative language (Martin and White 2005) – of the promotional genres commonly used in the tourism industry like tourist brochures (Mocini 2013), tourist mobile apps (Suen and Fung

2014), and homepages of luxury hotels (Cheng and Suen 2014). By working along this last (and probably one of the latest) line of research in promotional discourse, the present study aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistics of promotional discourse by specifically exploring the use of evaluative language in achieving promotional effect. To explore, and demonstrate, how evaluative language can be exploited to achieve promotional effect, the present study will analyze a corpus of public discourse authored by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (the Government thereafter).

The present paper aims to, first, identify the discursive resources employed by the Government in promoting these five core values of the city in an attempt to establish and maintain its status as a world class city; and second, with the promotional discursive resources identified, to contribute to the broad domain of English for specific purposes in relation to the teaching and learning of constructing promotional discourse. The study will answer the three research questions:

1. Which categories of evaluative language does the Government use in its effort to promote each of the five core values of Hong Kong?
2. How do the identified categories of evaluative language function to promote the city's core values?
3. How often does the Government use the various categories of evaluative language in its promotional effort?

The next section describes the research context, followed by one which reviews relevant literature in two main areas, namely city branding and promotional discourse. The theoretical and analytical framework drawn upon in the study, the appraisal theory (Martin and White 2005), will then be introduced. The Methodology section provides details concerning the data analyzed – the public discourse authored by the Government, and the procedures followed in analyzing the data mainly qualitatively with NVivo 10 (QSR International, Brisbane). The Findings and Discussion section presents and interprets the findings in two parts – qualitative and quantitative. Implications for the teaching of English for specific purposes courses are then discussed before concluding the paper with a summary of the key findings, a discussion of the limitations of the study and a reiteration of the significance in the Conclusion.

## Research context

This Section will specifically focus on the use of evaluative language by the Government in its attempt to promote the core values of Hong Kong. The core values of the city include “free, excellence, enterprising, innovative, and quality living” (Brand Hong Kong 2013). Promoting the core values is one of the initiatives of the Brand Hong Kong campaign launched in 2001 by the Government. The campaign aims to brand the city as Asia’s world city which will be positioned as follows:

A free and dynamic society where creativity and entrepreneurship converge. Strategically located in the heart of Asia, it is a cosmopolitan city offering global connectivity, security and rich diversity, and is home to a unique network of people who celebrate excellence and quality living (Brand Hong Kong 2013).

With such positioning, Hong Kong is presented as a powerful world city with the best location and business opportunities for multinational corporations in Asia. It is also a cultural hub with diversity. Through the campaign in general and the promotion of the core values in particular, the Government will be able to show both local and international communities its determination and ability to sustain and further develop the city’s prosperity and stability. The five core values have been regarded as, among others, the main reasons for the city’s success in aspects such as finance, education, healthcare, and social services, and have been promoted through discursive means. One such means is the Year Book, an annual government publication reporting the achievement and development of the city to the local and international communities (Flowerdew 2004). Apart from such publication, we believe that the Government is also attempting to promote the core values through other discursive channels. For example, the brochures, leaflets, and websites of the various government bureaus and departments such as the Education Bureau and Home Affairs Bureau, as well as related statutory bodies such as the Hong Kong Tourism Board. Smart phone apps is another channel, multimodal in nature, currently exploited by the Government for the purpose of promoting the city’s core values and thus its status as an Asia world city. Hong Kong is chosen as the city for investigation in the present study for the key role it plays in global economy and its interesting political situation. Economically, it has been regarded as one of the leading international financial centers, one of the four little dragons in Asia, and one of the main windows through which business transactions between China and international enterprises are carried out. Politically, its sovereignty was handed over from Britain back to China in 1997 and has since practiced the hitherto unique ‘one country, two systems’ constitutional principle.

## Literature review

This section reviews literature in two main areas – city branding and promotional discourse.

## City branding

The concept of world cities can be traced back to Hall (1966), Friedmann and Wolff (1982) and Sassen (2001). Hall (1966) defined world cities as (a) the centers of political power, (b) national centers of trade with great ports and international airports, (c) centers of leading banking and financial services, (d) congregation of professional talents with great hospitals, medical quarters, national courts of justice, and universities, and (e) centers for research, entertainment and culture. Hall's (1966) definition shows the multiple functions of world cities. Friedmann and Wolff (1982) further developed the definition to reflect the global significance of world cities. They regarded world cities as "the control centre of global economy" (Friedmann and Wolff 1982: 61). World cities should be interconnected by decision-making and finance, and their production and market expansion should have a global system of control (Friedmann and Wolff 1982). According to Sassen (2001), world cities are places for specialized service production required by organizations which operate factories, offices and outlets in a spatially dispersed network.

Research on the formation of world cities has been popular in social science since the mid-1990s. The development of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles was examined from a historical perspective (Abu-Lughod 1999) and that of London from an architectural perspective (Zukin 1992). While the discussion of world city mainly revolves around large cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and London, some key Asian cities/countries have also been made the focus in some studies, for example, Singapore (Teo 2004), Seoul and Taipei (Young 2012), Beijing (Chen 2012), and Hong Kong (Flowerdew 2004; Mak 2010; Shen 2010). Teo (2004) found that the Singaporean Government, by employing pronouns and politeness strategically in constructing the discourse of the slogans used in the *Clean and Green Week* campaign, attempted to create for Singapore an image of a "clean, safe and pleasant" city-state (Teo 2004: 504). In a more recent study of Asian cities, Young (2012) examined city branding of Seoul and Taipei. To improve city competitiveness, Seoul and Taipei developed urban design and events for tourism to establish the city's image and at the same time, to serve citizens and visitors. Echoing Young (2012), Chen (2012) investigated Beijing's effort in branding through mega-events like the Olympics from a public relations perspective. The findings revealed that people tended to associate positive event images with the Chinese government, and world mega-events could brand both the host country's image overseas and the government's image at home.

Despite the importance of Hong Kong's competitive identity on the international platform, comparatively little research in the area of branding Hong Kong as a world city has been undertaken. Mak (2010) explored the strategies of Brand Hong Kong for revitalizing the Hong Kong economy by reviewing literature and government discourse including the Commission on Strategic Development report, policy speech by the Chief Executive in 1998, and Brand Hong Kong website (Mak 2010). The discussion showed that Brand Hong Kong was

similar to the place branding strategies adopted by other cities with “dominant discourses of globalization and city competitiveness”, and that the branding program highlighted Hong Kong with “adaptability and entrepreneurship” which prevented Hong Kong from becoming a “copycat” in city branding (Mak 2010: 21). Mak (2010) identified the uniqueness of Brand Hong Kong through a desk-based research, yet no textual analysis of the government documents had been conducted to reinforce her claims. Shen (2010) examined Hong Kong’s brand development from a social science perspective. The study reviewed the change and identified the problems of the Asia’s World City discourse promoted by the government from 1997 to 2007. The review of the discourse of the Brand Hong Kong and speeches made by the city’s Chief Executives illustrated that the Brand Hong Kong campaign had limited achievements. Flowerdew (2004) investigated how Hong Kong discursively constructed itself as a world-class city by applying theories of critical discourse analysis, genre analysis and branding. A public consultation booklet, the Hong Kong 2000 yearbook and the ‘Gateways and Portals’ promotional video were analyzed to examine how the Hong Kong government controlled consultation process. Flowerdew’s (2004) study combined social theory with textual analysis and demonstrated the importance of language in the consultation process.

## Promotional discourse

The major promotional discourse literature has been focusing on the promotionalization of informational genres, namely academic introductions, job applications, magazine advertorials, press releases and fundraising letters (Bhatia 1997, 2002, 2004, 2005; Ding 2007; Erjavec 2004; Maat 2007). Some recent studies on the prevalent genres in the tourism industry examined aspects other than the generic move structure. They explored the use of evaluative language in such promotional discourse. Mocini (2013) examined traditional, paper-based tourist brochures promoting Italy and found that ‘affect’<sup>1</sup> and ‘appreciation’ (please see the next section for a discussion of these two and other types of evaluative language) were the main appraisal features in tourist brochures for expressing emotions and aesthetic assessments. ‘Graduation’ resources were also used to intensify the persuasive messages. It was argued that the use of evaluative language could function to bridge the expectations of the tourists and the offer made by the service provider, and “mould” compliant readers with repeated positive evaluations (Mocini 2013: 169). A recent study analyzed two of the most popular tourist mobile apps, *Hong Kong 720°* and *Discover Hong Kong AR* (Suen and Fung 2014). It examined the evaluative language of tourist apps by drawing upon Martin and White’s (2005) appraisal theory as the analytical framework. The findings show that positive ‘appreciation’ of the aesthetics of the city’s attractions were made frequently. Evaluative phrases like *excellent views*, *great beaches* and *one of the beautiful beaches in Hong Kong* were used to create a favorable destination image for Hong Kong. The language of these two tourist

mobile apps was found to be ‘monoglossic’, that is, the texts were mere assertion without overtly referring to other voices and alternative positions. The reliance on positive ‘appreciation’ for promotion and persuasion purposes was also observed in a study analyzing another promotional genre – the homepages of luxury hotels in Hong Kong (Cheng and Suen 2014). Phrases containing the subcategory *reaction* were most common in the evaluation of the quality of the hotel products and services, for example, *opulent guest rooms*, *highspeed broadband internet access*, and *Grand Rooms are beautifully presented*. The luxury hotels also exploited superlatives to position themselves as top hotels in the industry.

From the preceding discussion of the literature on city branding and promotional discourse, we can see that the use of evaluative language in the promotion of the tourism industry of a country or a city (Mocini, 2013; Suen and Fung 2014) and luxury hotels (Cheng and Suen 2014) has been investigated, and that textual analysis of the discourse the Government used in constructing the image of world-class city for Hong Kong has been undertaken (Flowerdew 2004). The present study attempts to link the use of evaluative language to the branding of Hong Kong as Asia’s world city by investigating how the linguistic resource is used in the Government’s effort to promote the city’s core values.

## Theoretical and analytical framework

### Appraisal: A brief overview

While a comprehensive discussion of the appraisal theory will certainly go beyond the scope of the present paper, the authors will give a brief overview of the framework in this section (readers may refer to Martin and White’s (2005) book on appraisal theory for a detailed account and discussion of the language of evaluation). The language of evaluation can be divided into “three interacting domains”, namely “Attitude”, “Engagement”, and “Graduation” (Martin and White 2005: 35). The scope of evaluation of the domains and examples of the lexicogrammatical resources realizing these domains will be presented below.

#### *Attitude*

The *Attitude* domain is concerned with feelings and can be regionalized as *Affect* which registers an individual’s emotional reactions, *Judgment* which deals with behavior that we admire or criticize, praise or condemn, and *Appreciation* which involves the evaluation of phenomena and things. *Affect* covers the feelings pertaining to happiness/unhappiness, security/insecurity, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction. It can be lexicogrammatically realized with, for example, adjectives (e.g. cheerful/miserable, confident/anxious, impressed/fed up with), adverbs (e.g. miserably, confidently, angrily), verbs (e.g. like, commit), and

nominals (e.g. love/hatred, confidence/anxiety). *Judgment* concerns people's attitudes towards behavior and "reworks feelings in the realm of proposals about behavior – how we should behave or not" (Martin and White 2005: 45). It covers feelings towards behavior that we admire and criticize – *normality*, *capability*, *tenacity*, and *behavior* that we praise and condemn – *veracity*, and *propriety*. *Normality*, *capability*, *tenacity*, *veracity* and *propriety* concerns respectively how special, capable, dependable, honest, and ethical an individual is. Lexicogrammatically they can be realized as adjectives (e.g. familiar/unfamiliar, experienced/helpless, careful/hasty, candid/manipulative, fair/unfair) and modal verbs. *Appreciation*, according to Martin and White (2005: 45), "reworks feelings as propositions about the value of things – what they are worth or not". It covers feelings towards phenomena or things in terms of *Reaction* (if and how much we like them), *Composition* (how well they are balanced, how clearly they are presented), and *Valuation* (how important, timely, etc. they are). Lexicogrammatically, *Appreciation* is typically realized as adjectives.

### *Engagement*

The second interactive domain *Engagement* concerns the way writer or speaker (writer thereafter) engages and involves reader or hearer (reader thereafter). The writer can achieve engagement and involvement with lexicogrammatical resources that either invite the reader to put forward an alternative value position by expanding the dialogic space or discourage the reader to do so by constraining the space. The writer can open up the dialogic space with *Entertain* or *Attribute*. *Entertain* expresses the writer's intention to hedge and can be lexicogrammatically realized with expressions of modality (e.g. may, can, should; probably, perhaps; it's likely that), circumstances (e.g. In my view /opinion), mental verbs and projections (e.g. I think that, I'm convinced that), and evidence/appearance-based postulations (e.g. apparently). *Attribute* expresses the writer's intention to acknowledge or distance themselves from the alternative value positions by sourcing them to external bodies (c.f. *Entertain* which conveys the writer's own position) and can be realized with reporting verbs (e.g. said, claimed), mental process verbs (e.g. believe, suspect), and adverbial adjuncts (e.g. according to).

Instead of opening up the dialogic space and invite alternative value positions, the writer can choose to "challenge, fend off or restrict the scope of such" (Martin and White 2005: 102) by using *Disclaim* or *Proclaim*. *Disclaim* functions to *Deny* or *Counter* alternative positions. With *Deny*, the writer first acknowledges the alternative position by introducing it, and then rejects it. Lexicogrammatically *Deny* can be expressed with expressions conveying the meaning of no (e.g. no, not, nothing). With *Counter*, the writer presents the current position as "replacing or supplanting, and thereby 'countering', a proposition which would have been expected in its place" (Martin and White 2005: 120). Lexicogrammatical resources realizing *Counter* include conjunctions and

connectives (e.g. although, yet), comment adjuncts/adverbials (e.g. surprisingly, unexpectedly), and adjuncts (e.g. even, still). *Proclaim* functions to emphasize the commonality between the writer's and the reader's positions with *Concur*, *Endorse*, and *Pronounce*. *Concur* functions to indicate the writer's agreeing with and having the same knowledge as the reader with rhetorical questions having obvious answers and expressions (e.g. of course, admittedly, not surprisingly). *Endorse* functions to construe the alternative positions as "correct, valid, undeniable or otherwise maximally warrantable" (Martin and White 2005: 126) with verbs (e.g. find, point out, demonstrate). *Pronounce* functions to emphasize or intervene/interpolate explicitly (e.g. You must agree that ... I contend ...).

### *Graduation*

*Graduation* concerns the way the writer strengthens or weakens their attitudinal evaluation. It can be achieved by modifying the *Force* or *Focus* of such evaluation. The writer can change the degree of intensity or amount of the evaluation with *Force*. To change the intensity, the writer can: (1) use adverbs or adverbial groups to modify adjective, adverbs, verbs and modalities (e.g. slightly, somewhat, a bit, extremely, greatly, thoroughly); (2) choose adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and modality of various strength (e.g. warm ↔ hot ↔ scalding; competently ↔ skillfully ↔ brilliantly; inch up ↔ rise ↔ shoot up; possible ↔ probably ↔ certain); and (3) repeat the same word or present a list of semantically close words. To change the amount, the writer can resort to imprecise reckonings of number, mass or presence, and extent in time or space (e.g. a little, much; large, heavy, bright; distant, ancient, long-lasting, wide-spread). The writer can also choose to change the prototypicality of the attitudinal evaluation with evaluative resources of the *Focus* category (e.g. real, true, sort of, kind of).

## Methodology

### The data

The main text appearing in the Brand Hong Kong website hosted by the HKSAR Government forms the data of the present study.<sup>2</sup> The main text includes the following e-documents:

1. Publications (<http://www.brandhk.gov.hk/en/#/en/facts/publications/thisishongkong.html>) – Brand booklet; Brand leaflet
2. Fact sheets (<http://www.brandhk.gov.hk/en/#/en/facts/factsheets/index.html>) – Asia's World City at a Glance; Best Business City; Gateway to China; Superb Connectivity; Creative City; Cosmopolitan Education; A Free and Open Society; Green Hong Kong; Advanced Healthcare; Innovation and Technology, Testing and Certification; Intellectual Property Trading Hub; Safe City; Top Tourist Destination; Brand Hong Kong

3. The number of words making up the data is 26,991 (with 7,800 from Brand booklet and Brand leaflet, and 19,191 from fact sheets).

## The procedure

NVivo 10 was used in analyzing the discourse of the e-documents first and mainly, qualitatively and second quantitatively. The same discourse was coded by both authors using the following set of nodes (with parent nodes and their component nodes) which correspond to the different regions, categories and sub-categories of evaluative language:

### Attitude (parent node)

- Affect-Security
- Judgment-Normality
- Judgment-Capability
- Judgment-Tenacity
- Judgment-Veracity
- Judgment-Propriety
- Appreciation-Reaction
- Appreciation-Composition
- Appreciation-Valuation

### Engagement (parent node)

- Engagement-Entertain
- Engagement-Attribute
- Engagement-Deny
- Engagement-Counter
- Engagement-Pronounce

### Graduation (parent node)

- Graduation-Force-Intensity
- Graduation-Force-Amount
- Graduation-Focus

The identification of the evaluative items was done in the following ways (Ho 2014):

1. the writer's *Attitude* was revealed by locating expressions concerning emotional responses, judgment of others' behavior, and judgment of the value of objects and phenomena;
2. the writers' ways of engaging the readers were revealed by locating the expressions which function to concur with the readers, emphasize the writers' value position, indicate the writers' willingness to accept alternative opinions, and suggest the writers' intention to attribute the value being put forth to an external source;
3. the writers' ways of either strengthening or weakening their feeling, and judgment of their own or others' behavior or value of objects and phenomena were revealed by locating expressions which function to upscale or down-scale the *Force* or *Focus* of the degree of evaluation.

The identified evaluative items were coded accordingly as the two examples below show (the evaluative items are numbered and bolded):

(1)

The **①**free [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*] movement of goods and capital has been central to Hong Kong's success as an international financial centre. There are **②** no [*Engagement-Deny*] restrictions on the amount of money allowed into or out of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong dollar is **③** freely convertible [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*]. Gold, silver and securities are **④** traded freely without any foreign ownership restrictions [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*].

The three attitudinal evaluations (**①**, **②** & **④**) are all categorized as being *Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation* as they all suggest the importance of the phenomena being evaluated to Hong Kong as an international financial centre without any restrictions on capital flow and movement. The *no* (**②**) serves to deny the possible alternative position that there are restrictions on the amount of money allowed into or out of the city.

(2)

Hong Kong has a **①** highly [*Graduation-Force-Intensity*] **②** efficient [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*] transport network and **③** state-of-the-art [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*] telecommunications facilities.

Example 2 shows that while the HKSAR Government also resorts to *Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation* in evaluating the city's transport network and telecommunications facilities (**②** & **③**), it also strengthens the first attitudinal evaluation with the adjective *highly* (**①**), serving to upscale the intensity of the evaluation.

The total number of instances of use of each type of evaluative language was shown against the corresponding node upon completion of the coding (the numbers are shown in Table 1). The identified evaluative items were then examined to determine if they were related to the five core values of the city as laid down by the HKSAR Government:

Free – Hong Kong is an open society, where economic and social freedoms are cherished.

Excellence – Quality, professionalism and progress are valued highly in Hong Kong, enabling world-class achievements in many fields.

Enterprising – Efficient, industrious and resilient, Hong Kong people are renowned for their “*can-do*” spirit, entrepreneurial skills and an ability to create opportunities.

Innovative – Hong Kong people value creativity and originality, and are forward-looking and adaptable. They seek to achieve an education and social environment conducive to creativity.

Table 1 Frequency of use of evaluative language in the promotion of core values

Region (A)	Category (B)	Sub-category (C)	Core values					Total (I)
			Free (D)	Excellence (E)	Enterprising (F)	Innovative (G)	Quality Living (H)	
Attitude	Affect	Security					1	1 0.4%
		Normality	2	4		2		
	Judgment	Capability	1	3				
		Tenacity			1	1	2	
		Propriety				3	3	6
		Sub-total (Judgment)	3	7	1	6	6	22 8.4
	Appreciation	Reaction	5	12	3	8	18	
		Composition	5	9	1	3	7	
		Valuation	11	24	6	19	17	
		Sub-total (Appreciation)	21	45	10	30	42	148 56.5
Engage-ment	Sub-total (Attitude)		24	52	11	36	48	171 65.3%
	Attribute			1				1 0.4%
		Deny	2					2 0.8%
	Disclaim							
		Counter					1	1 0.4%
	Proclaim							
		Pronounce					2	2 0.8%
	Sub-total (Engagement)		2	1			3	6 2.4

Table 1 Continued

Region (A)	Category (B)	Sub-category (C)	Core values					Total (I)
			Free (D)	Excellence (E)	Enterprising (F)	Innovative (G)	Quality Living (H)	
Graduation	Force	Intensity	3	12	6	8	14	43 16.4%
		Amount	1	18	1	5	17	42 16%
	Sub-total (Graduation)		4	30	7	13	31	85 32.4
	Total (Evaluative language)		30 11.4%	84 32%	18 6.8%	49 18.6%	82 31.2%	262 100%



Quality Living – Hong Kong people strive for quality of life that encompasses a green living environment, work-life balance, and a lifestyle that appreciates arts and culture, and treasures Hong Kong's nature and heritage.

Example 3 below illustrates the criterion for the inclusion and exclusion of the identified evaluative items.

(3)

Hong Kong's magnificent cityscape is world famous but visitors are often surprised to learn that ① most of the territory is green [*Attitude-Appreciation-Reaction*]. ② In fact [*Engagement-Pronounce*], ③ about three quarters of Hong Kong is countryside [*Attitude-Appreciation-Reaction*], with urban areas making up less than 25 per cent.

In Example 3, the first four evaluative items (realized as *magnificent*, *world famous*, *but*, and *surprised*) were not about feelings towards people or phenomena related to the five core values of the city. They only expressed (1) the feelings of either the writer towards the cityscape with *magnificent* and *world famous*, or the visitors with an affective item *surprised*; and (2) the writer's intention to *Counter* (with *but*) the proposition that visitors are not surprised to learn the green environment of Hong Kong. The other three evaluative items, ① to ③, are related to the core value Quality Living: evaluative items ① and ③, both are *Attitude-Appreciation-Reaction*, comment positively the environment – a large proportion of the city's land is green; evaluative item ② functions to emphasize (and therefore it is an instance of *Pronounce*) that what the writer is going to say is true.

An inter-rater reliability expressed as a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.66 was obtained. To ensure the reliability of the results, only those evaluative items that yielded the same analytical result were examined further in the study.

## Findings and discussion

This section is in two parts: qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative part will be presented in the form of extracts taken from the corpus, and the quantitative part that follows will be presented with the aid of Table 1.

### Qualitative

Findings will be presented with respect to the five core values being promoted by the HKSAR Government in the Brand Hong Kong website.

#### *Core value 1: free*

To promote this core value, the HKSAR Government evaluates behavior and phenomena observed in activities of a wide spectrum from media to business

to personal communication. Examples 4 and 5 illustrate the evaluation of behavior and phenomena.

(4)

One of the ① most [*Graduation-Force-Intensity*] ② vital [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*] factors in Hong Kong's success has been a ③ fast [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*], ④ free and unregulated [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation/Graduation-Force-Intensity*] flow of information coupled with a ⑤ robust [*Attitude-Appreciation-Composition*] and ⑥ vibrant [*Attitude-Appreciation-Reaction*] media. ... There are ⑦ over [*Graduation-Force-Intensity*] 700 periodicals, including Chinese, English, bilingual and other languages.

A total of seven evaluative items are used to promote the core value Free in the above example. The freedom of information flow enjoyed and valued by the city is evaluated positively on four occasions (items ① to ④): It is first of all evaluated as a valuable element with *vital* (item ②), whose strength is intensified by *most* (item ①); its importance is then demonstrated with *fast* (item ③) and *free and unregulated* (item ④), with the latter also functioning to strengthen the evaluation by repetition – using two semantically close adjectives in this case – *free* and *unregulated*. The phenomenon of information free flow is illustrated and thus reassured, though indirectly, with a positive evaluation of the city's media as in *robust* (item ⑤) and *vibrant* (item ⑥) – the absence of which would not have made the free flow of information as efficient as it is. Finally, some hard evidence in the form of an imprecise figure *over 700 periodicals ...* (item ⑦) is presented to substantiate the preceding evaluation – the word “over” in combination with the figure 700 is presented but not the exact figure (which could just be right above 700) in order to achieve magnification of the figure by a certain degree.

Example 5 below shows how *Engagement-Disclaim-Deny* is used in the description of the control of Internet use in Hong Kong.

(5)

Internet content is not [*Engagement-Deny*] censored or edited by government agencies.

Despite its identity as a city of China after the handover of its sovereignty from Britain in Year 1997, Hong Kong is considerably different from other cities (even major ones like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen) in terms of its allowance for free Internet use. People of Hong Kong can use Internet for different purposes as long as such Internet activities and uses are law-abiding. To fend off the possible alternative voice – that as in other parts of China, internet use in the city is censored or edited by government agencies, the HKSAR Government used an ‘*Engagement-Disclaim-Deny*’ token “not”. The use of such Deny also set up a contrast between mainland China and Hong Kong thereby emphasizing the high degree of freedom in using the Internet in the city.

### Core value 2: excellence

The HKSAR Government was promoting the city's second core value, Excellence, in Example 6 through a total of three attitudinal evaluations (all are of the *Appreciation* category) and four counts of accompanying *Graduation*.

(6)

①The region's [Graduation-Force-Amount] ②most [Graduation-Force-Intensity] ③advanced [Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation] telecommunications hub, Hong Kong has one of ④ the world's [Graduation-Force-Amount] ⑤ most [Graduation-Force-Intensity] ⑥ sophisticated [Attitude-Appreciation-Composition] telecommunications systems, connected to the rest of the globe through ⑦ multiple [Attitude-Appreciation-Composition] submarine and overland cable systems.

The government is focusing on the city's telecommunication systems in the above example. It first positions the city by pointing out that it is an important telecommunications hub with a total of three evaluations in a row (items ① to ③): it comments on the city's status as a telecommunications hub positively and favorably with *advanced* (item ③), and this evaluative comment is upscaled, or intensified, with the superlative *most* (item ②); the HKSAR Government also puts the city's status into perspective by specifying that the status is a regional one with *The region's* (item ①). This last instance of *Graduation* may appear vague as it is not clear which region or the scope of the region the government is intending to refer to – it could range from as limited as the nation (China) to more far-reaching as East Asia, South-East Asia or even the East. Such vagueness, however, can function to intensify the attitudinal evaluation since it allows readers to supply the necessary information concerning the scope of the region. The government, using a similar strategy, evaluates the city's telecommunications systems (items ④ to ⑥): it comments on the *Composition* of the systems favorably with *sophisticated* (item ⑥), and this evaluative comment is strengthened with *most* (item ⑤); the government again puts the level of sophistication of the telecommunication's systems into perspective with *the world's* (item ④). By first evaluating favorably the city's status and communications systems with *Appreciation*, and second mentioning the area or region in which such evaluations are valid and recognized (the region and the world), the HKSAR Government promotes the core value of Excellence which emphasizes the city's *world-class achievements in many fields*.

### Core value 3: enterprising

Examples 7 and 8 below show how the HKSAR Government promotes this core value by evaluating favorably the city's efficiency and industriousness.

(7)

①Renowned for their efficiency [*Attitude-Appreciation-Reaction*], the nine container terminals in 24 berths offer ②round-the-clock [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*] service.

In Example 7, the HKSAR Government evaluates favorably, in an indirect manner, the high efficiency of the city's container terminals as in *Renowned for their efficiency* (item ①) (a more direct way of doing so could be realized as *The nine highly efficient container terminals in ...*). It then makes explicit the industriousness of the people of Hong Kong through an *Appreciation-Valuation* regarding the service provided by the container terminals as in *offer round-the-clock service* (item ②). Example 8 differs from Example 7 in that *Graduation* has a rather strong presence – the single attitudinal evaluation (item ③) is modified by four instances of *Graduation* (three of intensity [items ①, ② and ④] and one amount [item ⑤]).

(8)

①Over [*Graduation-Force-Intensity*] 90 per cent of commuters' daily journeys are made on the city's ②highly [*Graduation-Force-Intensity*] ③efficient [*Attitude-Appreciation-Valuation*] public transport network – the ④highest [*Graduation-Force-Intensity*] rate ⑤in the world [*Graduation-Force-Amount*].

#### *Core value 4: quality living*

Example 9 below shows how the HKSAR Government promotes one of the main elements of the core value Quality Living, a lifestyle that appreciates arts and culture.

(9)

Hong Kong's vision is to become an international cultural hub. ①Indeed [*Engagement-Pronounce*], the city is an ②ideal [*Attitude-Appreciation-Reaction*] place for artistic expression and creation. Hong Kong's ③lively [*Attitude-Appreciation-Reaction*] arts and culture scene offers a ④rich [*Graduation-Force-Intensity*] ⑤variety of [*Attitude-Appreciation-Composition*] events, featuring local and international performances throughout the year. It is also a leading centre for multi-media, advertising and design.

The government, through its inscribed evaluations, shows the importance Hong Kong people attach to arts and culture. It first emphasizes, with the sense of reassurance realized as *Indeed* (item ①), the city's extremely high suitability for artistic expression and creation (item ②, realized as *ideal*). It then describes people's feelings towards the city's arts and culture scene with *lively* (item ③), followed by a *Graduation* (item ④) functioning to magnify the degree of variety of cultural events (item ⑤, an *Appreciation* token) Hong Kong organizes.

### Core value 5: innovative

Different from its practice in promoting other core values, the HKSAR Government resorts to *Attitude-Judgment-Propriety* in promoting Innovative through discourse.

(10)

Hong Kong is ①facilitating the development of technology clusters to complement the Mainland's technology developments [*Attitude-Judgment-Propriety*]. Hong Kong is also ②enhancing participation in national-level science and technology projects through collaboration with research institutions and enterprises in the Mainland [*Attitude-Judgment-Propriety*].

The two evaluations (both are *Judgment-Propriety*) in Example 9 present Hong Kong as a city which is willing to contribute to the technological development of mainland China, a behavior that deserves people's praise. Such willingness can be attributed to the importance the city attaches to technology and innovation.

### Quantitative

Table 1 shows (1) the frequency of use of each type (regions, categories and sub-categories) of evaluative language in promoting each of the five core values (see Columns D to H), (2) the frequency of use of evaluative language (regardless of type) in promoting each of the five core values (see bottom row of Columns D to H), and (3) the overall frequency of use of each region and category of evaluative language in promoting the core values (see column I)

The bottom row of columns D to H of Table 1 shows that the Government has used a total of 262 instances of evaluation in its attempt to promote the five core values of Hong Kong. It also shows that the Government differs in its discursive practice in promoting the five core values in terms of the frequency of use of evaluative language – in descending order of frequency in both number and per cent terms, it was Excellence (84; 32%), Quality Living (82; 31.2%), Innovative (49; 18.6%), Free (30; 11.4%), and lastly Enterprising (18; 6.8%). The frequency of use of the various types of evaluative language in the Government's promotional effort is shown in Column I – 171 instances (65.3%) of *Attitude*, 6 instances (2.4%) of *Engagement*, and 85 instances (32.4%) of *Graduation*.

The figures reported above indicate that the Government, through its use of evaluative language, is not simply telling people facts although a large proportion of the text analyzed in this paper is taken from the "Factsheets". Such an evaluative, non-objective orientation has been observed elsewhere. For example, in his study of property transaction reports, Kong (2008) discussed how writers of such reports promoted property with evaluative language to achieve desirability and warrantability. Partington (2007) demonstrated how evaluation could be used to achieve persuasion purposes in White House press briefings,

UK political interviews and UK broadsheet texts. It was argued that evaluation could “impose, overtly or covertly, a value system” (Partington 2007: 1554). The news article genre, which has once been regarded as presenting objective, factual information, was also found to be interspersed with evaluative elements (e.g. Martin and White 2005).

Table 1 shows that the Government has made favorable evaluations with mainly the *Attitude-Appreciation* category (totaling 171 counts of *Appreciation*, or 65.3%). The *Attitude-Judgment* category, comparatively, has been used significantly less frequently (only 22 counts, or 8.4%). The *Attitude-Affect* category has just been used once. It suggests that the Government is frequently making phenomena and things the target of its evaluation. This is understandable as it may not be a proper move for a government to openly express its own emotional reactions or judge the behavior of its people. A similar phenomenon has been observed in Holmgreen and Vestergaard’s (2009) study of the discourse of biotech news. They found that the journalists authoring the biotech news articles in their corpus rarely focused on the *Affect* and *Judgment* aspects, they mainly evaluated semiotic and natural phenomena, i.e. *Appreciation*. The comparatively infrequent use of *Judgment* and the almost complete absence of *Affect*, however, may have an undesirable effect on the effectiveness of the Government’s promotional effort. It has been pointed out that the use of *Affect* can help the writer to establish rapport with their readers (White quoted in Page 2003: 225), and that the combined use of *Judgment* and *Affect* would “encourage a greater sense of solidarity” (Page 2003: 226). In other words, the infrequent use of *Judgment* and *Affect* may lead to a weaker rapport between the Government and the readers, which would in turn lead to a lower effectiveness of the Government’s promotional effort. In terms of brand engagement, the infrequent use of *Affect* suggests that the Government adopts the traditional consumer-goods branding approach (Thomson et al. 1999) to brand Hong Kong as a product in an impersonal way, without appealing much to readers’ emotional response. This communication approach focuses on promoting brand attributes without arousing readers’ emotional desire.

As Internet users’ average attention span while browsing webpages is merely 30 seconds (Geissler et al. 2001), it is critical to consider the issue that arousing readers’ feelings on the promotional message on websites could elevate online experience (Okonkwo 2010) and hence, reinforce brand perception. Similarly, the government may have overlooked the role of people in contributing to brand distinction in the competitive international platform with the comparatively infrequent use of *Judgment*. People may contribute to make the brand “alive” (Kimpakorn and Tocquer 2009: 533) and hence, enhance their positive perception of the city.

A closely related observation that also deserves our attention is the significantly lower frequency of use of *Engagement* in the promoting the five core values – the number of instances of use was just six, and that this evaluative resource was only used in promoting three of the five core values. It has been demonstrated that the use of *Engagement-Entertain/Attribute* can allow and

encourage interaction between the writer and the reader and thus rapport can be managed (Ho 2014; Martin and White 2005; Page 2003), and that the use of *Affect* along with *Judgment* and that the use of *Engagement-Proclaim* (e.g. in fact, definitely) can help to convey a sense of authority (Hyland 2005). The infrequent use of *Engagement* by the Government could result in the non-enhancement, or even challenge, of the rapport between itself and the readers. Whether the discursive effort expended would lead to the result the Government desires would therefore be questionable.

Another observation that can be made is the use of *Graduation* in modifying, mostly strengthening, of attitudinal evaluations. Examples 4, 6, 8 and 9 have already shown that the combination of a *Graduation-Appreciation* is common. This practice should be a natural one since the government can then convey a stronger attitudinal meaning, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of its promotion of the core values of Hong Kong. The use of *Graduation* in examples 4, 6 and 8 share one common characteristic – they are vague. The three evaluative expressions *There are over 700 periodicals* (from example 4), *The region's most advanced telecommunications hub* (from example 6), and *Over 90 per cent of commuters' daily journeys* (from example 8) all contain “vague language” (Channell 1994: 5) – *over* in examples 4 and 8, and *region's* in example 6. While the writer could have specified the exact figures in examples 4 and 8 (e.g. *703 periodicals* and *92% of commuters' daily journeys*), and specified the region in example 6 (e.g. *the South-East Asia or East Asia*), s/he chose to use an “approximator” (Channell 1994: 43) instead. We argue that the choice was deliberate as “vague expressions are used to present statistical data in a way which favors the argument of the author” (Channell 1994: 180). In these three examples, the favor would be the writer could achieve higher persuasiveness with the vague language (Channell 1994: 179) – *Graduation* realized as *over* and *region's*.

## Implications

In view of the dominance and thus importance of promotional discourse in the various genres concerning different aspects of life as discussed above (from books and news reports to job applications and press releases to tourism and government discourse), it should not be surprising to see the production and construction of such discourse being one of the key topics in professional communication courses and their textbooks. A review of the professional communication textbooks reveals that there have been two main focuses concerning the teaching of promotional discourse. One is the effective textual organization of such discourse, and the other the use of English, like the importance of ensuring grammatical accuracy, using plain English, presenting facts and benefits, and avoiding jargons (e.g. Bivins 2008; Gerson and Gerson 2010; Guffey 2010; Guffey and Loewy 2011; Locker and Kienzler 2010; Newsom and Haynes 2008; Penrose et al. 2001; Smith 2012). Despite its substantial presence and key role in achieving the intended promotional effect in the Brand Hong

Kong website as discussed in the present study, the language of evaluation has unfortunately been largely left out in the ESP curriculum. While more research into the use of evaluative language in the construction of promotional discourse is needed, the authors believe that ESP learners can benefit from an awareness of the features and functions of the language of evaluation in their endeavor to acquire the generic competence in constructing promotional discourse. It is therefore suggested that the professional communication textbooks should include, apart from the two existing ones, a focus concerning the teaching of promotional discourse – the forms, types, and functions of evaluative language.

## Conclusion

This paper has described and discussed the use of evaluative language by the HKSAR Government in its effort to promote the city's core values through the Brand Hong Kong website. From the observation that *Appreciation* is the most frequently used category of evaluative language, we can see that the Government has phenomena and objects as the most common target of evaluation. With the strengthening effect achieved with the use of *Graduation*, the Government has relied on *Appreciation* to the largest extent in its attempt to promote the city's core values. The other two regions of Attitude, namely *Affect* and *Judgment*, have been used significantly less frequently and this has been argued to be a reasonable move by the Government on the one hand, and an ineffective move in terms of the effectiveness of the promotion on the other. It is a reasonable move since it may have aroused negative reactions from the public if the Government had openly expressed its emotions (which could have been achieved with *Affect*) or its subjective judgment of its people and/or their behavior (which could have been achieved with *Judgment*). It is an ineffective move since the frequent use of *Affect* and *Judgment* independently or in combination could have improved the rapport between Government and the people who may then be more likely to be convinced by the former's promotional effort.

As the present study focuses specifically on one particular promotional genre the Government uses in its effort to promote the core values of Hong Kong, the authors are aware of the possible limitation of the study in terms of the representativeness of the data – the Brand Hong Kong website. Further, visual images may play a significant role in the presentation of attitude on the Brand Hong Kong website. Discussion about how visual images make meaning and present stance on the websites provides a platform for undertaking future research.

Despite the limitations, the authors believe that the study is still significant in two ways. First, it has expanded the existing literature on both city branding and promotional discourse; second, it has made a suggestion concerning the incorporation of the language of evaluation in the ESP curriculum with a view to enriching the learners' repertoire for writing promotional materials. The rest of

the ongoing research project analyzes other genres through which the Government promotes the city's core values. It should therefore be able to depict a fuller picture of the strategies and resources employed in the government's promotional effort.

## Notes

1. The first letter of the names of the domains and regions of the language of evaluation is capitalized to distinguish them from the rest of the text.
2. The present study is a part of an ongoing research project whose data comprises both texts and images collected from (1) the websites of various government bureaus and departments, and Hong Kong Tourism Board, (2) the leaflets and brochures published and distributed by the government, and (3) the Hong Kong Year Book published in the last five years, i.e. 2009–2013.

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