

Joanna Thornborrow (Université de Bretagne Occidentale)

“You’ve made our day!”: University recruitment as an institutional encounter on Twitter

Joanna.Thornborrow@univ-brest.fr

In this paper I examine Twitter as a medium of institutional engagement between UK university admissions teams and prospective students. Specifically, I examine the way recruitment is done in this discursive environment through an analysis of the social actions and interactions on the Twitter sites of 5 UK universities. Drawing on the theoretical notions of interactional footing and the relevance of structural adjacency in institutional contexts (Goffman 1981, Drew and Heritage 1992), I analyse the tweeting activity by students and universities over a 24 hour data sample of interactions on Thursday 16th August 2012, the day A-level exam results were published in the UK, and the start of the process traditionally known as ‘Clearing’. I show that in addition to making use of the overtly promotional function of Twitter (Page 2012), some of the characteristic features of tweeting between institutions and students enable a range of informal discourses to be co-opted towards the contextual institutional goal of student recruitment to undergraduate courses. I argue that as the institutional ‘voice’ moves further into the domains of the personal via the social media, the relationship between universities and students is being reconfigured as a service encounter within a specific set of discourses that have consequences for the nature of institutional engagement between UK universities and their students in the wider context of changes to higher education in the UK.

*Joanna Thornborrow is Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Western Brittany, France (formerly at the Centre for Language and Communication Research, Cardiff, UK). Working in the areas of discourse and conversation analysis, with a particular focus on institutional and media discourse, her most recent work is on the articulation between digital media and forms of institutional interaction. Recent publications include Thornborrow and Haarman, “Backstage behaviour as frontstage news” *European Journal of Communication* (2013) and Thornborrow and Fitzgerald, “Grab a pen and paper’: Interaction v. interactivity in a political radio phone-in” *Journal of Language and Politics* (2013) and she is currently writing a book on the discourses of public participation media.*