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THE LANGUAGE OF RETRENCHMENT: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BUDGET CUTTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Using discourse analysis, this study analyzed language used at universities undergoing budget cuts.
Background	In times of economic hardship and declining public support, institutions can generate more revenue or reduce expenditures, referred to as retrenchment, to meet their resource needs. Yet, scholarship on organizational approaches to retrenchment is scarce.
Methodology	Using critical discourse analysis, this study analyzed public communication from university leadership to employees about budget cuts. To understand how institutionalized structures were negotiated, reinforced, and constructed through language we looked for linguistic patterns in the use of pronouns, affective and episodic stance, and nominalization in institutional emails.
Contribution	As educational scholarship on institutional budget cutting behaviors remains almost nonexistent, this study extended understanding of budget cutting behaviors by exploring how university presidents frame budget cuts as a serious problem and persuade stakeholders that their solutions will resolve the budget crisis while minimizing personal harm.
Findings	Analysis of corpus data suggested that the language used in SRI and URU's budget emails was tailored to generate support for university leadership's authority and plans to resolve the crisis.

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Recommendations for Practitioners	Through the lens of poststructuralist thought, findings suggest there is room for electronic communication about budget crises and resolution to be clearer about the organization of power and the location of financial decision-making.
Recommendations for Researchers	The existing body of knowledge on the language used in retrenchment decision-making is small and triangulation with the literature confirmed findings on a larger scale, more research is needed.
Impact on Society	If institutions are seeking transparency, they should use language that clearly communicates the nature of the problem, defines which individuals/groups are creating the plan to return to fiscal stability, and, when decisions are made, outlines the specific details of the plans that include who it will impact and how.
Future Research	While much of the research has focused on the impact of retrenchment on institutional and student outcomes, these findings suggest that future research should also explore the impact of retrenchment decision-making on faculty and staff outcomes like morale, sense of belonging, and retention and recruitment.
Keywords	retrenchment, budget cutting behaviors, discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

The story of declining public funding for higher education is familiar and concerns about the financing of higher education are perennial (Birnbaum & Shushok, 2001). In times of economic hardship and declining public support, institutions can generate more revenue or reduce expenditures (referred to as retrenchment) to meet their resource needs. Research has explored factors affecting higher education funding in the United States, particularly at the state level (e.g., Archibald & Feldman, 2006; Delaney & Doyle, 2011; Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2015; Tandberg, 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2012); the relationship between prices and demand (e.g., Heller, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1987; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005; St. John, Paulsen, & Starkey, 1996); and revenue generating strategies through academic entrepreneurialism (e.g., Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Yet, scholarship on organizational approaches to retrenchment in the United States is scarce.

In the context of diminishing resources, leaders of public institutions have to communicate retrenchment decision-making processes and decisions to various constituents. Using critical discourse analysis, this study analyzed public email communication from university leadership to employees about budget cuts at two institutions of higher education in the United State. Through the lens of poststructural thought, exploring language-in-use allowed us to identify the larger institutionalized discourses, processes, and systems that coordinated retrenchment decision-making behaviors and understand how institutionalized structures were negotiated, reinforced, and constructed through language. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by analyzing the discourse of cutting budgets at institutions in the United States and where that is occurring by exploring the language used to communicate those decisions to institution stakeholders.

RETRENCHMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutional leaders face a dynamic and challenging environment for budget management. Pressures include declines in state funding; serving as stewards of public resources in the context of growing public concern over the costs and value of higher education; and changing beliefs about the purposes of higher education and the role of markets. Nationally, state funding increased slightly (3.7%) between fiscal years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, however, institutions still face a great deal of variability in financial support from state governments along with declining enrollments in many cases (Grapevine, 2019). The variability in state funding is in part attributable to decreased tax revenue and increased liabilities in the forms of healthcare, pensions, and primary and secondary education at the state level. State budgets operate on a combination of income tax and sales tax. A loss in income and

a drop in sales leads to a loss in state revenue. In turn, states must either raise revenue (i.e., taxes) or cut spending. Because families' tightened income means raising taxes becomes politically difficult during a recession, states instead pursue cuts to spending. The two most expensive state expenditures, Medicare and K-12 education, are difficult to cut legally, as many states enshrine spending on these in their constitutions; politically, as most voters either have kids in K-12 or are on Medicare; and financially, as these programs have limited alternatives for replacing lost state revenue. Higher education, the third most expensive state expenditure, does not enjoy these protections: cutting it is legally viable, as cuts can be made in a simple budget decision; politically safe, as voters are less responsive to state appropriation spending; and financially justifiable, as postsecondary institutions can turn to alternative funding sources like tuition to offset cuts from the state (Breneman, 2002; Callan, 2002).

And so, when times get tough in the United States, states cut appropriations to institutions. During the Great Recession of 2008, states cut appropriations to higher education by an average of 23%, with the majority of states cutting more than 20% (Zumeta, 2010). In 2017, despite five years of increases nationally, state funding for higher education remained about \$2,000 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student below 2001 funding levels, controlling for inflation (Laderman & Carlson, 2017). State appropriations for public institutions were particularly affected following the 2008 Great Recession. In 2008, public universities in the United States received a total of about \$67.2 billion in constant dollars compared with \$53.1 billion in 2013, a 21% decrease (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Because public institutions receive relatively more of their overall revenue from public funding than private institutions (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2016), they may be disproportionately impacted by the Great Recession. Colleges responded to budget reductions in two ways, by raising tuition and enacting cuts (Oliff, Palacios, Johnson, & Leachman, 2013). In the years immediately preceding and following the recession, in constant dollars, institutions raised tuition an average of 27%. Barr and Turner (2013) found a strong positive correlation between changes in unemployment rates and changes in tuition rates during the recession. Institutions also enacted cuts by eliminating programs, closing or consolidating campuses, and reducing services.

INSTITUTIONAL BEHAVIORS IN MANAGING BUDGETS

When faced with resource constraints, institutional leaders can either increase revenue or reduce expenditures, or more likely some combination of the two. They can also become more efficient, which is a way to enhance the value of expenditures. Significant limitations exist however when it comes to raising revenue or reducing expenditures. There are pressures to keep the cost (or price) down for students, yet there is upward pressure on the cost (production cost) of educating students. Institutions are not free to raise prices to cover production costs to whatever levels may be desired for at least three reasons. First, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, rising costs of college are a perennial concern among students, families, and policy makers (Birnbaum & Shushok, 2001). Colleges and universities face public relations pressure regarding tuition and fee increases that limit their ability to increase revenue. Second, institutions may not be able to raise tuition or may face constraints legally in doing so. Tuition setting authority may rest at the institutional level. Authority can be shared or may rest elsewhere, for example with the governor, legislature, a statewide coordinating or governing board (Armstrong, Carlson, & Laderman, 2017). Third, students are sensitive to prices and an increase in price can result in decreased demand for higher education among some students (Heller, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1987). Increasing tuition and fees could have an overall negative effect on enrollments and may be at odds with some institutional missions to provide access to students (e.g., enrolling low-income or first-generation students who may be more sensitive to prices).

Institutions of higher education face resource constraints exacerbated by declines in state funding along with costs that increase year-after-year. Institutions are limited in their ability to respond by becoming more efficient as at some point increased efficiency may compromise quality. Moreover, institutions face constraints in increasing tuition and fees, a primary source of revenue for many col-

leges and universities. Therefore, reducing expenditures through cutting budgets may be a common and necessary response. Institutional leadership, faced with difficult decisions constrained by multiple forces have to communicate those decisions and processes by which decisions were made to employees, students, and the public. These stakeholders represent diverse interests, and the support of each for those decisions is important to maintain day-to-day institutional operations. How those decisions are communicated provide important insight into the decision-making process as well as the systems, processes, and discourses designed to maintain the systems and structures of power that form the university in the United States.

Impact of retrenchment

The research on the impact of retrenchment on institutional outcomes such as student learning and student perceptions is mixed, but suggests that it has a negative impact on the institution. First, Carter (2012) found that higher education administrators in South Carolina did not perceive a significant negative impact on education quality as a result of budget cuts, which suggests that “faculty and staff are required to do more work with eroding resources, thus allowing for the continued quality of the educational product” (p. 52). However, these findings contrast with the bulk of the literature on the negative impact of retrenchment in higher education. First, Johnson-Ahorlu, Alvarez, and Hurtado (2013) reported on a study that explored the impact of reduced state funding on students in California and found that students qualitatively reported that budget cuts had a negative impact on their ability to persist at two- and four-year institutions. Johnson-Ahorlu et al. (2013) found that decreased student support services, reduced instruction time, a reduction in the availability of required courses, and increases in tuition and fees negatively impacted their ability to be successful in higher education in California during the budget cuts that began in 2007. Similarly, Li (2017) described the negative impact of funding declines on college access and affordability for students, educational quality, necessary infrastructure, and faculty and staff layoffs. The negative impact of budget cuts on higher education was reinforced in Lounder et al. (2011) exploration of cuts after the great recession across the United States. Overall, and not unexpectedly, retrenchment has an impact on the higher education institution that spans student, faculty, and staff experiences.

While some research suggests that faculty are involved in the retrenchment decision-making process, faculty involvement is often limited or largely symbolic. For example, Archibald and Conley (2011) found that faculty leaders reported meeting with institutional chief financial officers rarely, if ever; only 30% of faculty senates reported being involved in the budget process. When faculty are involved, their involvement is not always a positive experience. For example, Marcus’s (1999) exploration of the strategic planning process at two universities found that faculty involved in the process often felt like they were involved to shoulder some of the blame for decisions made in the strategic planning process, regardless of the nature of their participation. This led Marcus to suggest that perhaps planning committees, especially those tasked with making decisions about program closures, should not include faculty to avoid the “myth of input” often perceived by faculty when involved in planning committees like these when their input is not really wanted or considered. In retrenchment decision-making, university leadership is tasked both with making the decision and convincing institutional stakeholders that it was the right decision without scapegoating faculty in the process (Marcus, 1999). However, little is known about the language university leaders use to accomplish those goals.

RETRENCHMENT LANGUAGE

Slaughter (1993) explored the language used in university retrenchment and found that the language used to describe retrenchment decisions was similar to the language used in the business world to rationalize layoffs and downsizing. Language defined the situation as serious to rationalize the need for severe cuts. The only research on the language used in budget communications in higher education was a discourse analysis conducted by Ayers (2014). Following Fairclough’s (2009) approach to critical discourse analysis, Ayers (2014) analyzed 178 budget texts collected from University of North

Carolina (UNC) websites from 2008 to 2010. Findings suggested that communications about budget cuts informed, warned, and predicted stakeholders about the budget cutting process in order to achieve strategic institutional goals, by garnering support for institutional decisions from those reading the texts (Ayers, 2014). Although research on the language used to communicate retrenchment decision-making is limited, isomorphic pressures might explain why institutions of higher education adopt similar language to communicate decisions about budget cuts to institutional stakeholders (Gates, 1997); isomorphism, in this context, refers to language used institutionally across institutions (Atkinson, 2008). In this study, we seek to expand our knowledge about retrenchment decision-making behaviors by exploring the language used to communicate those decisions to institution stakeholders. Next, we discuss our methods and the importance of focusing on language.

METHODS

This study was framed through the lens of poststructuralist thought to explore how institutional policies, practices, and procedures are reinforced, and replicated (Hesse-Biber, 2014). A poststructuralism frame emphasizes language because it is “regarded as constitutive of experience and not simply representative of it” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 44). As such, discourse analysis is a key tool of poststructuralist researchers because the link between power and knowledge can be seen by exploring language-in-use (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Lazar, 2005). Using critical discourse analysis, this study analyzed public communication from university leadership to employees about budget cuts. In the resource context described above, leaders of public institutions may reduce budgets and then have to communicate those decisions to various constituents. Through the framework of poststructuralist thought (Elias & Merriam, 2005), we examined the language used to communicate budget constraints to internal and external stakeholders through the exploration of emails sent to university faculty and staff. Through a poststructuralist lens, we explored language-in-use as evidence of the relationship between power and what is accepted as knowledge. To understand how institutionalized structures were negotiated, reinforced, and constructed through language we looked for linguistic patterns in the use of pronouns, affective and epistemic stance, and nominalization in institutional emails.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How is the discourse about institutional fiscal policy in higher education characterized and communicated at the institutional level?

1. What salient linguistics features were used to communicate decisions about institutional fiscal policy (specifically budget cuts) to stakeholders via email?
2. How was institutional policy reinforced through the use of stance, pronouns, nominalization, and intertextuality?

CORPUS

The data for this exploration was the text of all emails sent from institutional leadership about financial cuts and budgeting to all faculty and staff at two public institutions in the United States, Urban Research University (URU) and Small Regional Institution (SRI) in spring and summer 2017. Five emails came from the URU president and 14 from the SRI President; the corpus represents all emails sent about financial cuts from these institutions during this time period. The corpus ranged in size URU was an urban research university; SPI was a small, regional, state institution.

Genres are “institutionalized ways of acting and interacting with language” (Ayers, 2014, p. 101), classifying language within a specific genre helps to understand which institutional structure is being sustained or replicated via language (Ayers, 2014; Fairclough, 2003). The emails of focus in this study were classified broadly as institutional discourse genre, or discourse that is intended to inform, shape, or recreate the institution (Strauss & Feiz, 2013). More specifically, informed by Ayer’s (2014) analysis of budget updates, the specific genre of texts explored in this study are classified as “budget up-

dates” to align with prior research on this corpus. The ‘budget update’ is defined as “one-way mediated communication such as letters, memoranda, and official statements in which chancellors directly addressed faculty, staff, students, the general public, or some combination of thereof” (Ayers, 2014, p. 104). The modality of the corpus was electronic communication. Direct members in the participation framework were URU and SPI faculty and staff; indirect participants include anyone who received the email as a matter of public record, such as the media.

DATA ANALYSIS

Using critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) as an analytic framework, we coded the e-mails in Atlas.ti (qualitative data analysis software). Specifically, we analyzed emails for discourse features that were identified in the literature as salient in institutional discourse (Biber, 2006): pronoun use, affective and epistemic stance, and nominalization

Pronoun use

Pronoun use, such as the use of deixis, may be indicative of the attempt to create linguistic distance between two groups (such as seen in the use of pronouns to connote “us” vs “them”) or to create a sense of communal group membership and decision-making (Baecker, 1998). Further, pronoun use can be indicative of power or the concealment of power, when “we” is used instead of “I” or “you” (Afros & Schryer, 2009; Baecker, 1998). For example, Baecker (1998) found that higher education syllabi used “we” instead of “you” to conceal who would be making course decisions and completing course assignments, and the use of “we” instead of “I” hid who was making course pedagogical decisions. In this study, we explored pronoun use to understand if and how power was concealed and to understand if and how pronouns were used to mobilize support from institutional stakeholders for retrenchment processes.

Stance

Linguistically, stance is a tool used to convey emotion, reinforce validity, or evaluate knowledge. Stance is categorized as affective, evaluative/judgement, or epistemic (Strauss & Feiz, 2013). Exploring the use of stance perspective on how language is used to create an emotional response from readers, assert the validity of claims, and to define truth and knowledge (Parson, 2018). Stance is conveyed through the use of modal verbs (e.g., “must,” “should,” “may,” “can) to convey knowledge, obligation, and permission (Afros & Schryer; 2009), words that convey ways of knowing, and words that create emphasis or emotion. In this study, we explored stance to understand how language was used to convey knowledge about the retrenchment decision-making process and reinforce the validity of institutional decision-making processes.

Nominalization

Finally, and of particular interest in this study, we explored the use of nominalization, or the creation of a noun from a verb or adjective. These words often end in -ity, -tion, or -ism: “Nouns formed from other parts of speech are nominalizations. Academics loves them; so do lawyers, bureaucrats and business writers. I call them 'zombie nouns' because they cannibalize active verbs, suck the life-blood from adjectives and substitute abstract entities for human beings” (Sword, 2012, n.p.). Gee (2014) further explains,

Nominalizations are like trash compactors: they allow one to take a lot of information –indeed, a whole sentence’s worth of information –and compact it into a compound word or a phrase. One can then insert this compacted information into another sentence (thereby making bigger and bigger sentences). The trouble is this: once one has made the compacted item (the nominalization), it is hard to tell what information exactly went into it. Just like the compacted trash in the trash compactor, you can’t always tell exactly what’s in it.

Nominalization is of particular interest to this study as it informed understanding of and how the nature of retrenchment processes and procedures were concealed using nominalization instead of verbs and adjectives.

Analysis procedure

We began with descriptive coding that categorized different content areas of the email according to their purpose, such as the greeting, introduction, and conclusion. After descriptive coding, we coded for semantic and linguistic tools including pronouns, stance, and nominalization. In the first reading, we identified pronoun use to explore how power was negotiated through the use of pronouns. Second, we identified indicators of epistemic, evaluative, and affective stance by exploring the use of modal verbs (must, should, may and can), nouns and adverbs that connote emotion, and adjectives and adverbs that indicate perceptions of knowledge. Third, we explored the use of nominalization by identifying the use of adverbs, verbs, and adjectives that were acting as nouns. Finally, we conducted a thematic analysis to identify discourses that persisted within and across the corpus. Thematic analysis led to the identification of 31 codes independent of the linguistic analysis conducted in steps one through four. Codes were organized into five themes (i.e., Current state, future state, strategy, decision-makers, engender support) which were further refined into three categories: State of the institution, plan, and people management.

VALIDITY

While we do not attempt to argue that findings reported on in this study communicate broad generalizability, and, indeed discourse analysis can only reflect an interpretation of the reality represented in the corpus (Gee, 2014), we still sought validity in our analysis. Gee (2014) defines validity in critical discourse analysis as being comprised of convergence, agreement, coverage, and linguistic details. We sought convergence and agreement through multiple linguistic points, which enabled us to identify if and how core findings were supported throughout the corpus. Although the sample size was small (19 emails), the corpus represented that entire body of emails related to budget/finances sent during the time period of focus, which allowed us to examine the budget cycle as it was communicated to stakeholders for two public institutions. While a larger corpus would have undoubtedly led to more data, through convergence, we were confident in the agreement we were able to identify through analysis. Additionally, we sought triangulation with the literature as well as between the institutions of focus in this study. Second, aligned with the goals of discourse analysis, we aligned the findings to linguistic structures (Gee, 2014). Through a close connection to linguistic structure, we sought to ensure that our findings did not extend beyond the methods of analysis and the purpose of the study.

To ensure that analysis and reporting were conducted ethically, we created pseudonyms for each of the institutions. We have redacted any data that would identify the institutions.

FINDINGS

Analysis of corpus data suggested that the language used in SRI and URU's budget emails was tailored to generate support for university leadership's authority and plans to resolve the crisis.

PRONOUNS

First, pronoun use in this corpus either masked or revealed the decision-making process. Pronouns were used in the URU communications to mask who would be making the decisions, how those decisions would be made, and whether faculty and staff had access to power in the decision-making process. For example, a URU email stated:

Today, the deans, vice presidents and constituency representatives met to discuss the university budget. I will share some of that discussion with the Board of Trustees at their meeting

tomorrow, and **I** wanted to share it with **you** now as well . . . if **we** do not take action now . . . simply put, for some time **we** have been outspending our revenues, and this habit has caught up with **us** (URU, email 1).

There was a shift this paragraph from a clear power relationship (i.e., I share information with you) to one that is obscured by the unclear meaning of who we refers to throughout the paragraph. Similarly, we was used throughout the URU corpus to reference different groups without clearly stating who we referred to:

I understand many members of our community are concerned . . . deficit **we're** facing. I wanted to take a moment to explain the situation **we're** in and to assure you we are taking steps to address **our** issues (URU, email 2).

In this example, our and we was used to describe who was a part the budget crisis, and I was used to describe who would be controlling future actions and responses. You, in this example, was used to describe who would be impacted and who would be expected to take the actions decided on by the president.

In contrast, at SPI, pronouns clearly delineated the power relationship between the president and faculty.

I have reviewed our campus budget from an overall perspective and found that many of you are doing your part and spending less than **your** original allotments . . . while many reductions are taking place on our campus, it will still be a challenge to fully achieve our reduction goals. It is imperative that we all continue to reduce our spending . . . please determine if **your** expenditures are critical to the mission of the campus (SPI, email 1).

In this example, the directives are clear, using you and your when referring to individual or group responsibility, and I when referring to his decision-making power. There is a clearer relationship to who is doing what, and the use of “our” denotes the shared power and decision-making that goes into each decision.

STANCE

Affective stance

There were more expressions of affective stance in the SPI emails, which were written in a more personal style, so we saw aspects of personality come through in the email text through word choice and punctuation.

There is still no need for any kind of panic! (SPI, email 3).

I remain optimistic that these rough estimates will be moderated (SPI, email 3).

This contrasted with the URU emails, which were composed to deliver fact and orders. For example, “Let me be clear: We cannot cut our way to financial stability” (URU, Email 2). The bolded phrase acted as affective stance to reinforce the seriousness of the situation being described. The SPI emails also reinforce fact and orders, but also use affective stance to seek the support of faculty and staff, try to calm faculty/staff down, and motivate them.

Epistemic stance

First, epistemic stance was used across the corpus to express the validity of the statements being made about the budget:

We cannot cut our way to financial stability (URU, email 2).

While many reductions in operating expenses are taking place on our campus, it will still be a challenge to fully achieve our reduction goals (SPI, email 1).

Second, there were more expressions of knowing (and lack of knowing) from the SPI emails. Epistemic stance was used to reinforce the validity of updated information and to be clear and candid about how much was known and not known about the budget crisis.

We won't know to what extent until the Board Office provides us with numbers and instructions. We will know more in a week or so (SPI, email 2).

Finally, the use of simply in the URU corpus was used to describe the intractable nature of what was being presented.

Simply put, for some time we have been outspending our revenues (URU, email 1).

We **simply** will not continue this practice (URU, email 2).

Through the use of adverbs like simply, the nature of the knowledge was presented as unquestionable.

Evaluative stance

Finally, evaluative stance was used to communicate the size and seriousness of the problem.

The university will face a significant budget deficit in 2017-18 if we do not take action now, and even greater financial issues in the future (URU, email 1).

If we give raises this coming year, the new reductions of \$800,000 per year for the new biennium will become much larger and much more difficult to deal with (SPI, email 3).

An evaluative stance was used throughout the corpus to emphasize the size of the budget problem and the imperative nature of taking remedial action such as making cuts, spending less, and not getting raises.

NOMINALIZATION

Nominalization was used multiple times to create abstractions about the information both that went into creating an institutional action and what the institutional action will actually be. The clearest example is the use of "hiring freeze" and "hiring frost" in the URU corpus.

Tactics for the short term . . . a strict hiring freeze (URU, email 1).

Campus-wide salary freezes and a hiring frost (URU, email 2).

With the concurrence of the Board, other cost-containment strategies, including a salary freeze for current employees (URU, email 1).

The hiring frost is one measure designed to have significant impact (URU, email 2).

Between the first and second URU email, there was a shift in the use of freeze to frost, two nominalizations that implied more impermanence. Neither freeze nor frost, however, actually describe what either term means (e.g., how long the freeze or frost will last, who will be impacted, who makes decisions about who will be impacted). The nature of the nominalization represented by the hiring and salary freezes and hiring frost means that the actual meaning of what is entailed by the frost and freeze is obscured by making them nouns. The nominalization of these verbs obscures meaning, as compared to the use of freeze as a verb. For example, instead of saying we will freeze your salaries this year, or we are going to freeze any new hiring of essential and non-essential staff, the use of these adverbs as nouns obscures the meaning of them, and what exactly will happen as a result of those actions.

We see the use of nominalizations such as projections, reductions, conclusions, and indications in both corpuses. Similarly, the use of nominalization hides what is meant by the projections, reductions so that the nature of what those words meant in reality was hidden from the reader. Finally, nominal-

izations were reinforced through the use of passive voice, which obscures who is acting. Passive voice was not seen as frequently in the URU emails, and most often seen in the SPI emails, again reinforcing that the president was reflecting on directives made that he and the faculty had to follow.

Budgets are to be developed (SPI, email 2).

All state budgets were reduced (SPI, email 1).

Passive language and nominalization hide who will be doing the work and what exactly will be done.

STATE OF THE INSTITUTION

In addition to the analysis of linguistic features of the corpus, thematic analysis also revealed broader discourses within and across the corpus. Those discourses were organized by function: describing the current state, plans for improvement, or managing the expectations and behavior of the institutional stakeholders. First, in both the SPI and URU emails, the financial situation was presented as an immediate, urgent and serious concern. As a result, action needed to be taken immediately to begin to address serious financial deficits. In contrast to SPI, however, URU also referenced the behavior of past administrations as being the cause of the financial shortfalls.

For some time we have been outspending our revenue, and this habit has caught up with us (URU, email 1).

The spending policies of the previous administration, as well as unrealized tuition and clinical revenue increases, have created persistent budget shortfalls (URU, email 2).

SPI referenced state financial shortfalls and the legislature as the cause of the current financial state. Both SPI and URU stated that taking the steps to remedy the financial shortfall would result in financial stability in the future.

PLAN

While the plans asserted by SPI and URU differed in nature, both called for financial cuts and established that a plan was developing, but not finalized. URU and SPI emails differed in the nature of how that plan was being developed and who would be responsible for making plan decisions.

I met with the deans, vice presidents and others to begin the process of fixing our financial issues and positioning the university for future success (URU, email 2).

Our budget for the coming year must be submitted in just a few days. This mean all significant decisions for next year must be completed. While we have not yet received numbers for the next biennium, our early estimates are that the additional 6% reduction . . . we won't know to what extent until the Board Office provides us with numbers and instructions (SPI, email 3).

URU emails establish that university leadership will be creating the budget, where SPI similarly indicates that university leadership will be creating the plan but also alludes to the need for more information from the state before the budget could be completed. For both URU and SPI, the emails were used to call for input from faculty and staff for suggestions on how to make additional budget cuts or increase revenue streams.

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

The final category identified common themes in the different discourses used to moderate stakeholder (faculty, staff) responses and compel stakeholders to action. First, both SPI and URU emails encouraged faculty and staff not to panic whilst simultaneously reinforcing the dire nature of the budget crisis.

The budget figures are daunting, but we will work our way through these financial issues quickly and decisively – and as a team (URU, email 2).

Once again, there is absolutely no reason for any sort of anxiety over this new budget announcement (SPI, email 6).

These attempts to calm stakeholder responses often came in the same emails as the ones where the dire financial situations were described, contradicting messaging that might be interpreted to mean that panic was an appropriate response to the current financial state. Along with managing the responses of stakeholders, we also see clear communication roles delineated, where the university president/acting leadership took on the role of communicator and reinforced the role of faculty and staff as being responsible for executing required cuts. Each president made it clear that they would communicate any future updates and plans to faculty and staff and thanked faculty and staff for their presumed acceptance of their directives.

DISCUSSION

As educational scholarship on institutional budget cutting behaviors remains almost nonexistent, this study extended understanding of budget cutting behaviors by exploring how university presidents frame budget cuts as a serious problem and persuade stakeholders that their solutions will resolve the budget crisis while minimizing personal harm. The language used in the emails was tailored to generate support for university leadership's authority and plans to resolve the crisis using the following linguistic tools: 1) Conceal power and responsibility, and emphasize decision-making responsibility through pronouns use; 2) Denote seriousness of the budget problem through affective and evaluative stance; 3) Define what will and will not be happening through epistemic stance; 4) Obscure the meaning of institutional changes through nominalization. Differences between the corpuses were mainly seen in the use of affective stance and how power and decision-making was communicated to or hidden from email recipients. These differences could be attributed to the respective differences in the organizational structure of the two institutions, institution (and therefore participation framework size), funding models, and differences in leadership styles. The use of these tools in this way further reinforces this corpus as institutional language that replicates and reinforces the institutional structure of higher education.

Triangulation with the literature confirmed findings on a larger scale. First, findings reinforce prior research on the institutional language use. Similar to Ayers (2014) discourse analysis of UNC's budget texts, this corpus provided a narrative of the events surrounding and leading up to budget cuts, notified stakeholders of the decisions being made about budget cuts, and made predictions about future cuts and the outcome of current policies; the language used in each of these emails was crafted strategically to garner support for institutional decisions. Additionally, the use of stance to affirm the urgent and serious nature of the budget crisis aligns with prior research exploring the language used to rationalize retrenchment decisions. Gates (1997) found that retrenchment language described an "emergency situation" that inevitably led to the need for immediate and severe budget cutting decisions. Finally, the use of "freeze" to connote a reduction in spending is also seen in other strategic plans to reduce expenditures in higher education such as a "tuition" freeze (Meotti, 2016). These findings extend the research on the discourses of retrenchment by exploring how those tools were used to reinforce the authority of institutional leadership to make retrenchment decision and generate support for their budget cutting decisions.

Secondly, as Ayers (2014) found, the budget emails in this corpus served the purpose of creating and reinforcing community by acknowledging the pain and loss associated with budget cuts and referring to faculty, administrators, and staff as being "in this together." However, although some research has suggested that faculty are involved in the retrenchment decision-making process, faculty involvement is often limited or largely symbolic (Archibald & Conley, 2011). Findings from this research reinforced those findings, and indicated that although faculty input was sought, that input would be con-

sidered to inform decisions made by institutional leaders, faculty were not a part of the decision-making process. As Marcus (1999) found, our findings suggest that university leadership was tasked both with making the decision and convincing institutional stakeholders that those decisions were best, and faculty were not involved in the process outside of symbolic means of participation.

Finally, these findings inform theories of institutional decision-making and describe how institutional decision-makers must communicate decisions about reducing expenditures in the context of the constraints faced by institutions in raising revenues by increasing tuition and fees. Instead, institutional leaders have to communicate to stakeholders that reducing expenditures through cutting budgets is a common and necessary response. Further, although there were instances in this corpus where faculty input was sought, the actual input of faculty in the process as it was communicated was limited. Altogether, the focus on improving morale and confidence in institutional leadership in this corpus suggests that the impact of retrenchment decisions in higher education also might impact faculty and staff morale. While much of the research has focused on the impact of retrenchment on institutional and student outcomes, these findings suggest that future research should also explore the impact of retrenchment decision-making on faculty and staff outcomes like morale, sense of belonging, and retention and recruitment.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Through the lens of poststructuralist thought, findings suggest there is room for electronic communication about budget crises and resolution to be clearer about the organization of power and the location of financial decision-making. First, the organization of power could be made clearer to faculty and staff through the use of pronouns that do not obscure who is making financial decisions. Second, communications could be clearer by avoiding language that conceals the practical nature of cuts, such as through the use of nominalization which hides what “frost,” “restriction,” or “cost-containment” means in practice. These findings suggest that if institutions are seeking transparency, they should use language that clearly communicates the nature of the problem, defines which individuals/groups are creating the plan to return to fiscal stability, and, when decisions are made, outlines the specific details of the plans that include who it will impact and how.

Since the existing body of knowledge on the language used in retrenchment decision-making is small, more research is needed. First, given the small sample size of this study and the small existing body of literature, future research should explore these findings on a larger scale and expand the analysis to include a broad array of institution type, communication modalities, and retrenchment contexts. Second, while much of the research has focused on the impact of retrenchment on institutional and student outcomes, these findings suggest that future research should also explore the impact of retrenchment decision-making on faculty and staff outcomes like morale, sense of belonging, and retention and recruitment. Third, while this study focused on analyzing the language used in the emails, additional research should explore stakeholder interpretations to the language used in budget communications to explore if and how their perceptions align with our linguistic analysis. Finally, although there is a growing body of literature on the impact of retrenchment on student experiences, future research should continue in that view to understand how specific retrenchment decision impact student experiences in higher education.

CONCLUSION

Although this article reported on the more recent fiscal challenges faced by institutions of higher education, especially public institutions, budget cuts and budget cutting behavior has been a continual recurring question in the study of higher education (Burke, 1998; Gordon, 1997). This suggests that questions about budget cutting behaviors and the ways that budget cut decision-making is communicated to stakeholders will persist, although the modality of communicating those decisions will continue to change and evolve. Analysis of corpus data suggested that the language used in SRI and URU's budget emails was tailored to generate support for university leadership's authority and plans

to resolve the crisis. As educational scholarship on institutional budget cutting behaviors remains almost nonexistent, this study extended understanding of budget cutting behaviors by exploring how university presidents frame budget cuts as a serious problem and persuade stakeholders that their solutions will resolve the budget crisis while minimizing personal harm. If institutions are seeking transparency, they should use language that clearly communicates the nature of the problem, defines which individuals/groups are creating the plan to return to fiscal stability, and, when decisions are made, outlines the specific details of the plans that include who it will impact and how.

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tices.

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