Repertoires of publishing: A talk with PhD students

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Abstract: In the last decades, public universities and research institutions are faced with more scrutiny than before, with the self-regulation and governance of the researchers gaining more prevalence. Coupled with the accountability arguments and the use of rankings as quality measures, the university environment exerts different pressures upon scholars. This study explores how the PhD students cope with such pressures, by analysing how they justify their publishing choices. Their accounts are analysed by employing a strain of discourse analysis, namely interpretative repertoires, and analyse how through the use of these repertoires, the institutional pressures are managed and the discourses are opposed and reproduced.


To cite this version:

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I Introduction

The last decades have seen different logics playing out in the higher education and research sector. Whereas one the one hand the research elite have tried to extend their influence by using different schemes, the public sector as one of the major funders of higher education and research has tried to use other schemes to extend its own influence. This situation became even more befuddling when other players – from university administrations to NGOs and research funding organisations – began to group together, while at the same time grass-roots movements managed to carve their sphere of influence in the discourse alongside the elites and state actors (Whitley, 2010). All these actors played a role in the more wide-spread game play influenced by grand discourses such as neo-liberal discourse – hence the use of the word sector in the opening sentence.

This multiple stakeholder game-board – especially if one considers that some the actors have taken the game to global setting – creates tensions of autonomy and control (OECD, 2010, p. 24), with the decreased unconditional state grants during the last decades opening the universities and public research institutions to the private market for obtaining financial resources (Whitley, 2010), thus opening the doors for more scrutiny. The issues of accountability, efficiency, and value for money - a legacy of the neo-liberal discourse and the following New Public Management mentality - play an increasing role in the daily life of the public research institutions (Martin & Whitley, 2010; Mok & Welch, 2003).

One apparent result of these increasing pressures of accountability and efficiency is the employment of formal rankings in various forms, such as various university rankings that seem to make headlines from time to time in national news, as well as – and perhaps for this case more importantly – the bibliometric rankings. Needless to say, informal rankings have already existed – and not only for higher education and research institutions, but for every level of education – as most of us had an idea of which the leading universities are, especially in the Northern American and Western European context, and continue to influence the decisions about which university to enroll and work in. However, the expansion of formal ranking schemes, and – though sometimes not so voluntary – adoption of them have created tensions within the academia. Thus it is not surprising that the effect of rankings in the
across the academic setting has been investigated in various forms, such as the effects of the ranking reform in the UK on universities and individual departments (Lucas, 2006) the interplay of performance based funding and ratings (OECD, 2010) and how the authority relationships have changed during the shift from public research to the quasi-market systems, with one important shift being the rankings (Whitley, Gläser, & Engwall, 2010), suggesting that they have an impact on the power relations between different actors, and effect how the education and research is conducted in the universities, and the results of the academic and research activities are published. These ranking schemes do not just play a role in determining which venue to go for publishing and grant applications and how to select students and staff, but structure the activities in the academia to suit to the venue, and thus shifts and reinforces some of the institutional logics in the game-board.

This neo-liberal shift in the academia, with emphasis on the self regulation and performance orientation has been the subject of studies for some time: rewarding the researchers based on publishing in selected outlets seems to become more common as the neo-liberal discourse took root (Anderson, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Lee & Lee, 2013). In such an environment, Gaffikin and Perry (2009) argued that some creative research could be stifled due to the rather hierarchical structure created around the funding race. From another angle, the effect of rankings on the employment has been an issue raised by Redden (2008) as a response to the policy changes in United Kingdom. In such a situation, where neo-liberal policies, with their focus on performance and self-governance have such diverse effects on the academic environment Morrissey (2013) argues that alternatives to the neo-liberal understanding has to be articulated to successfully challenge the “performing academic”. Archer (2008) argued that this situation created additional insecurities, exemplified by a young researcher quoted in her study: “I never feel like I have done anything to the best of my ability, but I am always trying to. I hope that is how my life will continue. I keep on pushing myself and challenging myself and sometimes that doesn’t feel very nice. But I can’t imagine doing it any other way” (p.389), which contrasted with the “golden age” reminiscence of the older academics.

In such a performance oriented world, how do the younger academics cope? With so much reliance on the journal rankings and the pressure to publish, how do they legitimize their choices? How do they resist and adapt to the institutional pressures? This paper tries to delve into these issues, and argues that one way to understand how the rankings affect the conduct of business is through the investigation of the discourse used in the university setting, and aims to elaborate how interpretative repertories (IR) are used to justify the strategies chosen
and choices made in the publishing game, and asks “how do the PhD students account for their publishing choices?”

In the rest of the paper, firstly IR are detailed to provide an understanding of the methodological issues of the study, followed by a section that details the empirical setting of the study, in which the data gathering and the data analysis method are discussed. The following section provides the results and their discussion, with some reflections of these results discussed in the next section, with the conclusions provided in the last section.

II On Interpretative Repertoires

IR constitute a strain of discursive psychology, attributed to the works of Nigel Edley, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (Edley & Wetherell, 1995, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988; Wetherell, 1998) who drew upon the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984/2003) concerning the scientists’ discourse. And as a strain of discursive psychology, IR have three core principles as to what discourse is (Wiggins & Potter, 2008): (1) discourse is constructed and constructive: while the discourse is constructed by the people – assembling words, images – the people are at the same time constructed by the very same discourse; (2) discourse is action-oriented, be it to blame, justify, invite or to compliment, discourse is the primary medium to achieve these actions; (3) discourse is embedded in a context. In their work, Wetherell and Potter (1988, 172) defined IR as “bounded language units”, that are “systematically related sets of terms, often with stylistic and grammatical coherence, and often organized around one or more metaphors” (Potter, 1996), and as “culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes” (Wetherell, 1998, p. 400). Similarly, Fairhurst (2009, p. 1617, emphasis in original) see IR as “… tool bags of terminology, tropes, themes, habitual forms of argument, and so on that, in effect, contextualize by supplying leadership actors with a set of linguistic resources for use in discourse”.

By the flexibility provided of incorporating both the little “d” and big “D” discourse of Gee (1999), representing the language-in-use and the combination of language with other practices respectively, IR enable the users to draw from parallel, as well as paradoxical repertoires, and assume different roles in relation to the situation. The users engage in social action at micro level, managing their positions by drawing from macro level discourses to sustain their arguments. This flexibility of changing roles creates the freedom to change positions when faced with opposing arguments, either explicit or implicit, and enable users to perform different actions to maintain their position as well as influence others, and thus create and
sustain the logics behind publishing. This action-oriented framing of the IR makes it a suitable approach to analyse how the publication choices and strategies, as well as the life around these issues are presented.

III On Empirical Setting

Before detailing the particularities of the study’s empirical setting, the more general field of PhD studies needs to be laid out. One of the apparent differences that the Scandinavian countries have is the dominance of “compilation” theses, in which the PhD students publish several papers and write a “kappa”, an introductory chapter in which the papers are brought together. Though as Park (2007) notes other countries are also seeing this tradition being implemented in their systems, in Sweden, approximately two thirds of the doctoral dissertations are written in this format (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2011), and this choice is claimed to provide “continuous quality assessment” for the research as the papers are peer-reviewed. This externalized legitimation and quality assessment is one part of the change towards the quasi-markets in higher education in Sweden (see: Niklasson, 1996a, 1996b, 2012), and feed back to the publishing pressure that the students feel. Unlike their peers in more monograph dominated research settings, the students have to begin the publishing soon if they want to be awarded their degree.

In light of this general setting of PhD studies in Sweden, this study has its main setting in a fairly large public university. The study was spurred by how the PhD students talked among themselves in various social settings, and how they argued for their publication choices. This informal participation/observation setting was done in the department of the author, which has 23 divisions, ranging from business studies to fluid and mechatronics systems, thus offering a range of students. After realizing the variety of the tools the students use to reason their choices, a formal research plan was constructed, and data gathering in forms of interviews and focus groups was conducted.

The main setting of this study is a fairly large university, for Swedish standards at least, with participants from different divisions and departments, ranging from business studies to technology and social change, from political sciences to information systems. Several students from other universities were also interviewed, or were present in the focus groups, also reflecting a variety of disciplines. The data presented in this paper to argue the existence of repertoires comes from a single focus group interview that involved a participant from
another university in Sweden, with the PhD student coming from veterinary field. The use of only one data source, while limiting the breath of accounts used by the PhD students, provides an in-depth analysis of the data and how the interaction evolved in situ, “the development of a piece of social action as it accumulates over the length of an episode” (Antaki & Horowitz, 2000, p. 157). However, while the main driver is the focus group interview, several data extracts are provided from individual interviews to supplement the discussion, as well as show how the wording and style actually changed in different settings. While, as will be shown, the metaphors and central themes remained the same, the narrative styles differed between these data sources.

The wide spectrum of participants enabled the focus group discuss the issues laid down on the table – namely how do they publish and how are they affected by the journal rankings – from a variety of perspectives, carrying the institutional logics that is present in their own fields and departments to the discussion.

In the focus group, the participants were asked to discuss “publishing from the eyes of a PhD”, with emphasis on how the rankings of publishing outlets play into the whole publishing process and if the participants have a division/field level strategy for these issues represented by the ranking systems. Though as other solicited data sources, focus groups provide opportunities for retrospective reconstruction and prospective accounting (Whittle, Mueller, & Mangan, 2008, p. 109), the speed and the ability to capture the participants constructions of publishing provided by the focus group setting make this type of data gathering permissible to use. As noted by Potter (1996) there is a turn to more “naturally occurring” data in discourse analysis, and thus, the ability of the focus group to provide “a simulation of these routine but relatively inaccessible communicative contexts that can help us discover the processes by which meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk” (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996: 85) makes it particularly suited for the purpose of this paper. To provide an appropriate setting, the focus group was conducted in a silent lounge in the university premises, with the researcher intervening only to provide additional issues to “consider”, with the discussions taking place among the participants. The focus group interview was tape recorded and then transcribed as play script transcription and analysed as soon as possible.

However, to conduct the analysis, one needs to limit what to look for, as IR does not provide a concrete step-by-step method. One such way of limiting what to look for, is provided by the discursive constructionism of Potter and Hepburn (2008), which comprises three classes: (i) category entitlement and interest management, in which the category entitlements of the
social actors are analysed in terms of how they are constructed and opposed, (ii) discursive accountability, in which the narrators’ use of language to manage their accountability is analysed, and (iii) practices of narration, in which the text is scoured for cues of changes in narration (cf. Potter 1996; Manuti et al. 2012; Symon 2008; Shepherd 2006; Mueller & Whittle 2011).

IV Repertoires of publishing

The analysis of the interviews has yielded 3 distinct repertories that were used both in parallel and in contrast to each other: ranking as a driver for publication; scope as a driver for publication; supervisor as the publishing agent. Below the findings of the analysis are presented.

IV.1 Ranking as a driver of publication

This, perhaps not-so-surprising repertoire for those of us in the business, was a recurring repertoire that the participants drew from while discussing their experience as young researchers trying publishing. As a group of PhD students writing their thesis as “compilations”, the participants were, to the most extent aware of the systems that are used to rank the journals. Even the PhD student that began her studies 6 months prior to the focus group meeting had a broad idea about that the rankings play an important role. The extract provided below provides some examples of the repertoire:

L Its, there are just a few journals you can publish. Of course, every one want to publish in Nature. If you can get your paper into Nature then it is[sss] [laughter]
Ö =Hmm
S =Hmm
A Is it that hard?
L Yeah. It is extremely hard. And its, its basically everything in natural science, and its been in Nature, so if you get a veterinary paper in there its, so, it has happened, to some [inaudible]
A Aha
S Oh yeah?
N For my sake, I think it's a bit like Darcy’s, not to that extent but, in our division we have many different sub-fields. For ex. we have organizational management, what I do, but we also have
entrepreneurship, we have people that do gender studies, marketing, finance, so its hard to say that these are the conferences we go to, and these are not, because everybody goes to conferences in their subfields. But, like we talked about =

Ö =hmm

the other day, you have the academy of management, which is really good and one of the best conference in our field, then of course everybody tries to go=

A =hmm hmm

N to that conference, but its extremely hard, because they have about 20 or less percent acceptance rate so its sometimes harder to get in there then in certain journals.

A hmm

N And then, you have also some other conference, that are a little bit more general, but generally you go to more specific conferences, and my opinion is that, a lot of the conferences at least we go to are not as hard to get into as, for example, the Academy. There’s maybe, I don't know, I have a feeling that there is at least 50 or more per cent or getting into those conferences.

Ö hmm hmm

N In terms of journals of course you have, as you said also, A journals that everybody wants to get into, like fore example, academy of management review, or research policy or, those kind of big journals. And afterwards, I mean you have, like for example me, working with management and human resources, and you have international human resource journal and so on, again, apart from the top journals, the A journals, you go down in your sub-fields, when you are not accepted in them (laughter).

The text begins with Lucia’s argument of the need for publishing in a journal suited for her own research, leveraging on the nature of her research area that she explains later on in the focus group. However, as can be seen, the journal “Nature” is provided as an example of the outlet that one wants to get in, how it is hard to get in to “happened to some”, thus providing the first example of the high ranked outlet aspirations.
Natalie provides an introduction to her division, which comprises different disciplines, and builds on the earlier argument of Sten that having an interdisciplinary area makes rankings less meaningful. However by delimiting her field – organizational management – in the division and providing names for the top journal and conferences, thus reflecting the importance of rankings, soon reinforces the importance of rankings.

She further reinforces the ranking system by arguing that “every one” wants to go to the higher ranked conferences and journals, using a small exaggeration to carry her point across. This view is of ranking as the driver is strengthened by the claim that “you go down in your sub-fields, when you are not accepted in them”, which also provides a script formulation to make the occurrence of the phenomenon as a routine act: you try the A level journal, and if doesn’t work, you go down the list. The narrative provided by Natalie is filled with use of “me”, “I”, and “you” as opposed to the passive narration that can also be employed to express the same opinions, coupled with the fact that she is in a group of peers, provides the ability to create empathy by relating to others experiences.

The use of rankings in publishing, aside from the venues chosen are also reflected in other aspects of the daily lives of the PhD students. In the following text, the students are talking about when they can have a pay raise, which occurs at the completion of 30% and 60% of the workload of their PhD studies in the University. The 60% mark usually occurs when the students write a licentiate thesis. Licentiate is a common form of a pre-doctoral degree in Sweden, and some other countries, with differences among universities and divisions of its appropriateness for the PhD studies. As can be seen there are differences in the divisions reflecting the history of the divisions that the students are coming from, and one such difference resonates with the ranking behavior rather closely. This section follows Natalie’s account of a friend in another faculty, in which, the requirements for finishing the licentiate seems to be changing according to the supervisor’s wishes, with the last count being “four at the moment”:

S =For lic?
N Yeah, four papers for the lic. And now suddenly the supervisor filled in, they have, like a for, a paper that supervisor fills in after doing the individual study plan where they put how many percentages, and now the supervisor for himself decided that he will do the lic in fall so in a year instead of, without talking to me, without explaining why, and also like, the first, last semester he was supposed to get 30%, but then he
didn’t get it, because apparently the reason was that he didn’t publish. They usually go on conferences, so, conferences are much more important than journals for them, so he didn’t publish in the conference they wanted, and that’s not his fault, and the other reason is the supervisor only aims for really really like important conferences, where you have like 15% chance of getting in so=

And now after being here two year, he got to 30% while he usually should be 40% or more cause he’s done 60 percent, nn, 60 credits, which you need. He has all the credits for the lic, he has all the papers, it is only like the kappa, so, yeah, it really happens a lot. [laughs]

He really wants to finish after the lic?

No, no he just wants to do the licentiate, I think he really wants to continue with PhD, yes.

Hmm.

But now he is just getting tired that, it is just slipping away from him all the time. He thinks that he is there, and then, apparently something comes up and then, it is moved, so.

[collective hmm]

Our 30% where you get the raise=

=yeah=

=is after 14 months. It is the only criteria for 30%

Yeah, same for us, its, it is time only=

=OK=

and, at half time revision, erm, they go through what you have done and see if you can manage to do this in four years. And if not, you have to take some actions, and you put that pressure on the supervisors.

Here, after Sten’s shock hearing “4 papers for the licentiate”, Natalie gives an account of how the things are run in the Other Faculty. For the students from the University and thus familiar with the issues, the ritual of filling the individual study plan is enacted, with the supervisor filling in the “percentages”. This is further followed by the requirements of the degree being tied to publishing in conferences that “they want”, which are explained as hard to get in, with sometimes as low as 15% chance of getting in. Her storytelling of the “other” PhD student is
peppered with words that entice sympathy from the other students i.e. *getting tired* and *slipping away*, as the students are mostly aware of the time constraints of publishing, and as the “collective hmm” issued by the group, it seems to have succeed in garnering this emotion.

The issue is countered by Sten, who gives an account of how their institute uses a time-based appraisal for salary raise, which is affirmed with Lucia. This time based system is posed as an automatic system, where publishing seems not to affect the pay raise, thus challenges the institutional logic presented by Natalie. Later on in the interview, Lucia’s tone changes to a more assertive one, using a more logical reasoning in her account then the emotional cues used by Natalie:

L and if, if you have been doing your phd 100% for 2 years then it is half time you should get your raise =

N =Yeah

S =Yeah

L Doesn’t matter if you haven’t published anything

N No, no, I know

This discussion among the students also serves to introduce Anna to the logic at her neighbour division, when Natalie assumes the identity of the department rather than just her division. As in line with her earlier style, Lucia is using a rationalistic narrative to manage her peers’ position in not publishing for a licentiate degree, as the experiments themselves take a lot of time.

L I think, it is also because, I mean, before we had you should publish certain amount of papers before half time, but, some other PhD students, our, they spend like two years breeding genetically engineered mice. [overall hmm and yeah]

L I mean that takes a lot of time. They were writing all the papers in perhaps the last two years.

S We have the 30% which is just time based, and 60% with a seminar which is a seminar you have to have before you get to 60% of your time, and then to get the raise you have to pass that seminar=

N =Yeah=

D and have to approve it [inaudible] should do.

L We have a half time seminar, where you present, you have [inaudible]
As can be seen, Anna's argument relies on her knowledge gathered by asking around the division and department, as well as going to her supervisor to ask about her licentiate. From her account, the licentiate is a near norm in the institute that came up during various social situations with peers as she has heard it from a lot of students. This peer created institutional logic however is contrasted by her supervisor, who asks "do you want lic?", which signals that this is an uncommon event in her division. The use of supervisor here is an interesting turn of speech, with the externalisation of the institutional logic of not having a licentiate is done by invoking a category entitlement of a supervisor who has authority in these issues. This use can be contrasted with Lucia's earlier account, in which the externalisation was achieved through the use of a rationalistic language. This justification through the supervisor is seen more clearly at the "supervisor as a publishing agent" repertoire.

Just as having a future in academia was a central theme, as was evidenced in the accounts provided, the ranking repertoire was tightly coupled with the ideas of legitimacy, an issue that became more apparent in the individual interviews. Contrasting a small conference around a sub-theme to ECIS, a widely known information systems conference and in her words "an A level conference", Flora gives an account of her publishing choice.
I don’t think it is just e-government that I am doing, but I can also send to an e-gov conference. But then I know its very, it is a much smaller community, and if I send to ECIS for instance, then I know that IS field is more or less represented there. So I want to get comments, do they also think that this topic is an IS topic or do they see it as an e-gov topic.

That is interesting, because I was talking with some other people, and they were telling that "we would prefer a smaller conference, rather than a big conference".

It depends on also I would say, "Why am I sending?" I’m sending there to... I have a strategy to know wha-, I want to know, the status, more or less, of my ideas. "Are they innovative, or are they, puff". So if I want to know that, I need to send it to big conferences, the reknown conferences. Because just by being accepted you know you are right in some way, or you, erm, its something people want to read about, or=

= interesting=

=yeah it is interesting. And then I also know that that will count later on.

It is as something, what do you say...

For post doc position?

Yeah, for positions and so on. So if I have publications there, than I know that will be looked upon=

= in your CV.

Yeah, so I’m, in that sense I am very strategic. Smaller conferences could be more or less if I want to be, in more constructive, then I would choose,

I wouldn’t choose a conference, I would choose a workshop.

As can be seen, Flora's account contains identity work, in which the bigger and reknown conference, ECIS provides her with the identity of IS researcher, not just an e-government researcher. The wider acceptance by peers through ECIS is then used to legitimize the future academic positions, arguing that these highly ranked outlets "will count later on". Similar accounts were used in other fields, with one account mentioning AOM as a conference in a very similar wording to the one provided by Flora, mentioning how it legitimizes the research and the researcher, as well as mentioning how it provides a "stamp of approval" when the paper is later sent to journals.
IV.II Scope as a driver of publication

This repertoire, once again though not so surprising, comes as a counter repertoire to the ranking as a driver repertoire. Rankings, as an institutional logic that has been in the academia for some time, is contrasted with another institutional logic, the scope as a driver for publication.

And it is also about getting a journal that has the right scope for what you do of course, that is the main thing because they won’t accept it if it is not worth, which is, for me a big problem, because what I am doing right now, its, I mean its never been, no one is doing this in Sweden, no one is really doing anywhere else, I don’t really know where to publish.

But, don’t you have any mo..., like you said, Nature, do you have more general, so to say, journals that you can publish in?

The thing is that this project is really interdisciplinary between Nature, natural sciences and social sciences. Aa, but, the common thing is the forensics, and the forensic journals, you can, they can cut you some slack.

Here Lucia, who has dabbled with the ranking repertoire previously, introduces the scope repertoire. The first half of the sentence signals that scope should be taken into consideration when publishing, posing it as a parallel repertoire. This comes after a discussion about how some factors force the PhD students to send their papers to venues, and introduces the importance of other issues than rankings. The use of the word “also” makes this repertoire a part of the previous repertoire, linking them in a way so that the idea of scope is taken as an addition to the previous repertoire.

The tone changes in the second half of the sentence, posing the scope as the “main thing”, as it is a signifier of the paper’s worth, thus putting the scope in a more contrasting position to the ranking – arguing, if nothing else, that scope should be considered as the first priority – which was discussed previously to this point in the group as a main driver for selecting a publishing venue.

When questioned about some “general” journals, she once again refers to her research being interdisciplinary, and poses this situation as problematic from a scope perspective. This is in alignment with the argument up to this point that specialized journals are preferred. However, in her account, this specificity is constructed on the ground of scope, and as such though her account can be taken as a ranking account based on specificity, the underlying logic is to select a journal based on the scope rather than it’s ranking. Her account is tightly embedded to
her identity work of posing her and her field as interdisciplinary, thus to some extent, exempt from the ranking logics abound in the other participants fields.

L  We don’t really have this problem, the field is so small already, it is more about scope, getting it in somewhere.

N  What I see as a problem, I, can admit right now I don’t understand these systems, I have tried to understand them, but I do not quite still understand how they work, but what I see as a problem is that, of course everybody wants to publish in something they think first relevant, but also will be a credit, I mean, for example good journal.

In her narrative, Lucia uses “I”, and stresses what she does as a researcher as a unique strain of research, as opposed to the externalization Natalie prefers “so to say”. She transforms the earlier question of where to send according to the rankings to a question of where to send that fits my research. This proposition is further strengthened when she is questioned about how she copes with the scope while trying to play the ranking based publishing game.

The use of identity, and the problems to find an outlet that matches the identity is also apparent in other settings. One example from an interview is provided below, in which William, coming from marketing field, argues that to have an audience that understands your work, you need to choose the outlet accordingly. His account revolves around finding the right community, thus sharing a common identity. He contrast the earlier discussed ranking repertoire with the scope repertoire rather starkly, mostly using personal pronouns and leveraging his account to his experiences in publishing. He employs the “general vs specific” concept in similar way to already examined account provided by Lucia to highlight the desire for matching the scope in choosing outlets. He puts forward the argument that if the scope does not match, even a high ranked conference would not be able to provide good comments.

W  You know, I think sometimes finding a very match conference is very difficult. For example, one of my articles, I would like to find a special issue to send them. Because I thought those people will understand my work better. But when I didn’t find these kind of conference, I will send to common conferences. But these people are not familiar= are not so special

Ö  =with your area
W With my area. And it is, it is very interesting, sometimes you are in this kind of pressure. You will not find a community that they are so special in your area, and you go, and find some challenge with your-, positive challenge and comments with your work. It is, I think, it is important. And some conferences, however their brands are good, they are big, but then you are going within this kind of conference, you see, it is- they are not so, maybe, special oriented. They are, just want to, they are looking for general things.

IV.III Supervisor as a publishing agent

The supervisor has played a recurring role throughout the focus group session. As already mentioned in the previous analyses this recurring role has been among others as a tool for cementing the claims that the participants offered, a tool for externalization. In this section however, the repertoire is based on the supervisor more concretely, and shows how interrelated the issues of publishing, rankings and the supervisor are.

In the excerpt that follows, Sten is questioning the use of impact factor, one type of rankings that were discussed in the interview. The impact factor of ISI was contrasted with the Norwegian System. The excerpt while once again showing how the rankings permeate the publishing talk, also is giving the first clue of the supervisor as a publishing agent.

S But why, I mean as I understand, in Sweden, if you are ever being evaluated for your career or your job, than you are being evaluated on, aah, based on that scoring system that you, the Norwegian system, so, aaa, why do you [inaudible]... impact factor. I wonder what they are trying to achieve, other than prestige.

A Hmm

Ö Hmm

N Hmm. Yeah, I’m, I mean I don’t think I have been long enough around to try to understand the logics either behind it. I mean, As a phd student often times you do what your=

A Yeah, exactly=

N Supervisor suggest. Or those you talk to. You talk to him or her, and then they say we should maybe aim for this first and then.. you don’t really question.
In this piece, Sten questions the choice of ISI rankings, and poses the question of the use for prestige as a driver for the ranking, and as such the ranking repertoire, while under question, is still visible in the language used. The favour for the Norwegian system is based on a claim of the existence of a national system: Swedish academic institutions follow the Norwegian system. Natalie's account of not understanding the logics behind gives another clue of how taken for granted the ranking logic has become.

Her account however also gives clear category entitlements: as she is a PhD student herself, she has the authority to make use of the category of PhD students, and contrasts this with the other category, of the supervisor. Another category, used by the supervisor is given: we, which assumes a publishing process where the supervisor and the student is a team. Of interest is once again her use of active tense rather than the passive, thus engaging the participants and having them draw from their own possible experiences.

Next excerpt is opened by Anna, the most recent PhD student in the focus group. She follows the discussion where the participants are talking about how PhD students are expected to publish a number or journal articles.

A [inaudible] I mean like, my supervisor, I think he is kind of experienced and he doesn’t send to bad journals or conferences. And that's why, for me, I have just started, I have no idea about ranking, anything, but those journals which we are aiming for right now, I think they are very, they are high ranked in my field. And, ee, I don’t think, if you know journal of cleaner production, also another one, energy something. Em... [light snickering]

S I think there is a few that begins with energy. [laughter]

A But, energy technology or something like that. And the conference, ECEEE, this is the conference in=

S =Hmm Hmm

A energy efficiency

S Yeah

A You know it?

S I was there last year

A Jahå!

S I didn’t publish though, I just = [had to go]
A =But, does it have good, I don't know, reputation something?
S ECEEE?
A Yeah
S Yeah, yeah it is a conference where you also get a good peer reviewed journal out of it. I think it is probably number one=
A Jaha
S Or number two
Ö Hmm
A Ok. So, that’s what, like, for example, for me, my supervisor doesn’t ask me where I want to go or publish. He just says, “Ok, now we are sending there”
S Really?
N Ok
A Since I trust his, like, experience and everything.

Here the supervisor takes the role of the guide that helps the student by picking out which venues to go for, and this role is granted as the supervisor is posed as experienced. As Anna's account show, some journals are equated by being bad, and her supervisor is, by being experienced in these issues, picks out the good ones. As can be seen, she argues that she doesn't have any ideas about rankings, and excuses that situation with acknowledging that she is a beginner. She uses this to further highlight the role entitlement of the supervisor, as the help given by the supervisor is justified on the grounds of being an experienced researcher.

The use of excusing and justification, two general types of accounts (Scott & Lyman, 1968) in such close connection is of interest here, and show how the situation at hand is managed through both parties involved: the PhD Student and the supervisor. In her account Anna draws from a more embedded discourse than just regarding the academia, but of a number of system of which education is one main part: the role of the teacher as the master of knowledge, and the student as the apprentice. By leveraging her account on such a discourse she is able to make her point and use both justification and excuse to establish the discourse in her language.

From another angle, this script also shows, following her claim of not having an idea of rankings, she is still eager to get in to the rankings repertoire, as she inquires about the conference she has attended, giving a hint of how even this brief socialisation works to spread the logic of ranking existing in others divisions. This excerpt also highlights another way of
how this ranking logic, or in Anna's argument, the classification of good and bad journals, is mediated through the supervisor. The agential power of the PhD students is constrained in her account, whereas the supervisor directs the publishing. Use of the supervisor's speech is once more utilized, with the pronoun "we" once more used to highlight the team perspective espoused.

This rather uni-directional influence on the publishing is also embedded in the wider discourse of the teacher as the master constructed in academia. As the account is structured to justify why the supervisor directs the route to publishing, the lack of agential power of the PhD student is presented as a logical outcome of the situation, and thus is externalized.

Similar accounts are found in individual interviews as well. In these instances, the role played by the supervisor was fleshed out in more detail. Both in the focus groups and individual interviews the talk touched upon the relationship between the PhD student and the supervisor as co-authors, as well as the guide role of the supervisor. One phrase that Flora has used for the interaction between the student and the supervisor was "socialization", how both parties help each other. However, just as this idea was reflected in other accounts, her counter argument, that "this is an idealized version" was also reflected in other accounts. The following account is from Helena, a PhD student from Business Studies. While talking about her strategy for publishing, the talk turns to a more division level strategy and the role of the supervisor is inquired.

Ö We have talked about, well, not necessarily yours, but the supervisors in the department or the division. What is their take on publishing?

H Well, with one of the supervisors I have no idea of what their take is, because we haven't really spoken about it. With my main supervisor, we also haven't spoken about it excessively. I know when we first discussed the form for publication for the first and second papers, there was a very strong push to publish as book chapters. I think at the beginning I was not so convinced that was the best idea, just because I thought "well, lets aim for a conference first, and then see how it goes from there", again with the main idea that, well you know, conferences gonna give good feedback so on and so forth, but then I realized that book chapters were a safer platform.
As can be seen, in her account Helena uses ranking repertoire, justifying her reluctance to accept the supervisor's idea of book chapters as a beginning strategy for publishing. This once again shows how the ranking repertoire has become integrated with the publishing game so that most of the accounts provided in this paper make a reference to it one way or another even when the core repertoire is another. But more interestingly is that deviating from the role of the guide and co-author, the uni-directional aspect – push – of the supervisor is highlighted. In Helena’s account, the realization that the recommendation was a safe choice that could be pursued came after one and a half years into her PhD process, showing a lack of communication within “the student-supervisor team” that is assumed to be the publishing strategy unit in her divisions case. As her account shows, the contact with the second supervisor seems to be non-existing concerning publishing, and her account continues to argue that the work she does with the main supervisor and the other PhD students for the project at hand is more of a “piecemeal thing, more of a patchwork”, once again highlighting the broken nature of the communication in the process.

V Some reflections

Prior to sending this paper to EGOS, I had the chance to air out the ideas presented in this study in various settings. Here some of the insights that were put forward by the participants in those settings are briefly discussed, to both act as a general discussion to the analysis presented up to this point, as well as to hint how some of the issues can be seen differently by employing a different approach to the issue.

One such reflection comes from an earlier draft of a paper that I was working on regarding how the language is used in curricula and how an IR approach would shed some light to our use of language in such a format. One of the issues raised by a participant was that teaching was personal and thus such an analysis is not proper. I can imagine such a comment coming from the same participant, substituting the word “teaching” with “publishing”. To this effect, while acknowledging that such acts are very much personal, I would also disagree to the extent that the way we teach and write, and the way we publish are not so different from our colleagues. This is by no means about saying we share the same success stories with some of our colleagues, but we use similar category entitlements and phrases while teaching, just as using similar methods and writing styles while publishing. One of the reasons of using the focus group data rather than the interview data in this paper was to show how such similarities are created in an interactive setting, just as changing the narrative style of this
section to use a more personal account while turning to a passive language use to externalize the account at the “research related” parts is done to show how language is used with an aim to entice some interest and publish.

One other issue of interest came when the short paper version of the paper was presented in an internal seminar, in which a senior faculty questioned the whole ranking system itself. While highly critical to the rankings, he nevertheless argued that “of course” the journal we send out manuscripts have to be indexed. As similar comments were not recorded, just as they are not covered by the scope of this paper, it is not possible to provide a detailed analysis of this account. However, perhaps one can still argue that “indexing” is a form of ranking to begin with, as the non-indexed venues are counted as second-class, if not worthless, when it comes to publishing in this account. This once again shows how dominant the idea of rankings are, as when this issue was relayed to another colleague, she argued that her paper on an open access journal has reached more than 1000 views, and if those people have read it, she has achieved her goal, to spread her knowledge and ideas, thus using more of the scope repertoire identified.

Another reflection involved with this issue of contrasting repertoires is that perhaps there is an understanding that the scope is already involved with the writing and publishing process so intrinsically, that we don’t bring it up. However, as seen in earlier accounts, the scope was used strongly to create and supplement the identity of multidisciplinary research, thus the assumption of scope being so internalized that it is not talked about is shaky at best. This shaky assumption is also revealed in other settings. Just like the senior faculty account, this setting is also anecdotal and not recorded, but for those of us in the editing and reviewing part of the publishing, would sound familiar.

In 2014, at Umeå seminar of the research school I am affiliated with, Swedish Research School of Management and Information Technology, we had the chance of having a panel session with the seniors that hold editorial positions in various journals. The aim was to give the juniors tips about how to craft a good paper, and why the papers are rejected and the common mistakes that lead to these rejections. One thing that the panel agreed on was that the desk-reject rates are increasing, thus the papers do not even make it to the reviewers. And the most common reason they cited was that the papers do not fit to the aim and scope of the journal/conference. This account shows that while it might be
argued that the scope is intrinsic in the writing thus not articulated in talk, it also seems to be missing from the conduct of writing and publishing. A similar account was provided by Flora in the interview where she also reflected upon the desk rejection issue, and how people send papers that do not fit to the scope of the conferences she served as reviewer, or sometimes sending poorly written unfinished work, thus raising the desk rejection rates.

Some words can also be said about which repertoire was the most dominant one encountered. While recognizing that perhaps due to the framing of the study on journal rankings primarily it was the most prevalent repertoire encountered, it is nevertheless worthwhile to take note that this fits to the situation discussed in the studies mentioned in the introduction chapter. As mentioned before, the initial drive of this study was the recurring use of similar reasoning that the PhD students used while justifying their publishing strategy in informal settings, and one last anecdotal account can provide some insight on the issue. While discussing the acceptance of this paper and giving an update on the writing process to a colleague that was interviewed for this study, his roommate, another PhD student, joined the conversation by asking “what is the impact factor?” This preoccupation with the ranking was used as a conversation starter, rather than using another repertoire, such as asking how this fits to a project using the scope repertoire, or questioning the involvement of the supervisor. While it can be argued that rankings are more of a common currency - as the projects and supervisors might not be familiar to the others - it is still interesting that such use of repertoire in an impromptu setting is a familiar occurrence in these days.

**VI Conclusions**

In this paper, a focus group interview of PhD students was analysed to identify the repertoires used by the students to come to grips of publishing in academia. Through such an investigation, the study aimed to infer how the PhD students resist and recreate the institutional discourses present in the academia while justifying their publishing choices.

Some of these repertoires were used against each other – ranking vs scope as drivers of publishing – showing how the ranking discourse attached to the more neo-liberal post 1970s mode of thinking is still in clash with the older logic. Aside from these repertoires and their sub-repertoires. The participants have used other repertoires to account for the activities involved in publishing, i.e. supervisor as publishing agent.
One implication from these results is the way that PhD students use a variety of sources to account for their actions in the publishing game. Various rhetorical devices are invoked to manage their positions when faced with opposing repertoires. Different roles that are played by different actors – supervisor and the agent – as well as how the overall structure of the game is experienced by the PhD students reflected in the repertoires. The artful use of such repertoires provides the user the power to influence the game of talk, and thus resolve tensions involved in the game of publishing – though probably never resolving all of the issues, reflecting the fluid nature of the PhD students identity.

The results showed that the tensions identified in the literature in other settings are also prevalent for justifying the publishing choices of the PhD students. The tensions revealed when justifying a paper sent to a journal that doesn’t have the aim and scope that matches the paper with the arguments based on the pressures faced for future career choices, which are tightly linked to publishing in highly ranked journals, or to the push-effect exerted by the supervisor showed that the choice of the PhD student is constrained in various ways. Similarly, these tensions highlighted how the identity of the PhD student is flexible; the same PhD student can assume the role of a pursuer of academic knowledge and choosing outlets accordingly, as well as a performance-concerned career-oriented junior faculty that would attend a conference that has attracted big names. The clash of the repertoires in such a setting showcased that the tensions between the neo-liberal construction of the academics and the “golden age” understanding of the academics is still going on, and unlikely to be resolved any time soon.

Acknowledgement

This paper acknowledges The Swedish Research School of Management and IT for funding this work.

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