

Exploring appraisal in claims of student writers in argumentative essays

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents some exploratory observations on appraisal in a set of 40 undergraduate students' argumentative essays. Written texts can be seen to embody, initiate, or simulate various kinds of interpersonal and textual interaction, working together with ideation, as their writers develop and evaluate arguments for reader consideration. In our ongoing research, we investigate the linguistic resources on which undergraduate writers draw for this complex set of intellectual and dialogic purposes. In this paper, we concentrate on the evaluative wording of claims in an English language essay as captured within the framework of appraisal theory (Martin 2000; White 2002). We focus on how student writers convey, and sometimes negotiate, evaluative meanings in claims that they make. Evaluative linguistic choices made by writers of high-rated and low-rated essays appear quite similar in the general incidence of appraisal system resources. At a finer level of analysis, different trends begin to emerge regarding the types of ENGAGEMENT resources used and their combination with GRADUATION and ATTITUDINAL resources in writers' claims. We briefly consider implications for research and pedagogy.

Introduction

This paper reports on one aspect of a complex ongoing investigation of evaluative language that undergraduate student writers in one university setting use in the course of writing their argumentative essays.¹ The investigation as a whole explores ways in which individual students approach different writing tasks in introductory modules in two disciplines (English language and geography) at the National University of Singapore; the present study is concerned with an English language writing task. Part of our motivation for the investigation is to enhance situational understanding and seek pedagogic implications. We also hope to contribute towards efforts in applied linguistics to describe the uses of evaluative language in ways that analysts can apply effectively to student writing, as well as to professionally written texts.

The importance of evaluative language in academic and other forms of writing is attested in the work of a number of scholars (including Hunston 1989, 2000; Hyland 2000a, 2002b; Martin 2000; White 2002), partly

because of the role that evaluative language can play in the textual construction of interaction between writers and readers. Interaction has become well established as a crucial notion in accounting for the nature of written text (for example, Widdowson 1984; Thompson and Thetela 1995; Myers 1999; Thompson 2001), notably, though not exclusively, in the case of academic writing. However, interaction is complex, and its precise definition and status vary in different scholarly treatments in ways that we cannot review in detail.

Within the metalanguage of systemic functional linguistics (following such sources as Halliday 1994 and Lemke 1992), most accounts of interaction are framed primarily in interpersonal terms, although some also consider ideational and textual aspects. A possible danger of concentrating on interpersonal aspects of interaction, and of evaluation, is that the intellectual substance of messages may receive insufficient attention. Stapleton (2002) identifies a comparable problem within writing pedagogy, and argues that attention to the writer's 'voice' should not be at the expense of ideas. Consequently, we must point out that some scholars also emphasise the importance of epistemological and ideational reasons for attending to wording that qualifies the propositions being advanced (see, for example, Salager-Meyer 1998; Hyland 2002b; to some extent, Thompson 2001). Comparably, the approach of Hunston (1989; 2000), following Sinclair (1981), characterises evaluation itself on two planes ('autonomous' and 'interactive'), again helping to ensure that attention is given to propositional content as well as interpersonal aspects of meaning.

In the case of student writers, especially at undergraduate level, the interpersonal management of writer-reader relations can pose considerable demands, often affected by power relations and assessment processes. Ideationally, a notion of knowledge as something provisional or qualified may come into tension with students' previous 'received wisdom' perceptions and experiences of textbook knowledge. Uses of evaluative language in students' essays appear likely to prove important in the textual fusion of these sets of concerns, for example, when selecting what information to highlight in order to advance an argument persuasively. How far it actually does so, however, cannot be taken for granted, but calls for investigation in a variety of settings.

The current study is essentially exploratory and descriptive. We seek to examine the evaluative quality of claims made in first-year undergraduate argumentative essays, and to see whether (and if so, how) differences in evaluative choices of wording prove to be associated with more or less successful written outcomes. We define 'successful' operationally, in terms of overall ratings that subject teachers in English language originally gave to these scripts.

These ratings will have taken account of a range of factors; evaluative choices of wording were not specified as considerations in marking guidelines. We shall consequently compare the types of linguistic resources used evaluatively in claims advanced by students whose scripts received 'A', 'B' and 'C' ratings from their teachers (high, medium and low ratings). Our emphasis falls mainly on a comparison of high-rated and low-rated scripts, also keeping in mind that the relevant student population is already highly selected (prerequisite language grades for course admission) and relatively homogeneous in terms of language proficiency. We introduce our definition of 'claims' later, in the context of the study task.

The framework that we adopt in this study is that of appraisal theory (Martin 2000; White 2002), which brings together various threads of discussion about what contributes to the expression of the writer's attitude or opinion. We find it both sufficiently broad and sufficiently specific to be of value in our enquiry. Appraisal theory is not the only contemporary approach to the analysis of evaluation in language (compare proposals by Hunston 1989 and 2000, which we draw upon in other parts of our research), and some questions remain about its capacity to handle all facets of interaction in argumentative writing, which is not the only genre it is designed to capture. In our experience, nonetheless, the appraisal framework proves to be effectively applicable to the analysis of students' academic writing, as well as that of published writing. The framework has already been used elsewhere to examine students' writing and to show the relevance of appraisal resources in literary and history essays (Rothery and Stenglin 2000; Coffin 2002). In this light, we believe that the theory and framework are worth exploring further, and can throw useful light on our data. As the framework is relatively new, we provide a brief introduction in the next section.

The appraisal framework

This framework comprises three major systems, ATTITUDINAL, ENGAGEMENT and GRADUATION.² Taken together, these systems comprehensively describe the significance of linguistic items typically associated with evaluation. Any direct signalling of a writer's attitude, for example, may also be affected by other system choices that set the degree of commitment or level of qualification to a (possibly reported) claim. Figure 1, which we derive from descriptions in Martin (2000) and White (2002), offers a diagrammatic representation of the major systems.

'Appraisal' includes all 'evaluative use of language, including those by which writers adopt particular value positions or stances and by which they negotiate the stances with either actual or potential respondents' (White 2002: 1).

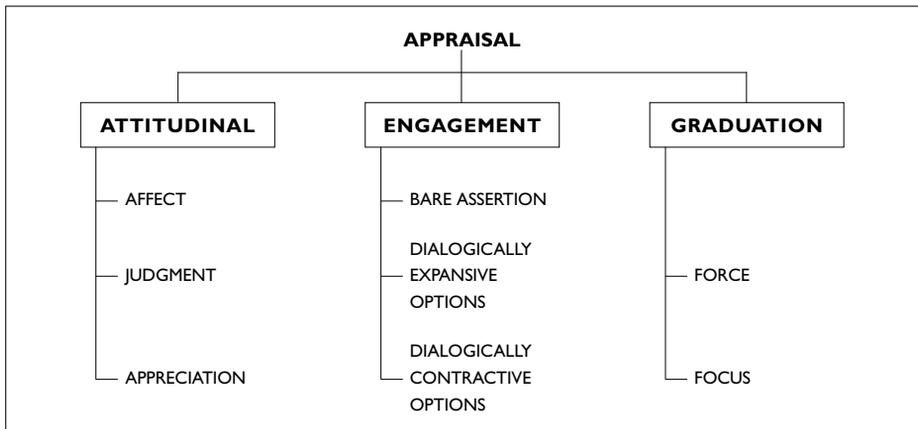


Figure 1: Illustration of appraisal subsystems

Martin (2000: 145) defines appraisal as ‘... semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgments, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations’. Categories of the appraisal framework as derived from these sources are described with examples from our own data. The description is not exhaustive, as space is limited, and does not attempt to do justice to all the complexities, or to account fully for examples by setting them in their wider textual contexts. Some selected details, including occasional modifications, are presented later as we describe actual data from our study.

ATTITUDINAL: The ATTITUDINAL system expresses meanings to indicate either a positive or negative assessment of people, places, things, happenings and states of affairs. The system is subcategorised into AFFECT, JUDGMENT and APPRECIATION, with AFFECT as the basic subsystem. Figures 2, 3 and 4 (Appendix, p 86) provide fuller details.

AFFECT indicates or implies how the writer is emotionally disposed to the person, thing, happening or state of affairs, as illustrated in Example 1.

EXAMPLE 1

In addition, the *antagonism* between the English and the French continued to grow, culminating in the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). (S1 31)³

AFFECT can be recontextualised as JUDGMENT expressed as an ‘... evaluation matrix for behaviour with a view of controlling what people do’ (Martin 2000: 147). JUDGMENT indicates normative assessments of human behaviour, typically making reference to rules or conventions. This is shown in Example 2.

EXAMPLE 2

This reality is that the slaves *did not have any social power* or say in America.
(S6 25)

AFFECT can also be recontextualised as APPRECIATION expressed as an ‘... evaluation matrix for the products of behaviour (and the wonders of nature), with a view to valuing what people achieve’ (Martin 2000: 147). APPRECIATION indicates assessments of the form, appearance, composition, impact, significance of human artifacts and natural objects as well as human individuals (not behaviour) by reference to aesthetics and other systems of social value (Martin 2000: 147). This is shown in Example 3.

EXAMPLE 3

One of the *main* reasons for this is due to their status as slaves on American plantations.
(S6 18)

In Example 3, a ‘reason’ has been evaluated as being a ‘main’ or central reason. This deviates from the original sense of APPRECIATION as used in the appraisal framework which is more inclined towards the description of the aesthetics of things. However, Martin (2000: 160) clarifies that the item of valuation in the APPRECIATION subsystem ‘... has to do with our assessment of the social significance of the text/process’. It is also VALUATION that is ‘... especially tied up with field, since the criteria for valuing a text/process are for the most part institutionally specific’ (Martin 2000: 160). Hence, in Example 3, one of the reasons given in the text is evaluated to be of central importance and this represents an APPRECIATION: VALUATION of a text entity. The valuation of a reason as a ‘main reason’ is significant in the context of an institutional genre such as the argumentative essay.

ENGAGEMENT: Through the ENGAGEMENT system, the writer can negotiate and moderate the level of commitment to propositions made. The framework, however, emphasises the role of ENGAGEMENT resources in regulating the dialogic space made available for propositions made. According to the appraisal framework, ‘all utterances to some degree take into account or respond to prior utterances and to some degree anticipate or acknowledge likely responses, reactions and objections from actual or potential dialogic partners’ (White 2002: 13). An utterance represents one option amongst a diversity of sociosemiotic realities. Thus those utterances that employ ENGAGEMENT resources acknowledge the dialogic potential of the utterance, while those that do not do so thereby deny or ignore the dialogic nature of the utterance inherent in the communicative social context.

The various options in the ENGAGEMENT system are defined and described in Figure 5 in the Appendix (p 88). Essentially, the options represent different degrees of acknowledgment of dialogic diversity. Bare assertions are utterances that do not employ any ENGAGEMENT resources. These utterances exclude dialogic diversity. Utterances that are 'extravocalised' (assigned in some manner to another source, without the writer's endorsement: see Figure 5 for elaboration and illustration) are most open to such diversity. Utterances to which the writer expresses commitment tend to reduce or 'contract' dialogic space to varying degrees (Figure 5).

As part of the ENGAGEMENT system, intertextual choices (see Figure 6 in the Appendix, page 89) concern the selection of linguistic items through which the writer adopts a stance towards texts that are attributed to other writers. The degree of ENDORSEMENT, the SOURCE TYPE and the type of TEXTUAL INTEGRATION all contribute to the intertextual stance taken by the writer towards the attributed text. The set of intertextual options also expresses the insight that the manner in which sources are represented or reported helps to convey the writer's attitude, a point that is not always recognised.

GRADUATION: The set of GRADUATION resources can be used to moderate or amplify evaluations, notably ATTITUDINAL ones, for our purposes particularly including those of VALUATION (see above comments under Example 3). GRADUATION concerns the semantics of scaling. It is concerned with values which act to provide grading or scaling, through expressions of intensity attached to an utterance (Force: for example, *quite a lot*, *slight change*, *tempers flared*) or in terms of the precision of focus with which a relationship is exemplified (Focus: for example, *somewhat*, *sort of*, *grave mistake*).

The study

The essays examined were taken from an assignment written by first year undergraduates reading English language at the National University of Singapore. One of the essay assignments in this English language module (EL1102, *Studying English in Context*) required students to write a 1500-word essay in response to the following prompt:

'One compelling reason for change is the need for language to adapt itself to the needs and realities of the speakers.' Discuss the above statement by focusing on changes to the English language either in the Middle English period or in the context of the USA.

As can be seen from the prompt, writers need to take a position on the issue of whether they think 'the need for language to adapt itself to the needs

and realities of the speakers' constitutes 'a compelling reason for change in the English language' and to substantiate that position with examples from either the Middle English period or from American English. Thus, the evaluative quality of the essay is potentially crucial, as the writer's opinion or stance is important here.

From a batch of about 200 essays that were graded by four subject tutors, a total of 40 essays were selected for analysis, as follows:

13 'A' grade essays

13 'B' grade essays

14 'C' grade essays

This selection comprised all the 'A' and 'C' essays in the original batch, which means that numbers for these categories were operationally dictated by the data. 'B' grades were by far the most common. It seemed reasonable for our exploratory study to concentrate mainly on the high- and low-rated essays to see what trends might emerge. Given the intensive nature of the analysis, only a random selection of 13 'B' essays, as a sample of comparable size, was included for further comparison.

The focus of the analysis is on how claims are advanced in these essays. Our present definition of 'claim' is, however, a selective one. Rather than attempting to analyse every statement that makes some kind of claim, we focus only on claims that are central to the essay topic. Toulmin (1958: 97) defines a claim as 'a conclusion whose merit we are seeking to establish'. In the context of this study and the specific essay prompt, we define a claim operationally as:

A conclusion whose merit we are seeking to establish. A decision can be made by identifying a set of sentences which would suggest to the reader the importance of the role of needs and realities as a factor for change in the English language, either with regard to Middle English or American English.

Applying this definition, the first author identified and coded all claims in the set of 40 essays. Using the above definition of a claim, both authors decided to exclude statements such as that in Example 4, as it does not address the main issue.

EXAMPLE 4

Changes in grammar reduced English from a highly inflected language to an extremely analytical one. (S7 19)

Example 4 describes a change in the language but it does not relate that change to a particular factor of change. Hence it is not analysed as a claim.

Both authors carried out an inter-rater analysis on a sample of four essays. There was 80 per cent initial agreement on the identification of what statements constituted claims within the essay. Differences largely reflected doubts over what constituted the restatement of the same claim as opposed to a separate claim, depending on the extent of rewording involved. For operational reasons, we excluded from our scope any restatements of earlier claims in the course of the essay although we may pursue this aspect in future as preliminary inspection indicates markedly more restatements in the 'A' essays than the 'C' essays. One hundred per cent agreement was reached at the second round of analysis after reconciliation of perspectives on some of the claims identified. Our aim was to ensure that procedures were applied consistently across the data, for example, with regard to what we counted as new claims or as restatements. Ultimately, these decisions still involve interpretation, and the inter-rater exercise has sought to maintain consistency within that element of interpretation.

As descriptive research questions, we asked to what extent the evaluative quality of claims made by better and poorer writers proved to differ in terms of:

- 1 the ATTITUDINAL resources used
- 2 the ENGAGEMENT resources used (dialogic positioning)
- 3 the GRADUATION resources adopted.

We examined all claims in the three sets of essays for the relevant categories of appraisal resources.

Results and discussion

The data analysed show that a preponderance of ENGAGEMENT resources were used, and so the presentation focuses on these, and refers to other systems where necessary to throw further light upon the results. In the findings presented below, the 'A', 'B' and 'C' grade essays (henceforth referred to as A, B or C scripts) prove quite similar in the incidences of major appraisal resources used. Some differences become apparent at a finer level of analysis, looking into particular types of ENGAGEMENT resources used and the manner in which GRADUATION, ATTITUDINAL and ENGAGEMENT resources are combined in the claims.

Table 1 shows the number of claims found in the different sets of scripts. These numbers are broadly similar (there are slightly fewer claims in the set of 14 C scripts, but the trend does not approach significance). We note, though, that there were two C scripts in which no clear claim could be located.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the different types of ENGAGEMENT resources used in the essays.

Table 1: Number of claims

	A scripts (13)	B scripts (13)	C scripts (14)
Number of claims	33	30	26

Table 2: ENGAGEMENT resources used in claims

	A scripts	B scripts	C scripts
BARE ASSERTIONS	12	11	13
PROCLAIM	3	4	3
DISCLAIM	1	0	1
PROBABILISE	9	10	7
* PROBABILISE + Others	6	3	1
ATTRIBUTED	1	2	1
QUESTION	1	0	0

* For example: Therefore, I *would* agree (PROBABILISE) with the statement that language change is to meet the needs of its speakers, not forgetting the *fact* (PROCLAIM) that the speakers ...

All the categories in the ENGAGEMENT system were used by the writers in each set of scripts except for the B set where there was no occurrence of DISCLAIM. 'PROBABILISE + Others' is a category created based on the recurrence of claims in these samples where PROBABILISE was used together with other ENGAGEMENT resources in the same claim. An example appears immediately below Table 2. The category of QUESTION was added, even though the appraisal framework does not generally include interrogative forms. The reason for this addition is explained below.

There are three aspects that show interesting patterns of usage of ENGAGEMENT resources. First, only one writer, in one of the A scripts, used a question as a means of conveying a claim. The appraisal framework discusses the use of rhetorical questions as a form of ENGAGEMENT, in that such questions may be used to convey a sense of PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD. However, in the case of this essay, the writer seems to be asking a real question rather than a rhetorical question in the statement of claim, as can be seen in Example 5:

EXAMPLE 5

However, were the changes really a result of the needs and realities of these speakers or was it merely a natural progression of a language? I shall be exploring this issue by looking at external evidence in order to explain the internal evidence found in Middle English. (S1 3–4)

Thompson and Thetela (1995) examine the use of questions in advertisements to create a sense of interaction between the intended audience and

the writer. Hyland (2002c) discusses the functions of questions in professional academic writing. One of the uses of questions is to set up claims. These two studies advocate the interactive quality of question forms and their potential propensity to engage the reader strategically. Accordingly, depending on its function, a question could in some instances be categorised as one of the options in the ENGAGEMENT system that expands dialogic diversity in the appraisal framework.⁴

Second, in terms of attributed claims, we found that one writer each from the B and C scripts attributed their claims to two different lecturers of the module taught:

EXAMPLE 6

There were many changes made to the language owing to factors such as social, political, economic and ideological changes. (Dr X) (S24 2)

EXAMPLE 7

The four factors are as follows: first adapting to the needs and realities of the speakers, identity, contact and borrowing, regularisation and deliberate planning. (Lecture 4 – Dr Y) (S30 5)

In Examples 6 and 7, the writers attribute claims to their lecturers and do not subsequently clarify whether they themselves take the same position. It is perhaps typical of student writers to represent certain claims as authoritative and indisputable by attributing them to authority figures. This appears unproblematic when claims are indeed uncontroversial (as seems likely in Example 6), but there may be some tension (not least within academic expectations (Lea and Street 1999)) when students present claims as uncontested wisdom when they might have started to treat them more cautiously. In Example 7, for instance, it may have been convenient for a lecturer to discuss factors under four headings, but critical readers of the essay may still question whether there are only these four factors at work.

Third, some trends concerning the use of PROBABILISE eventually prove interesting. By itself, the level of usage does not differ notably amongst the three sets of scripts, as can be seen from Table 2. However, PROBABILISE is also frequently used with other ENGAGEMENT resources within a claim. An example is provided in Table 2, where a PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD is combined with a PROCLAIM (in fact) within the same claim. When the two categories of PROBABILISE and PROBABILISE + Others are combined, they make up 45 per cent of the ENGAGEMENT resources used in the A scripts, 30 per cent in the C scripts and 43 per cent in the B scripts. Thus, set C

already has a somewhat lower proportional (and absolute) occurrence of **PROBABILISE** and **PROBABILISE + Others** than set A (and B).

More striking differences come to light at a more delicate level of analysis, as we will presently show within the category of **PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD**. The options of **PROBABILISE: EVIDENCE**, **PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD** and **PROBABILISE: HEARSAY** are described in Figure 5 in the Appendix (p 88). As explained by White (2002), these options are set in a cline such that **PROBABILISE: EVIDENCE** indicates a higher degree of dialogic space than **PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD**. Within each of these options, there is also a cline of force or intensity. Using the example of **PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD**, a statement such as 'I'm certain' is higher in intensity than 'I suspect'.

The results show that the composition of **PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD** (high) and **PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD** (low) used differs quite markedly amongst the sets of scripts. This is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: List of 'PROBABILISE' used in claims

A scripts	B scripts	C scripts
PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (high) (2) It is true It is certainly true	PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (high) (5) It is inevitable Especially true Inevitable Inevitable changes Inevitable	PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (high) (4) It is true It is true It is inevitable It is as inevitable as it can get
PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (13) Can be explained Can be attributed I would agree I would like to conclude It can be related XX can be discussed I would just like to conclude There can be ... One can argue no further XX can be attributed One possible reason We can say One should say	PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (8) Cannot Will Can Can be said Can be seen Can Can be interpreted Seems quite true	PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (4) XX may be Usually, XX I would have to say It is suggested

In the A scripts, **PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD** (high) constitutes only 2 out of the 15 **PROBABILISE** used (13 per cent) while in the C scripts, it constitutes 50 per cent. In the B scripts, the same category constitutes 38 per cent of **PROBABILISE** options used. While we would need to obtain larger samples before testing for statistical significance, we believe this trend is sufficiently pronounced to merit further study.

As discussed earlier, in comparison to the C sets of scripts, the A set has a

somewhat higher occurrence of PROBABILISE and PROBABILISE + Others. Also, the A writers seem to use PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (high) less frequently. The B writers' frequency of usage falls neatly between the A and C writers. It seems plausible from this observed trend that the C writers as a group are more inclined to formulate their claims with less tolerance for an alternative perspective, as PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD (high) involves statements that express a higher level of personal stake involved should one reject the proposition. Consequently, these statements are more resistant to potential rejection as compared to low or median values for PROBABILISE: LIKELIHOOD.

Table 4 shows the use of ATTITUDINAL or GRADUATION with ENGAGEMENT resources within individual claims.

Table 4: ATTITUDINAL and ENGAGEMENT resources in claims

A scripts	B scripts	C scripts
ENGAGEMENT + ATTITUDINAL resources = 11 claims	ENGAGEMENT + ATTITUDINAL resources = 6 claims	ENGAGEMENT + ATTITUDINAL resources = 7 claims
ENGAGEMENT + GRADUATION resources = 8 claims	ENGAGEMENT + GRADUATION resources = 1 claim	ENGAGEMENT + GRADUATION resources = 3 claims
Total: 19	Total 7	Total: 10

In the three sets of scripts, the use of either a GRADUATION or ATTITUDINAL resource with an ENGAGEMENT resource constitutes 57 per cent, 23 per cent and 38 per cent of the claims in the A, B and C scripts respectively. This can be seen in Examples 8, 9 and 10. Generally speaking, a higher percentage of claims in the A scripts use a combination of appraisal resources. However, the usage does not decrease in correlation to the lower grades as the C essays have a higher occurrence of these usages rather than the B scripts.

EXAMPLE 8

In its bid to stay relevant, the needs and realities of the speakers *have indeed* played a *significant* role in the changes made to Middle English.

(S1 104) [ENGAGEMENT/PROCLAIM + ATTITUDINAL]

EXAMPLE 9

In conclusion, language change *can* be discussed as *mainly* resulting from language contact, social attitudes toward a language, and language planning, rather than the result of the Whorfian view.

(S8 53) [ENGAGEMENT/PROBABILISE + ATTITUDINAL]

EXAMPLE 10

In my opinion, the above four areas (attraction/repulsion, regularisation, language contact, changing realities) fall into the very general category of 'needs and realities of American English speakers', and thus all contribute *in their own ways as compelling* reasons for the language change and adaptation.

(S7 12) [ENGAGEMENT/PROCLAIM + ATTITUDINAL + GRADUATION]

This could mean that the A writers are more inclined to use a variety of appraisal resources when they position themselves. They may convey their attitude (ATTITUDINAL), express their awareness of the diversity of positions that can be taken (ENGAGEMENT) and at the same time adjust the intensity of their evaluation (GRADUATION). This might ultimately result in claims that do not seem too abrasive or overbearing.

One way of indicating the writer's claim appropriately is through adopting a strategy of problematisation. In her study of novice and expert argumentative writing, Barton (1993) observes that expert writers tend to make clear the issue being debated through such a strategy. A proposition is presented and then problematised through the use of an evidential of contrast (for example, *but*), for instance. The expert writer then takes a position with reference to the contradictory views expressed. Example 11 (invented) illustrates the strategy:

EXAMPLE 11

Public concern on XXXX might have allowed for necessary action to be taken to nip the problem in the bud. *However*, these early attempts to alleviate the situation have also resulted in the premature demise of creative ideas that might ... (Contrastive evidential)

Comparatively less successful attempts to problematise were apparent in some of the scripts analysed. The failure to achieve the intended impact can be explained through the use of intertextual choices together with other ENGAGEMENT resources, as seen in Example 12:

EXAMPLE 12**Introduction**

According to Dick Leith, linguists often assert that 'all languages develop vocabularies that fully serve the needs of their users'. One language may have a richer vocabulary in certain social aspects than another, and this often leads to the claim that different speakers have different perceptions. This proposition of thought and behaviour as influenced by language is best defined by the Sapir Whorf Hypothesis, which was established by American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. (S8 6–8)

Conclusion

In conclusion, language change can be discussed as mainly resulting from language contact, social attitudes toward a language, and language planning, rather than the result of the Whorfian view of language speakers' needs and realities.

(S8 53–55)

The propositions in the above introduction are rather tentatively set with the use of 'may' and 'often'. In intertextual terms, the writer begins by attributing the position of language change being motivated by needs and realities of speakers specifically to 'Dick Leith' and generally to 'linguists'. The reporting verb 'assert', according to the appraisal framework, indicates a sense of 'responsibility delegated' to the source. There is no clear indication of what the student writer's view is toward this issue. This is probably a failed attempt to problematise, assuming that the writer's underlying intention was to bring in the delegated position statement in order to disclaim it. The student writer does finally take a contradictory position in his conclusion. However, the debate would have been much clearer if the issue had been problematised successfully in the introduction.

Conclusion

All three sets of essays, from high-rated to low-rated, show appraisal resources being used to evaluate claims. These resources are used to different degrees and in different ways to produce more or less effective claims. For instance, the ways in which different systems of appraisal resources are combined in claims may lead to claims coming across as more or less salient in their evaluative stance. The differences, though, are relatively fine-grained, and not simple matters of the presence or absence of particular appraisal systems. They contribute to, but do not actually determine, the overall success of an essay within an institutional context. Accordingly, a great deal more research on a wider range of writers and text types would be needed before making strong and specific recommendations for pedagogy.

A preliminary call for attention to this area can nonetheless be made. Coffin's (1997) analysis of students' history essays shows clearly that the strategic use of different systems of appraisal resources at different stages in the genre of historical accounts helps convey the writer's attitude effectively, but that these ways of evaluating are not always apparent to the novice writer. In this light, pedagogy involving effective appraisal of ideas surely forms an important element in the teaching of writing. Rather than waiting for definitive research findings to materialise, we would want to encourage teachers to continue and renew explorations with their students of the lexical choices that signal attitudes, probabilities, and points of view in the ideas and arguments they advance in their writing.

NOTES

- 1 The full investigation is the ongoing doctoral research of the first author, supervised by the second author.
- 2 We follow a common practice in the literature on appraisal theory in capitalising key terms in systems and subsystems.
- 3 S1 denotes the script number; 31 denotes the sentence number within the script.
- 4 A forthcoming publication by White addresses the use of questions as an option in ENGAGEMENT (personal communication with the first author).

Appendix

APPRAISAL SUBSYSTEMS

	Surge of behaviour	Disposition
Un/happiness (negative) Unhappiness/misery (mood in me)	Whimper Cry Wail	Down Sad Miserable
Antipathy (directed feeling: at you)	Rubbish Abuse Revile	Dislike Hate Abhor
Happiness (positive) Cheer	Chuckle Laugh Rejoice	Cheerful Buoyant Jubilant
Affection	Shake hands Hug Embrace	Fond Loving Adoring

Figure 2: AFFECT

Source: Figure 2 is drawn from a fuller treatment given in Martin (2000: 150–61).

Social esteem 'venial'	Positive (admire)	Negative (criticise)
Normality (ate) Is he or she special?	Lucky, fortunate, charmed ... Normal, average, everyday ... In, fashionable, avant-garde ...	Unfortunate, pitiful, tragic ... Odd, peculiar, eccentric ... Dated, daggy, retrograde ...
Capacity Is he or she capable?	Powerful, vigorous, robust ... Insightful, gifted, clever ... Balanced, together, sane ...	Mild, weak, wimpy ... Slow, stupid, thick ... Flaky, neurotic, insane ...
Tenacity Is he or she reliable, dependable?	Plucky, brave, heroic ... Dependable ... Tireless, persevering, resolute ...	Rash, cowardly, despondent ... Unreliable, undependable ... Weak, distracted, dissolute ...

Figure 3: JUDGMENT

Source: Figure 3 is drawn from a fuller treatment given in Martin (2000: 150–61).

	Positive	Negative
Reaction: impact Did it grab me?	Arresting, captivating, engaging ...	Dull, boring, tedious ...
Reaction: quality Did I like it?	Lovely, beautiful, splendid ...	Dry, ascetic, plain, ugly
Composition: balance Did it hang together?	Balanced, harmonious, united ...	Unbalanced, discordant ...
Composition: complexity Was it hard to follow?	Simple, elegant, intricate ...	Ornamental, extravagant, monolithic ...
Valuation: was it worthwhile?	Innovative, original, unique ...	Conservative, reactionary ...

Figure 4: APPRECIATION

Source: Figure 4 is drawn from a fuller treatment given in Martin (2000: 150–61).

<p>DENYING DIALOGISTIC DIVERSITY</p>	<p>BARE ASSERTION: An utterance which does not employ any value of ENGAGEMENT. Such an utterance ignores the dialogic potential in an utterance. Example: Language change stems from various phenomena.</p>
<p>CONTRACTING DIALOGISTIC DIVERSITY</p>	<p>DISCLAIM: DENIAL: An utterance which invokes a contrary position but which at the same time rejects it directly. The contrary position is hence given very little dialogic space. Example: Language change <i>does not</i> stem from one phenomenon.</p> <p>DISCLAIM: COUNTER-EXPECT: An utterance which invokes a particular expectation but does not reject it directly, as in the case of the DISCLAIM: DENIAL. Instead, an alternative is provided to counter the expectation. Example: Undoubtedly, the cultural factor is important in the process of change <i>but</i> language change stems from various phenomena rather than from just one factor.</p> <p>PROCLAIM: EXPECT: An utterance which does not invoke an alternative position but expresses a strong level of writer commitment. The direct expression of commitment results in the utterance becoming somewhat less than absolute. The strength of the commitment derives partially from the notion that the proposition is generally known as accepted. Thus, it allows little space for negotiation for an alternative position. Example: <i>Of course</i> language change stems from various phenomena.</p> <p>PROCLAIM: PRONOUNCE: An utterance which also expresses a strong level of writer commitment and thus results in it being seen as less than absolute. However, it allows more dialogic space than PROCLAIM: EXPECT as the commitment is attributed to self and not to people generally. Example: <i>I am therefore convinced</i> that language change stems from various phenomena.</p> <p>EXTRAVOCALISE: AUTHORIALY ENDORSED: An utterance which expresses the writer's alignment with and endorsement of an attributed proposition. As such, the dialogic space is somewhat narrowed. Example: Linguists <i>agree</i> that language change stems from various phenomena.</p>
<p>EXPANDING DIALOGISTIC DIVERSITY</p>	<p>PROBALISE: EVIDENCE: An utterance which invites dialogistic alternatives through the use of evidential formulations such as 'it seems' and 'apparently'. Example: <i>It seems</i> that language change stems from various phenomena.</p> <p>PROBALISE: LIKELIHOOD: An utterance which invites dialogistic alternatives through the use of modals of probability and other interpersonal metaphors such as 'I believe' and 'I suppose'. Example: <i>It is possible</i> language change stems from various phenomena.</p> <p>PROBALISE: HEARSAY: An utterance which invites dialogistic alternatives through the use of hearsay or quotatives such as 'It's said' and 'I hear'. Example: <i>I hear</i> language change stems from various phenomena.</p> <p>EXTRAVOCALISE: ENDORSEMENT NEUTRAL: An utterance which signifies maximum dialogic space as the writer attributes the proposition to a source and distances himself/herself from the source. Example: <i>Some linguists say</i> that language change stems from various phenomena.</p>

Figure 5: Options in ENGAGEMENT resources

Source: Adapted from White (2002)

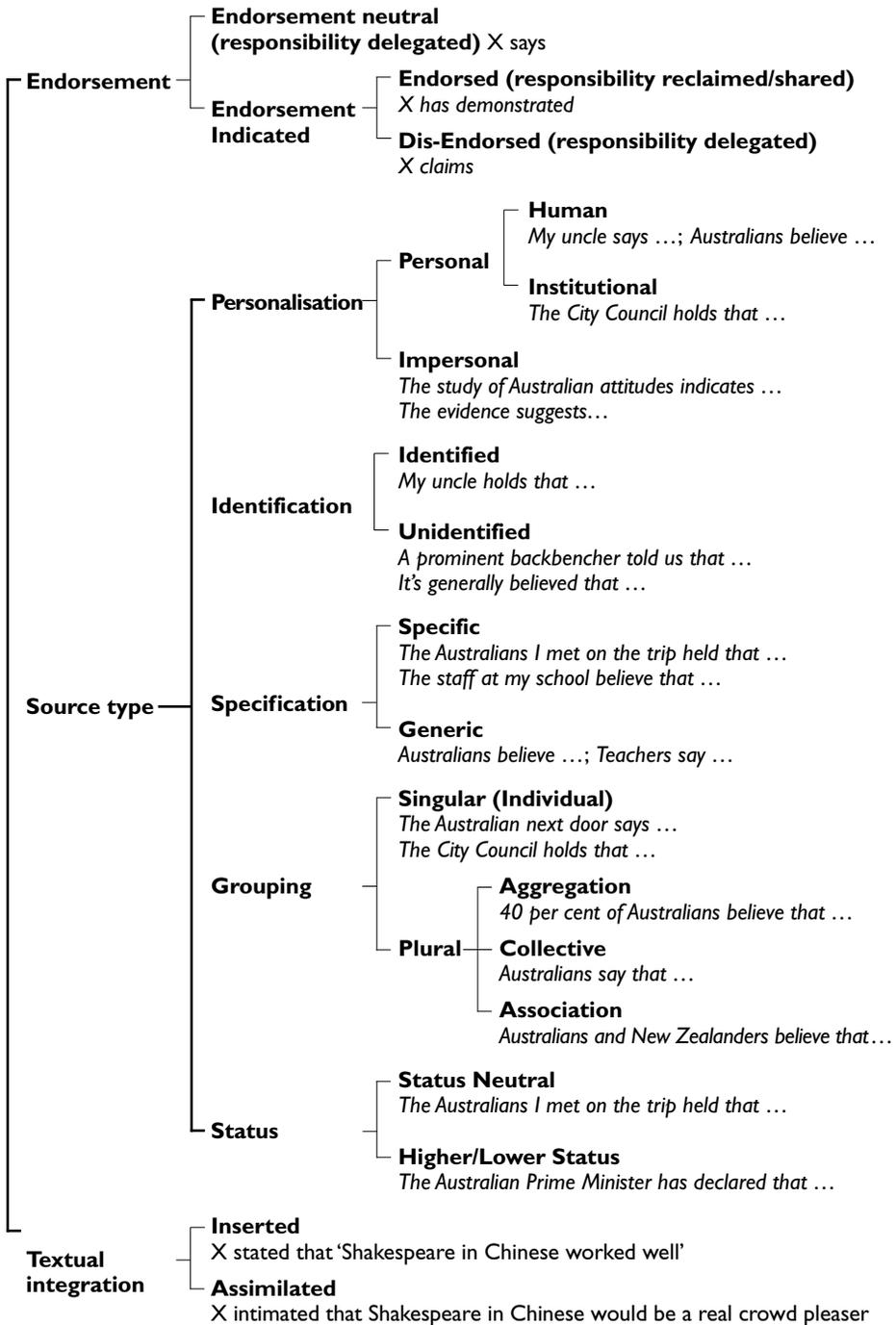


Figure 6: Intertextual aspects of ENGAGEMENT system

Source: Adapted from White (2002)

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