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ABSTRACT

This thesis is located at the intersection of linguistics and education. The aim of the thesis is to explore, from a linguistic perspective, the construction of evaluative stance in the introductory sections of academic research papers, in order to input directly into pedagogic practice in academic literacy in English. The pedagogic focus is research writing at undergraduate level, a context that represents an important transition for many students into new forms of language, as they learn to argue for their own research in relation to other knowledge and other knowers in their field.

The data for the study include the introductory sections of both undergraduate dissertations written in English as a second language, and the introductory sections of published research papers that were used as pedagogic models. The linguistic construal of evaluative stance is investigated through a detailed study of the discourse semantics of interpersonal meaning, drawing on the model of Appraisal within Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin 2000) as the theoretical point of departure. Language choices in the data are interpreted with reference to the theory. At the same time the theory itself is interrogated and further developed in its application to the academic texts that comprise the data in this study. An initial analysis of the construal of evaluative stance in the published texts becomes a reference point for identifying the resources and strategies used by the student writers. The objective, however, is not primarily to make generalisations about how published writers and student writers evaluate. Rather the aim is to develop a theoretical framework to explain the evaluative strategies that are encoded in the texts, and the implications of choosing amongst different strategies.

The thesis contributes a theoretically motivated, multidimensional and dynamic explanation of evaluative stance in the context of academic argument. The study addresses the kinds of values that are expressed, how and by whom, as well as how interpersonal meanings are distributed in texts and how they interact dynamically in the construction of an argument for the writer's own study. The thesis contributes functional linguistic explanations of the ways in which academic writers manage the dual demands of 'objectivity' and argument, as well as how they manage to maintain solidarity with their academic discourse community while establishing difference and hence space for their own research. The thesis explicates a range of evaluative strategies employed by academic writers, and demonstrates how different evaluative strategies have implications for the construction of different kinds of knowledge.

From a pedagogic perspective the explanations of evaluative stance developed in this study provide insights and resources for teachers of academic English literacy to assist them in modelling evaluative strategies in academic research paper introductions, and in negotiating effective strategies with their students.