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Stance construction in L2 argumentative essay writing

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Abstract

This article investigates how students as authors find their tone when crafting academic arguments. It centers on the students' control over the evaluative factors contributing to their scripts in terms of demonstrating successful and unsuccessful voices. The research shows how the APPRAISAL theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics accounts for authorial voice in students' academic writing. The categories of the ATTITUDE subsystem of Appraisal (Affect- Judgment-Appreciation) in particular, highlight the expressions that are used more by the target students to express negative or positive authorial voice in their writing. Important implications for supporting and encouraging this learning in academic writing courses in English as foreign language contexts are drawn from the findings, which add to our knowledge of how university students learn to create a voice in their argumentative writing.

Keywords: Appraisal, attitude, authorial voice

Introduction

In this work, the authorial Attitude describes the relationship between the authorial voice and other voices, such as the putative reader. While writing, the engagement technique can be achieved when the author carefully selects specific language patterns. Accordingly, enabling the author to satisfy the demands of the discourse community regarding the disclosure of one's abilities in expression while also exchanging information regarding his or her ideas in terms of analyzing, supporting, allowing for additional voices in the text, and producing material that supports the readers [Hyland, 2008] ^[7]. The author's point of view on the subject matter is also communicated through various lexical components, known as the authorial posture. The way authors portray themselves to readers and the topic they are writing about is known as taking an authorial posture or a stance. It represents how language is used in interpersonal contexts. Taking an authoritative stance is a critical skill in good writing, not just in overtly contentious literature often associated with the social sciences and arts but also in other academic writing that could make "objective" statements [Abdulhussein, M., 2016] ^[1]. How a writer's identity is reflected in literature has always equipped the curiosity of scholars. Academic writers employ several strategies to present themselves in their work. Still, the most prominent is using first-person pronouns to establish an authorial voice and support claims [Cheung, Y. L., & Lau, L., 2020, p. 225] ^[2].

As structured in different genres, the sequential effects of posture indicators have been the focus of many studies in recent years. Linguists, sociologists, and anthropologists have used the elements of Attitude to explain the social meanings of language. During the past few decades, there has been a considerable increase in "conference panels, multiple book publications, and particular journal problems dedicated to the subject" that center on the position in research (Englebretson, 2007, p. 1) ^[3].

Du Bois (2007) provided a collection of materials to analyze a stance triangle. According to the stance triangle, contrary to what other scholars have claimed, a stance comprises three separate activities. Evaluation, placement, and alignment are all terms that Du Bois uses to describe different facets of the same stance act. According to Du Bois, "I evaluate something and thereby position myself, and in that way align with you" is how one takes a stand (Englebretson, 2007, p. 163) ^[7].

In the article "Model of Interaction in Academic Discourse," Hyland defined posture, its several facets, and its functions. This posture model consists of four parts: Self Mentions, Attitudinal Expressions, Boosters, and Hedges. The author also defines Attitude as the "voice" of a work, which is demonstrated by the author's use of culturally attuned language

features to introduce the reader to the writer, the writer to the reader's worldview, and the writer to himself. Each of the following phrases might be used to convey this idea: First, "to the degree to which they are willing to invest in it," The mood they wish to express to the reader, a proposition, or something (Hyland, 2008, p. 6) ^[7].

The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based Appraisal Theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005) ^[14, 10, 11] analyzes, categorizes, and characterizes the elements that individuals utilize while negotiating Attitude processes. Despite its relative youth, appraisal theory has established itself as a robust framework for understanding social phenomena. Numerous studies in several domains have been based on this hypothesis. Because of its wide range of possible applications, this theory has inspired authors to use it in a variety of genres, including works of outstanding literature, scholarly works, political writing, legal scholarship, and psychological research. Depending on their specific foci, several of the works either employed the entire Appraisal system or selected specific components for their analysis. The primary purpose of these research projects was to compare and contrast how various academic fields employ language in their analysis and material comparison. In the 1990s and 2000s, Martin and White developed the appraisal

framework, which gives meanings analyses by which texts transfer negative or positive evaluation, by which the directness or intensity of such attitudinal utterances is increased or decreased, and by which writers/speakers dialogically with potential respondents or previous speakers to the current reposition. These tools for meaning creation are collectively referred to as the "language of evaluation" because they are all ways for the speaker or writer to reveal their personality and a critical engagement with the text by taking positions either toward the things, events, or affairs states that the text is construing or toward the propositions about these things, events, or affairs states.

Attitude the subcategory of Appraisal (Figure 1) used in this study includes those meanings utilized by speakers or texts to put an intersubjective value to respondents and processes with reference either to emotional responses or to value systems that are culturally obtained (Martin & Rose, 2003) ^[10]. The Attitude can be categorized into three parts (Subsystems) (Salvi, 2010) ^[15]: i. Affect: This involves phenomena described by reference to emotions or feelings. ii. Judgment: This evaluates the behavior of humans concerning sanctions or social standards. iii. Appreciation: Instead of human behavior, it assesses things (Objects) and products regarding principles of aesthetics and other systems of social value [Jalilifar, A., *et al.*, 2012, p. 83] ^[8]

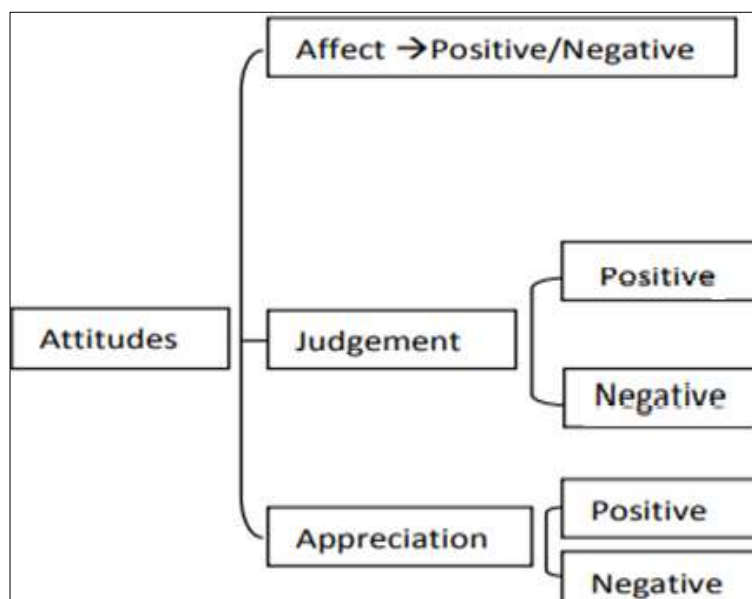


Fig 1: The system of Attitude category of the Appraisal Theory adapted from (Martin and Rose, 2003:22-65) ^[10]

Applying the Attitude subcategory of Appraisal is a powerful way to describe the creation of academic arguments for inexperienced writers by utilizing evaluative strategies in the texts' argument structure. Furthermore, advocating for particular approaches to analyzing the development of viewpoints in texts and elucidating the evaluative attributes of academic arguments to inexperienced writers may be enhanced by understanding which prosodic features remain consistent throughout the different stages of text creation.

Methodology

Data Collection and Procedure

According to Martin & Rose appraisal is "concerned with the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved how values are sourced and

readers aligned". It is "something to do with evaluating things, people's character, and their feelings". This study is aimed to describe 1) how the Appraisal System is used to express the students' attitudes in their writing, and 2) The pedagogical implication of the study on English teaching. The study is qualitative and descriptive in nature, based on its characteristics. The students' attitudes as they were shown in their writing were revealed using a qualitative approach. It is also descriptive in the sense that the goal of this study is to describe how interpersonal meaning is realized in writing using Martin and Rose's (2003) ^[10] Appraisal Systems.

In this study, the data were collected during the academic year 2022-2023, the researchers as they are the teachers of the course asked the students to do a task as a part of their activities through the academic writing course. The unit of

analysis in this study is centered on the realization of interpersonal meanings using words or phrases to indicate the attitudes indications in the text. In particular, the data were obtained from the written texts. The students were asked to write and express their attitudes regarding “Social Media” after a pre-elementary discussion and ideas exchange about how much social media influenced their life.

The number of students who participated in the study is 45 undergraduate students who majored in English at Al-Farahidi University in Iraq. The 3rd stage students who chose to achieve the study are both male and female aged between 20 and 27, and all of them are native speakers of Arabic. They had already passed two courses of academic writing including paragraph writing and essay writing. English is the medium of instruction and the students are required to handle their assignments in English. However, sometimes it is important to use Arabic when there is a necessary need.

In the analysis of data, Martin and Rose’s (2003) ^[10] model of Attitude (Fig. 1) was followed. As mentioned earlier Attitudes include three subcategories Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. The researchers read all 46 essays carefully and highlighted all the expressions of Attitudes and classified them according to the model of analysis (Fig.1), i.e. Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation expressions.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to examine how the students’ writers express an authorial voice in their academic writing. In other words, how they can show positive or negative attitudes toward certain topics which is in the case of this study “Social Media”. The students were given the chance to write an argumentative essay about the topic as an activity they have to do throughout the course. For sure, the student learns how to write an argumentative essay and they have a preliminary introduction about how to write about the topic. Additionally, they were asked to read, discussed in groups, and used the internet to help for more knowledge regarding the topic they were going to write about.

The researchers used a qualitative analysis because the qualitative analysis offers a more adequate connection between Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation expressions, that in general do not interpret merely words or phrases but may appear by focusing on the whole sentence although they are the keywords that facilitate the analysis process. Additionally, to ensure consistency only one of the researchers analyze the students’ scripts, and to ensure agreement the other researcher analyze 25% of the whole texts [Vinagre, M., & Corral Esteban, A. 2018, p. 342] ^[13]. In fact, the Attitude keywords appear in the text as verbs, adjectives, nouns, verbs, and phrases, so the researchers highlighted these expressions to classify and interpret the results.

Only the explicit expressions of Attitude were found and examined. Researchers in appraisal claim that these expressions might be positive or negative in accordance with a system of norms that follow and they can turn the volume up or down (Hood, 2008) ^[6]. The total number of Attitudes among all attitudes expressions of the data under analysis is 253. It consists of 110 (46. 8%) expressions of Affect, 98 (38.7%) expressions of Appreciation, and 45 (17.7%) expressions of Judgement. It appears from the

results that students can use expressions of the Attitude category, specifically Affect, and Appreciation respectively, to communicate their thoughts on the topic they were asked to write.

From the results, we can see that the attitude distribution in the academic writing of the university’s students shows how students communicate their ideas to produce a text appropriate for its communicative goal. The students generally used repetitively simple words to show their attitude toward the topic they were writing about. This indicates that “undergraduate students have their linguistic proficiency (syntax and vocabulary) by using common words in their writing” [Fitriati, S. W. *et al.* 2018, 336] ^[5].

Consequently, the students tend to specify certain situations in reference to feelings or emotions as in the following examples.

1. I agree that social media has a damaging influence on our communities. [Negative Affect].
2. Social media gives the chance to the people to meet and participate in activities. [Positive Attitude].

In fact, the appraising expressions of Affect are useful to express the students’ feelings which may be in their opinion can be delivered to the reader through writing (ibid, p. 335). The most dominant expressions of Affect are positive which means that most students convey their feelings of happiness and satisfaction by using these appraising items positively.

In the case of this study, the higher presence was of the Affect expressions which indicate that the students reported their emotional reaction toward the topic they discussed whether this reaction was negative or positive. They were eager to demonstrate openness to expressing their own feelings and experiences rather than to judge opinions or behavior or evaluate others’ experience towards social media whether it is negative or positive. Affect keywords like” happiness, unhappiness, desire, depression, dissatisfy” that “registering positive or negative feelings towards an entity, process, or state” [Margarita Vinagre, p. 342] were found in the students’ scripts.

The high incidents of Affect expression indicate the student’s dis/satisfaction regarding social media in our case, however, the analysis shows much occurs of Positive Affect compared to Negative Affect. This means that students tend to express their interpersonal values more positively in our case to show connection and interaction with the ideas they express. In other words, they tend to express their own feelings and emotions directly rather than judge behavior or opinions or appreciate a phenomenon. This direct expression of feelings reveals confidence in what is said, as to be “honest, direct, sincere, straight, and frank about the phenomenon he is dealing with.” [Rohmawati, I., 2016, p. 32] ^[4].

The second subcategory of Attitude in students’ scripts is Appreciation. According to Martin & White (2005) ^[11] “appreciation’ relates to the evaluation of objects and products by reference to community-recognized values” [Martin & White, 2005, p. 45] ^[11]. Hence, Appreciation expressions reflect students’ view positively or negatively toward things rather than people as Judgment / Attitude expressions can express. In this sense Appreciation shifts feelings or emotions “from a personal to an institutional framework” [Jalilifar, A., *et al.*, 2012, p. 89] ^[8]. In the current study, students value social media by using expressions like (Useless, bad, uncomfortable, lazy,

confusing.) which indicate Negative Appreciation, and expressions like (Necessary, elegant, useful, good,). The following examples are found in the students' scripts, they express Negative and Positive Appreciation.

1. People get really confused by the large number of news on social media. [Negative Appreciation].
2. Social media is a good way to increase knowledge and development. [Positive Appreciation].

By using Appreciation students assess the value of things (Human, process, art, text,) whether positively or negatively. [ibid] In this study, Appreciation incidents are realized in the students' writing as Adjectives, adverbs, Nouns, and Verbs. The students construe their Appreciation towards Social Media by reflecting on their reactions towards other people's opinions and views and stressing the social norms regarding social media usage. They try to show emphasis and interest regarding their appreciation and assessment of the norms governing the society and provide opinions and evaluation of the cultural norms and how they feel about the way others behave in social media.

The last subcategory of Attitude that is used less in students' scripts is judgment. The judgment reflects the students' evaluation regarding the topic they are writing about. Judgment can be explicit or implicit [Lancaster, C. I. Z., 2012] ^[9] in other words, either to esteem or criticize a phenomenon or a person. So in the case of the students' script, they tend to express their judgment positively by using expressions like "*strong feelings of, lovely, wonderful, pleasing,*" or they can estimate negatively by using expressions like "*Odd, unusual, worst, terrible, having undesirable*". As can be shown in the following examples:

1. Some young people foolishly spend much time online, instead of having fun with their friends outside. [Negative judgment].
2. Social Media is a powerful tool that allows people to connect with others who share the same interest. [Positive judgment].

The judgment reflects the students' attitude toward social media in terms of acknowledging, criticizing, and praising behavior or phenomenon, or people which can be negative or positive [Setieya, M., & Husein, R. 2019, p. 278] ^[12]. In the scripts under analysis, the students seem very sensitive about criticizing others. In other words, they seem unwilling to reflect a clear opinion regarding or they are hesitant to judge negatively people who use social media.

To sum up, it can be understood that the evaluation of feeling is called Affect, the evaluation of things is appreciation, and the evaluation or attitude toward someone is called Judgement. Hence, it appears from the results above that students while writing can have good feelings that reveal confidence towards the thing they are writing about. Their feelings can infer positively and negatively in terms of Affect / Attitude which was found to be the dominant in their writing. Appreciation on the other hand can be done towards assessing or evaluating things positively or negatively. The students in their writing denoted a real appreciation for social media as an important device for learning, interacting, and development. In Judgement, students construe a positive or negative reaction toward people. Judgment incidents appear fewer than Affect and Appreciation which may be indicated that students as writers lack the ability to develop critical skills.

Conclusion

The current study makes an original contribution to the field of academic writing. It showed that the students' attitude toward writing is a matter and it is manifested in various ways. The study utilized the appraisal theory in particular the attitude subsystem of appraisal which includes three categories (Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation) to examine the students' views in terms of attitude in academic writing. The point of concentrating in this study is to show how undergraduate students in the 3rd stage can reflect their affect, judgment, and/or appreciation while they were writing. The results indicated that the students tend to express their feelings and emotions in terms of affect category whether negatively or positively. Also, they used appreciated expressions as they feel that they can reflect more interaction with the readers. Finally, they used fewer expressions of judgment which may be indicated that the students lack the ability to convince readers about their point of view. The study recommended further studies, especially in higher education to get better knowledge regarding academic writing improvements, as to investigate how students can reflect their voice, position, and evaluation to what they are writing about.

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