Attitude in undergraduate persuasive essays

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that investigated the expression of evaluative language in persuasive essays written by undergraduate students. The main focus of the study was to explore differences in the use of evaluations between high-graded and low-graded essays. The expressions of evaluative language were analysed with reference to attitude. *Attitude is one of three main components of the* Appraisal System *in language, which is concerned with the use of evaluative language. Appraisal theory has been developed within the broader theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and focuses on the interpersonal metafunction of language.*

The findings of the study reveal that, while high-graded essays maintain their formality, they more frequently and skilfully deploy multiple attitude-invoking judgment strategies. These strategies are identified in terms of their contribution to the success or otherwise of the texts. The paper also considers how these linguistic strategies might inform academic literacy support to foster critical components in student essays.

Introduction

Academic staff frequently express concerns about lack of critical voice, lack of stance and identity, and failure to develop an argument in undergraduate writing (Ballard and Clanchy 1991; Belcher 1995; Bloch and Chi 1995; Ivanic 1998; Ivanic and Camps 2001). While these elements are essential components of quality persuasive essays[1] (Johns 1993; Kamimura and Oi 1998; Varghese and Abraham 1998), most undergraduate students, particularly English as a Second Language (ESL) international students, experience difficulties in constructing critical voice when arguing a case (Arsyad 2000; Thompson 2001; Hirose 2003; Braxley 2005; Lee 2006, 2008a, 2008b). From a linguistic perspective, problems associated with a lack of critical stance in argument may be closely linked to a lack of skill in manipulating evaluative language.

The use of evaluative language has been investigated, in various contexts, by scholars from different disciplines, using different terms. For instance, writer-oriented features of dialogue have been explored under the terms *stance* (Hyland 1999, 2004; Hood 2004b) and *authorial stances* (Biber and Finegan 1989; Hunston and Thompson 2000). The issue has also been addressed in terms of evaluation of entities and propositions in academic research articles (Thetela 1997) and personal views in undergraduate essays (Myers 2001). Scholars agree that the use of evaluative features, such as expressions of opinion, has different constraints in different genres (Myers 2001) and displays considerable variation across genres (Al-Sharief 2001).

The literature stresses that evaluative language and raising critical voice in academic writing are integral to successful essay writing. However, very little research has explored the effect of evaluative language on the quality of persuasive essays by using a rigorous linguistic framework that encapsulates evaluations. Recently developed linguistic descriptions of evaluative language, termed *appraisal*, have proven a useful way of exploring these issues at the level of discourse semantics (see Martin 1997, 2000, 2003). Appraisal theory has emerged from the elaboration of interpersonal resources, such as mood, modality and attitudinal lexis, within the theoretical framework of SFL (Martin 1992a; Halliday 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Appraisal theory refers to delicate interpersonal resources of evaluative language at the level of grammar and discourse. From this perspective, interpersonal meaning is organised according to prosodic structure (see Martin 1992b, 1995, 2003). Prosodic structure or interpersonal structure spreads or diffuses interpersonal meanings over an extended text, and these meanings accumulate, reinforce, intensify

or resonate with each other to construct an evaluative stance (Martin 1992b; Lemke 1998; Martin and Rose 2003/2007; Hood 2006).

Attitude is one of three main appraisal systems. It is concerned with the linguistic inflection of adopting subjective positions (see White 1998, 2004; Macken–Horarik and Martin 2003; Martin and Rose 2003/2007; Hood and Martin 2005; Martin and White 2005). Attitude divides into three sub-systems of increasing delicacy:

1   Affect – expressions of feelings and emotions.

2   Judgment – evaluations of human behaviours.

3   Appreciation – evaluations of things and entities.

These three values are further sub-categorised, as presented in Figure 1 (see Martin 2000; White 2004; Hood and Martin 2005).

Figure 1: Typology of attitude systems
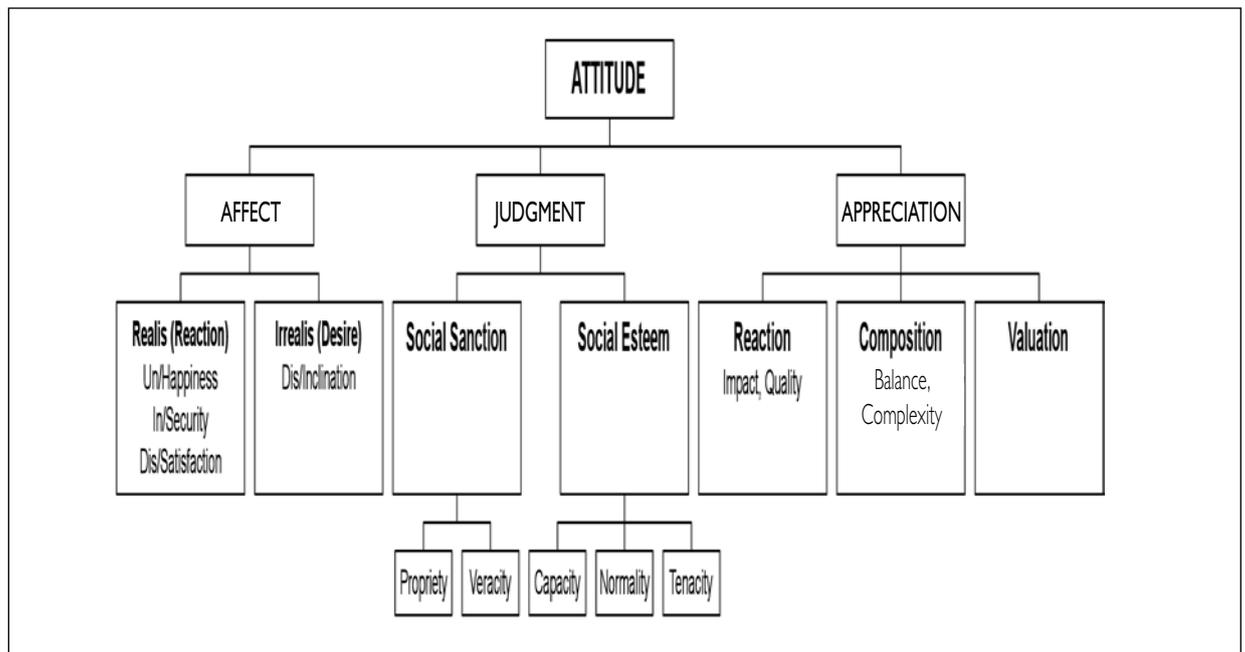
Attitude was initially identified through SFL research into the narrative genre in secondary school contexts (Martin 1996; Rothery and Stenglin 2000; Macken–Horarik 2003). In the academic context, studies of evaluation and interaction in essay writing have focused on the genre or *move structure* of expositions and on the grammatical resources for interpersonal meaning. However, there has been little attention paid to the semantics of interpersonal meaning in academic writing and its realisation through prosodic structure (Hood 2004a, 2006). The only study undertaken in an academic context targeting ESL writers in the second-language context is by Hood (2004a, 2004b, 2006). Hood analysed how novice academic writers construct an evaluative stance in introductory sections of academic research papers. Student dissertations and published articles were compared in terms of attitude and graduation. Graduation is related to intensifying or downgrading a given value. Hood focused on identifying what is being appraised between the research-oriented field and the subject matter-oriented field, as well as how graduation resources evoke attitude.

The present study aimed to compare good and poor argumentative essays written in a university English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. In order to address the problems associated with lack of critical voice alongside formality in persuasive essays, the ways the undergraduate writers constructed evaluative stances were explored via their utilisation of attitude resources, both at the level of discourse semantics and grammar.

Methodology

Design and research question

The site for data collection was an EAP class in the Faculty of Arts in a regional university in Australia. The study focused on two groups of six students undertaking the same course with the same lecturer: six students were East Asian students (EAS) from countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and six were Australian-born native English-speaking students (ABS). Most of the students were in their first year at university. The participants were divided into three groups by the researcher:

1   Successful writers achieving high grades of a distinction (D) or higher for their essays (high-graded essays – HGEs).

2   Less-successful writers achieving middle grades of a credit (C) or a high pass mark (P+) for their essays (middle-graded essays – MGEs).

3   Unsuccessful writers achieving low grades of a pass (P) or fail (F) for their essays (low-graded essays – LGEs).

Evaluation criteria applied in marking the essays were described in SFL terms and were explicitly stated in handouts to students. Throughout the semester, students were required to write four major assignments, each of which scaffolded work towards a final assignment chosen for analysis. For the final assignment, the students were required to construct an argumentative or persuasive essay of no more than 1000 words discussing the following topic: universities in Australia need to learn not only from the Western intellectual tradition but also from those of other cultures in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

In SFL terms, the essay is regarded as an analytical exposition[2] in which students need to take a stance and argue a point of view. The study aimed to identify the grade-based differences with regard to the deployment of appraisal resources in constructing an evaluative stance through the following research question: what are the differences between high-graded essays and low-graded essays relating to the three sub-systems of attitude?

Method

All attitude items can be connoted as being either positive (+) or negative (–) values. A further dimension of all three attitude systems is that they can be distinguished as either inscribed (explicit) or invoked or token (implicit). The inscribed evaluation is explicitly presented by means of a lexical item, for example He is <u>abusive</u> to his children. Invoked attitude does not involve explicit, direct attitudinal evaluations, but draws on ideational meaning to connote evaluation, for example <u>He smacks his children very angrily all the time</u>. The invoked realisations are divided into those that invite a reaction using intensifiers, for example, *smack, very, all the time*, and those that provoke one through the use of lexical metaphor, for example, *anger* (Martin 1996, 2003; Martin and White 2005). With regard to the judgment value, provoked judgments use other evaluating elements that direct the reader to a judgment. For example, in the following sentence, evaluations such as *reluctance, learn* and *problem* are evaluative items that provoke the impropriety of doing the wrong thing:

> Universities in Australia's <u>reluctance</u> to <u>learn</u> from Indigenous cultures may contribute to the environmental <u>problem</u>.

In relation to implicit attitude values, the analysis applies a double-coding technique (see Lee 2006, 2008b), which refers to items being simultaneously coded as two values (Rothery and Stenglin 2000). This occurs horizontally, as two values are parallel coded by the same text elements according to different appraisal categories, as shown in this example:

Sentence 1 *In the Indigenous world-view, the land and nature are sacred and are respected by man, and are not to be exploited.* (ABS 8–20)	can be rephrased as	Sentence 2 *The Indigenous world-view is respectful to the environment.* Sentence 3 *Indigenous people are respectful to the environment.*

Sentences 1 and 2 are typical examples of 'incongruent formulation' (Martin and White 2005: 68) that involve 'borders' (Martin and White 2005: 58) between judgment and appreciation. This is because the words carry positive ethical values of propriety but the target being appraised is the Indigenous world-view, which is a semiotic thing or value, not directly targeting behaviour or character. The examples have clearly a different rhetorical purpose compared to the congruent formulation of Sentence 3. The incongruent clauses (1 and 2) are thus double coded as judgment:propriety and appreciation:valuation, while the latter congruent one (3) is single coded as judgment:propriety. Double coding has a pedagogic implication for formal and abstract writing. This method was extended to differentiate successful essays from unsuccessful essays.

Quantitative overview analysis

Table 1 outlines quantitative overviews of the essays in terms of the deployment of attitude.

Table 1: Number of attitudes deployed in essays

Attitude sub-system	EAS	ABS	TOTAL
Affect	36	38	**74**
Judgment	452	420	**872**
Appreciation	416	383	**799**

Table 2 shows a marked difference in the deployment of attitude between the top four HGEs and lowest four LGEs.

Table 2: Deployment of attitude between highest HGEs and lowest LGEs

	HGEs	LGEs
Essay 1	275	90
Essay 2	165	122
Essay 3	178	144
Essay 4	161	97
TOTAL	**779**	**453**

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When closely examined, this gap is generated by the greater use of judgment in the top four HGEs, followed by affect and appreciation, as shown in Tables 3 to 5.

Table 3: Deployment of judgement	HGEs	LGEs
Essay 1	144	38
Essay 2	81	68
Essay 3	92	65
Essay 4	86	45
TOTAL	**403**	**216**

Table 4: Deployment of affect	HGEs	LGEs
Essay 1	14	6
Essay 2	7	5
Essay 3	16	4
Essay 4	7	6
TOTAL	**44**	**21**

Table 5: Deployment of appreciation	HGEs	LGEs
Essay 1	117	46
Essay 2	77	49
Essay 3	70	75
Essay 4	68	46
TOTAL	**332**	**216**

This shows that evaluation in the LGEs (with the exception of Writer 6) consists of a relatively higher proportion of appreciation than judgment.

Analysis of affect

Due to limited space, only the two highest-graded essays and two lowest-graded essays are compared here.

High-graded essays

Affect is the resource deployed for construing emotional responses and feelings. Emotion is construed by successful writers through a greater variety of the sub-affect categories. Table 6 shows the different ways in which emotion is construed in the HGEs and the LGEs.

Table 6: Deployment of sub-categories of affect

Affect sub-categories	HGEs	LGEs
Insecurity/security	16	3
Dissatisfaction/satisfaction	17	3
Disinclination/inclination	8	10
Unhappiness/happiness	3	5

The HGE pattern of using affect is illustrated in the following sentence, where all the elements contribute to doing the right thing – judgment:propriety.

> *If universities in Australia can learn* [capacity], *then this will bring social satisfaction and security.*

The successful writers employ what I call *an affect-invoking judgment pattern*, as can be seen in Examples 1 and 2.

Example 1

> *The Chinese intellectual tradition, due to* **admiration** [+satisfaction] *for order, strongly* [graduation] *values social contribution rather than individual success* [+capacity], *and reproduces knowledge based on past works* [t, +propriety/val][3] (EAS 1-13).

Example 2

> *The need to learn* [+capacity] *other intellectual tradition* [t, –capacity] *is* **peace** [+security] *between groups of people* [t, +propriety/val] (EAS 2-32).

As seen in these examples, HGEs use nominalisation to obscure the agency of the sensor of the emotion. The affect within HGEs is packaged as nominalised and is thus backgrounded with no agent involved, for example *admiration, peace.*

Example 3

> *This work ethic has been a major contributing factor in the rebuilding* [+capacity] *of Japan after the widespread destruction and* **devastation** [–unhappy] *caused by the* **humiliating** [–unhappy] *defeat* [–capacity] *in the* **Second World War** [–propriety/security] [t, +propriety/val] (ABS 7-12).

Example 3 is from an essay written by an Australian-born English-speaking student who frequently exploits sub-categories of affect, such as:

- un/happiness – love, affinity, humiliating, devastation

- dis/satisfaction – respect, veneration, pride

- in/security – lifetime security, war

- dis/inclination – endeavour, want, the need.

In particular, affect in the HGE written by the ABS is amplified through enrichment or augmenting, for example *security of lifetime employment, widespread destruction, alarming, devastation, humiliating*. These types of affect involve intensification, typically via graduation-infused force.

Low-graded essays

Affect in low-graded essays is mostly constructed through the un/happiness category, in contrast to the variety of affect values chosen by successful writers. Further, affect feelings in the essays of unsuccessful writers are not interconnected with judgment. Neither are they connected with the main thesis of the essay, ie that universities can learn from other intellectual traditions. Most importantly, LGEs tend to use affect by presenting a person as the one who is experiencing the emotion, as seen in Examples 4, 5 and 6, which construct subjectivity through personalised affect.

Example 4

> *Some <u>students</u> may use the time to* **make merry** [+happy] *more* (EAS 5-21).

Example 5

> *However, the* **freedom** [+happy] *could spoil* [–propriety] <u>*students*</u> *in Japan* (EAS 5-23).

Example 6

> *Another common factor within intellectual tradition is that <u>we all</u>* **feel need** [+inclination desire] *to understand ourselves in every way conceivable* (EAS 6-34).

Example 6 also constructs emotion within obligation, using the mental process *need*. In this study, the desire value *need* falls within affect inclination, for example *want, would like to, attempt, wish, endeavour*. The EAS writer of Example 6 presents herself as the person experiencing the emotion through *we all … ourselves*. This is different from HGEs that attach emotional quality to an aspect of experience itself.

In successful essays the positive and negative affect values trigger the main 'axiology' or 'value orientation' (Lemke 1992, 1998), for example *learn from other cultures such as Eastern and Indigenous culture*. The ABS writer of Example 3 intensifies, reinforces and infuses the following message across the argument prosodically: if Australia desires to learn from other cultures, for example *endeavour, want, the need*, then it becomes a secure, happy and satisfactory country, for example *security, veneration, pride, love, respect, kinship, affinity, appreciate*. Otherwise it will become an insecure and unhappy country, for example *world recession, enormous external debt and severe droughts, devastation, humiliation, war, alarming situation, concern*. In contrast, this pattern seldom occurs in the unsuccessful essays.

Analysis of judgment

Academic arguments encode a high frequency of ethical concern, given the nature of the register. Among the five sub-categories of judgment, capacity and propriety play central roles for the main axiology. The

top four HGEs exploit judgment more than twice as often as LGEs, as seen in Table 3. Propriety and capacity in HGEs are balanced, while judgments in LGEs are made more by capacity, tenacity and normality than by propriety. Further, ethical concern in HGEs is clearly achieved by choosing implicit tokens rather than explicit values of propriety, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Number of instances of implicit and explicit propriety in HGEs

	Implicit/tokens	**Explicit**
Essay 1	82	11
Essay 2	19	16
Essay 3	25	16
Essay 4	17	13
TOTAL	**143**	**56**

Conversely, propriety within LGEs is constructed with explicit propriety evaluations being chosen over implicit propriety, as seen in Table 8 and shown in the ensuing analysis.

Table 8: Number of instances of implicit and explicit propriety in LGEs

	Implicit/tokens	**Explicit**
Essay 1	6	5
Essay 2	7	21
Essay 3	5	5
Essay 4	1	3
TOTAL	**19**	**34**

High-graded essays

Capacity and propriety are significant choices of judgment made by successful writers. Capacity codes people's ability, while propriety is concerned with being ethically right or wrong. However, successful writers do not overtly judge right from wrong. Ethical concern is mostly construed by implicit tokens of judgment. HGEs are primarily concerned with a positive assessment of propriety, and judgment:propriety is invoked by what I call *multiple attitude*, which means that co-patterning and transformation of all attitude values contribute to the creation of a text axiology of learning from other cultures.

Example 7

> *However, in order to **meet the challenges** [+valuation][t, +capacity] of the 21st century, Australian Universities would **need to learn** [t, −capacity] not only from the Western intellectual tradition but also from those of other cultures in considerations of **advancing** [+capacity] with appropriate [+valuation] plans, **creating solutions** [+capacity] for environmental problems [−valuation] and reducing international **disputes** [t, −propriety][t, +propriety] (EAS 1-3).*

Example 7 is the main thesis of Essay 1. The main thesis in the introduction helps us to predict that the point of departure for the argument frequently employs propriety values. For example:

> If Universities in Australia learn [capacity] from other cultures, then they solve [capacity] three main problems (−valuation) then this leads to doing the right thing [propriety].

The writer of Essay 1 mainly exploits capacity, for example *meeting challenges, need to learn, advancing, creating solution*, and other inscribed appreciation, for example *challenges, problems, appropriate*, in order to provoke ethical concerns, rather than directly inscribing oppositions of doing the right or wrong thing.

Example 8

> *These challenges* [−valuation] *include* **technological advancement** [+capacity], ***environmental protection***
> [+propriety] *and peace* [+security] *between groups of people* [t, +propriety/+valuation] (EAS 2-6).

Example 8 was written by EAS 2 and the combination of capacity *(advancement)*, security *(peace)*, valuation *(challenges)* and propriety *(protection)* generates a positive ethical value. The whole clause implies that Australian people are doing the right thing if they learn from Western *(technological advancement)*, Indigenous *(environmental protection)* and Eastern intellectual traditions *(peace groups of people)*.

Further, when judgment is offered, the target of the judgment is most frequently the collective entities, for example *universities in Australia, academic traditions, nation*, or abstract things, for example *realisation, learning, ideas, assumption, attitudes, recognition, academic traditions*, rather than the person. Alternatively, the target of judgment is not clearly specified and there is no person who is the target of behaviour, only the abstract thing *(these challenges)*. Coupled with this, capacity and propriety are heavily nominalised, for example *wisdom, application, advancement, protection, destruction*. This nominalised abstraction and the target of evaluation as a semiotic thing result in frequent incidences of double coding. This is a preferred realisation of an academic argument for successful writers.

Example 9

> *If Australia is to* ***provide viable*** [+tenacity] **economic competition** [+capacity] *with its Asian neighbours, //it* **must learn** [t, −capacity] *from the development, culture, and traditions of the economic* **superpowers** [+capacity] *of Japan, China, South Korea, and Taiwan* [t, +propriety] (ABS 7-9).

HGEs written by Australian-born students display a similar pattern to HGEs written by East Asian students. In Example 9, tenacity *(viable)* and capacity *(provide, competition, learn, and superpower)* are utilised in the main proposal. The modal auxiliary *must*, combined with explicit capacity *learn*, conveys ultimately an implicit message of Australia's lack of capacity. In the whole clause complex, the main message of doing the right thing by learning is successfully conveyed.

As the argument develops, ABS HGEs begin to exploit explicit propriety items, as seen in Example 10. However, when inscribed propriety is used, the voice tends to be attributed to external voices by using quotations. In this way, successful writers tend to negotiate their own voice with other public voices. Graduation *(quite, plainly, little)* is frequently used to evoke propriety, as in Example 10 where Western culture is severely criticised for not tolerating Aboriginal culture.

Example 10

> *But the Western positivist world-view 'quite plainly has* **little toleration** [−propriety] *for the traditional Aboriginal perspective of land, ecology and land ownership'* (Christie 1985: 41) [−propriety/−valuation] (ABS 7-40).

In Example 11, an explicit judgment *(mindless pollution)* is a main trigger to set up a strong negative ethical loading. Valuations *(pollution, toxic, damage)* and ideational items *(logging of rainforests)* add to the negative evaluation of the Western intellectual tradition as a whole. *Mindless pollution* is a typical example of drawing a fine line between appreciation and judgment. This is because the object being appraised is the thing *(pollution)*, but *mindless* carries an explicit judgment value, indicating a negative assessment of human behaviour (White 2004). Again, the ideational intensification, for example *toxic, irreversible damage*, contributes to encoding the impropriety of carelessness at the whole-clause complex.

Example 11

> *The* **mindless** [-propriety] **pollution** [−valuation] *of waterways, the logging of rainforests and the emission of toxic* [−valuation] *gasses into the atmosphere are but a few of the factors which cause irreversible* [graduation] *damage* [−valuation] *to the environment* [t, −propriety/valuation] (ABS 8-19).

As already noted, the marked feature of HGEs is that there are multiple interactions among attitude items of judgement:capacity and judgement:propriety, appreciation and affect. Further, HGEs construe

the interplay between explicit/inscribed and implicit/evoked values of attitude. There are also interactions between positive and negative 'loading' (Macken-Horarik 2003: 299), even though most evaluations tend to result in a positive evaluation. Through these interplays and configurations of multiple attitude, language resources for construing emotion and ethics are deployed in particular ways to co-create high-order meaning complexes.

A further significant feature of successful texts is that they realise interpersonal meanings prosodically. The transformation between capacity and propriety, alongside other attitude items, is the basic formula that operates throughout the texts in order to evoke an ethical loading of right and wrong. In this way, HGEs tell the reader that Australia is currently not doing the right thing and keep demanding that the reader learn from other cultures. This demand exerts the 'line of force' (Iedema 2003). This main macro-proposal, which is a main request in a written text (Martin 1992b), is continuously reinforced as the essays unfold. For instance, Essay 7 begins with the negative capacity value of needing to learn and tenacity to study. These values set up a negative prosody across the text, for example:

> *a shift toward other cultures has to take place, need to develop awareness, fail to incorporate, ineffectiveness, slowed by world recession and external debt, mismanagement, must learn, need to learn, if learned.*

This negative evaluation is realised in tandem with the positive and tenacity, for example *survival, viable, unshakable,* and capacity, for example *success, deal with effectively, meet the challenges, strong, solution, achieved, sustained, powerful, superpower, economic progress, can learn, understanding is arrested, successfully managed, can provide, can become better equipped, can promulgate, can prepare, grow stronger, intelligently address.*

Low-graded essays

The overall frequency of judgment in unsuccessful texts is significantly low, compared with successful texts. There tend to be fewer interactions of multiple attitude among judgment, appreciation and affect categories, and of the interplay between positive versus negative and implicit versus explicit. If judgment occurs, ethical concern is raised relatively directly through propriety items or negations, without incorporating other items such as capacity and appreciation. Propriety seldom occurs in invoked forms *(spoil, violence)* (see Examples 12 and 13). Further, most judgments are negatively encoded and most objects of judgment are human agents and not nominalised abstract ones centring on the people *(students, we).* Even if judgments are used, they have little to do with doing right in terms of learning from other cultures.

Example 12

> *However the freedom* [+security] ***spoil*** [−propriety] <u>*students in Japan*</u> (EAS 5-23).

Example 13

> *If* <u>*we*</u> *do not close attention to culture, // misinterpretation* [−reaction] *can occur and may cause over* ***violence*** [−propriety] *or even* ***war*** [t, −propriety] (EAS 6-35).

As seen in LGEs written by Australian-born students, exemplified in Example 14, the ethical colouration of impropriety in the opening stage is also construed by explicit propriety items *(threat, force)* with the writer's own voice.

Example 14

> *The only* ***threat*** [−propriety] *to this consistency is coming now //as the indigenous culture is* ***forced*** [−propriety] *to mix with western culture // and* ***suitable*** [+capacity] *individuals to carry on traditional roles such as story teller become harder to find* [−comp][t, −propriety] (ABS 11-12).

In particular, evaluations chosen by the unsuccessful ABS writers 11 and 12 are dominated by negative constructions (see Example 15). The writer of Example 15 phrases his desire in negative terms. Negative capacity *(refuse to learn)* leads to negatively invoked ethics.

Example 15

> *Despite the different motivations and methods used for learning, for Australian universities to **refuse to learn*** [–capacity] *from such an academic culture would be to **refuse to learn*** [–capacity] *from around 400,000 years of academic experience* [t, – propriety] (ABS 11-13).

Analysis of judgment demonstrates that although ABS Essays 11 and 12 look argumentative, the argument is seldom oriented to construe social sanction values of ethical concern. As seen in Example 16, direct person/people–led social esteem normality *(noisy, quietly)* fails to bring about an evocation of the writer's ethical concern.

Example 16

> *This may include different types of assignments, also the current style of lecturing, // a person standing in front of a room full of sometimes **noisy*** [–normality] *people, may be replaced with groups of people, **quietly*** [+normality] *discussing the topic, in smaller rooms* (ABS 12-11).

Analysis of appreciation

Significant differences in the choices of the three sub-types of appreciation can be seen between HGEs and LGEs. In most cases, HGEs encode appreciation as composition along with valuation, as seen in Table 9. In the LGE texts, reaction is taken up relatively more often, along with valuation (HGEs 2 versus LGEs 24).

Table 9: Deployment of sub-categories of appreciation in HGEs and LGEs

	Appreciation encoded as composition		Valuation		Reaction	
	HGEs	**LGEs**	**HGEs**	**LGEs**	**HGEs**	**LGEs**
Essay 1	9		108	40		6
Essay 2	7	1	70	41		7
Essay 3	4		66	67	2	8
Essay 4	2		66	43		3
TOTAL	**22**	**1**	**310**	**191**	**2**	**24**

High-graded essays

In general, successful essays display what can be called an appreciation-invoking judgment pattern, as exemplified in Example 17.

Example 17

> *As a result of applying this idea, //**unplanned*** [–composition] *technologies that may **benefit*** [+ valuation] *some capitalists, but can **harm*** [–valuation] *society can be brought in* [t, –propriety/valuation] (EAS 1-10).

Appreciation valuations *(problem, benefit, harm)* and composition *(unplanned)* are embedded within evoked judgment:propriety and judgement:capacity. In other words, instances of these appreciations at one level contribute to the representation of judgement at another. Example 17 is paraphrased roughly as *the technology is unplanned, and harmful to society and therefore, the behaviour of creating such technology is ethically unacceptable.*

East Asian students favour composition value, as seen in Example 18. *Composition balance* and *harmony* are common choices that are realised within the evoked propriety of unselfishness.

Example 18

> *Their traditions encourage social contribution and **harmony*** [+composition: balance] *rather than individual achieve-ment* [+capacity] [t, +propriety /valuation] (EAS 2-45).

Example 19

> *Despite arguments to the contrary, Australian universities stand only to gain* [+capacity] *from **invaluable*** [+valuation] *aspects of other intellectual traditions* [t, –capacity] (ABS 8-5).

Successful writers, especially ABSs, tend to choose a strong saturated assessment of valuations, for example, *detrimental, undrinkable, unusable, invaluable*. Again, the strong claims of successful writers tend to occur within the attributed voice. In this way, their strong subjective argument balances with the persuasion in a public voice, as seen in Example 20. The lexis detrimental encodes a negative connotation in that harmful human practices against nature will bring disruption or disorder. Again, these choices provoke ethical colouration. In many cases, valuation appears in a nominalised form such as *degradation, pollution* and *erosion*. HGEs are thus much more formal than LGEs.

Example 20

> *It has been estimated, in fact, that if such **detrimental*** [–valuation] *practices continue at the present rate, //half the world's plant and animal species will be destroyed by the end of twenty first century* [t, –propriety/valuation] (Lucas 1998: 36) (ABS 8-23).

Low-graded essays

One significant difference that emerges in patterns of use in LGEs is the degree and type of dominance of appreciation. Successful writers in most cases encode appreciation as valuation and composition, while poor writers employ relatively more frequent constructions of appreciation as reaction. The subjective voice of LGEs is mostly constructed by choosing this reaction with some valuations. Further, appreciation values by unsuccessful writers are not constructed to invoke judgment. They are mainly isolated cases of appreciation. As is evident in Example 21, where EAS student 6 uses the highest proportion of reaction impact (7), for example *interestingly, fascinating, interesting, exciting, mystical, enthralling, misinterpretation*, the writer attempts to evoke the reader's positioning by using appreciation reaction.

Example 21

> *It is **interesting*** [+reaction: impact] *that when this happens the two start to teach each other, //open each others minds to further possibility of thought and knowledge* (EAS 6-43).

As with East Asian students 5 and 6, Essay 11 is also constructed with the use of the reaction value predominantly. In the following examples, reaction impact values, such as *laughable* and *amazing*, express the writer's emotional response to the appraised.

Example 22

> *Thus for Australian universities to assume that Western Academic Tradition holds all the **correct*** [+valuation] *methods and traditions and the Australian Indigenous academic traditions hold none, would be almost **laughable*** [–reaction: impact] (ABS 11-10).

Example 23

> *What makes the aboriginal academic culture more **amazing*** [+reaction: impact] *is the fact that despite their lack of written methods of any kind* [t, –capacity], *their dreaming stories and the like have remained constant throughout time* (ABS 11-11).

ABS LGEs essays are dominated by values of reactions alongside valuations. Therefore, their essays sound argumentative but fail to invoke judgment at the whole clause level. That means that those values are seldom relevant to any particular field, such as technology, environment or the economy. This means, in turn, that evaluation is not used to reflect the topic relevantly. Evaluation tends to represent the commonsense reality of the world.

As already mentioned in the analysis of affect and judgment, another significant finding in relation to appreciation is that, for HGEs, appreciation *challenges* and *problems* are main values that lead to a negative prosody of social disorder across the argument. ABS Essay 7, for instance, realises negative valuations prosodically, for example, *degradation, erosion, undrinkable, unusable, ruined, destructive*. This negative prosody parallels the positive valuations in a way that learning from other cultures will bring about social worth, for example, *significant, valuable, at its core, major, centres, relevant, importance*, as well as social sustainability and balance, for example, *informed approach, original, traditional, better, sustainability, unified, harmonious*. Writer 7 reflects her attitude by choosing these evaluative items repeatedly as the text unfolds.

Conclusion

This paper aims to tease out critical ability from a linguistic perspective by exploring the deployment of attitude resources in undergraduate essays and its effect on the quality of their arguments. Research results reveal that significant differences can be found between high-graded writers and low-graded writers in their use of attitude resources. The first major finding is that successful writers encode a significantly higher number of attitude items in their arguments. Their writing is characterised by exploiting a variety of types of attitude items and sub-items. This means that HGEs are characterised as being argumentative rather than descriptive.

Most importantly, high-graded writers show their preference for evoked judgment in contrast to the overt judgment of LGEs. In order to create *latent* judgment value, high-graded writers exploit multiple instances of attitude, which refer to the mechanism of using different attitude resources. Multiple attitude is formed by the interplay of such patterns as affect-invoking, appreciation-invoking and capacity-invoking judgment:propriety at the whole-clause complex. Successful essays are full of judgment. This judgment is made implicitly by exploiting various appraisal resources. Moreover, when explicit judgments are made, they are deployed mostly through other attributed voices. This indicates that attitude resources play a key role in the construction of critical writing and their strength in argument is disguised within the public voice. This integration makes the arguments of high-graded writers persuasive. This result is consistent with Macken-Horarik's (2003) finding that high-range writing demonstrates the ethical stance embodied in the narrative. Macken-Horarik (2003: 299) argues that 'evoked appraisal is important to analyse because it is a primary mechanism by which a text insinuates itself into reader attitudes'. The moral value is hidden and latent, yet smeared through complex configurations of other attitudinal resources. Poor-range writings fail to show this latent pattern of text meaning.

A further significant finding is that in order to evoke ethics, high-graded writers have utilised nominalised affect:in/security and affect:dis/satisfaction values, appreciation:valuation and appreciation:composition rather than reaction, and judgment:capacity and judgment:tenacity rather than normality and veracity. It is by exploiting these resources that successful writing conveys the main ethical message successfully to readers, without imposition. This controlling stance of judgment:propriety is achieved by implication rather than by overt moralisation.

In terms of sub-types of attitude, the finding that LGEs choose a significantly high proportion of appreciation:reaction values accords with the findings of Hood (2004a, 2004b) in that student writing contains more frequent encodings of appreciation as reaction than those of published texts. She argues that while not coded as affect, a connection to an emotional response is evident in this kind of appreciation used by student writers, creating texts that reflect a much more spoken mode.

Characteristics of successful essays are also associated with their highly nominalised patterns of attitude values, which reflect a depersonalised attitude. Appraisal researchers argue that such patterns are associated with more impersonal and formal writing (Martin 1993; Iedema 2004). This implies that successful essays display formality that reflects the 'distant' nature of an academic audience (Peters 1986). Successful writers tend to organise their attitudes through the public voice, which displays 'situationally-

sensitive' constructions (Connor 2004). By contrast, the overt expression of judgement:propriety, appreciation:reaction and personalised affect in unsuccessful writing tends to personalise the argument. LGEs create a more personal voice, reflecting an ill-constructed academic audience.

The final distinctive difference identified is that attitude values in unsuccessful writing are prosodically realised. Successful writer attitude values are repeatedly chosen and eventually are transformed positively through complex configurations and transformations between positive and negative values. Low-graded writers, on the other hand, fail to show this mechanism and their attitude is mostly constructed negatively. The prosody of a successful essay, alongside the high proportions of valuation, implies that successful essays reflect a topic-relevant construction of the text.

These findings have significant pedagogical and practical implications for the teaching of tertiary students. Most staff raise questions about how to teach critical voice in EAP courses. Incorporating the appraisal system into teaching can help undergraduate and international students to enhance skills associated with expression. International students learn English in their native countries mostly based on a traditional grammar, which is detached from meaning. The research unravels this issue through a linguistic construction of evaluative stance. The results indicate a need to pay attention to the ways in which novice academic writers can raise their critical voices formally without being overly judgmental, and how judgment is made by combinations of attitude resources for explaining co-occurring choices of attitude value.

The results also suggest the need to stress the importance of using valuation and composition resources and discouraging reaction resources. It may be difficult to generalise the findings due to the small sample size and a wide range of grading categories. Therefore, a large corpus is required for further research to draw a more reliable conclusion. However, the research results demonstrate that attitude resources play a key role in the construction of a critical voice leading to a successful argument. The grade-based differences are reflected in the deployment of particular choices of attitude to construct an evaluative stance.

Notes

[1] The terms *argumentative* and *persuasive* are interchangeably used by scholars in contrastive rhetoric, which is an area of writing research in second language acquisition (Crowhurst 1991). *Exposition* is the preferred term within SFL. The term *persuasive essay* was chosen because an argument written in an academic context emphasises a social aspect of writing, not only focusing on a writer's claim or a thesis, but also on the evidence cited in support of a thesis.

[2] In SFL, persuasive texts consist of three main genres in the academic context: analytical exposition, discussion and challenge (Write it Right 1996).

[3] Explicit values are coded as a **bold** letter, while implicit ones are coded *t*, which means *token*. 'Val' stands for value.

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