

# EXPLORING INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION IN WRITTEN DISCOURSE

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of any discourses, either spoken or written ones, is to communicate the messages to the targeted audiences. Written discourse appears to be the most cautious piece of work since it is a product of a well-organised and long-term writing process. To achieve the communicative purpose, an author should interpersonally interact with the targeted readers. The interpersonal interaction can be realised through the use of modalisation to express certainty and uncertainty as well as the use of attitudinal evaluation to evaluate things, events, people, situations and etc. In this case, the analysis of some extracts which are produced as guidelines for the teachers suggest that the written texts are quite convincing and evaluative as well as successful in persuading the readers. This is typical to this genre of discourse as its ultimate goal is to win over the interest of the reader in using the product. In other word, the author tries to make the text convincing and persuasive in order to win over the teachers' interest in using the textbook in their classrooms.

**Keywords:** *written discourse; interpersonal interaction*

## INTRODUCTION

Text is a means used by the writer, author, or speaker to convey messages beyond the sentence level. It can be either in written or spoken forms. In other words, text refers to a set of sentences or utterances which carries meaning. In that vein, Hoey (2001, p. 11) defines text as a means for interaction between the writer and reader in which the writer holds the control, and 'the whole interaction can be referred to a discourse'.

I will deal mainly with written discourse as the text that I am going to analyse in this paper is the written one. The text is taken from a textbook for teachers of EFL, and it is the first part of the chapter on the teaching of reading skills. Furthermore, the focal points of the analysis are on interpersonal interaction which predominantly focuses on expressing certainty and uncertainty as well as evaluation. Precisely, this study is going to analyse how the writer interacts interpersonally with the reader in order to put across his message. Last but not least, it also focuses on finding out how successful the writer is in persuading the reader by using his persuasive and evaluative language.

In this paper, I will first consider the literature review to establish the key concepts in order to support my analysis process. I will then analyse the text as well as discuss what the analysis has shown about the text. Finally, I will draw some conclusions encompassing the summary of aim of study, texts and analysis used, and main findings as well as implications.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Interpersonal Interaction**

One of the language functions is “to enable us to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitude and judgements. This function is known as the interpersonal function.” (Bloor & Bloor, 1995, p. 9). Dealing with written discourse, there are some ways that the author can use to interpersonally interact with the readers through the text. Two of the ways are by expressing certainty and uncertainty and evaluating a thing, a person, a moment, or feeling.

### **Certainty and Uncertainty**

The writers personally tend to view something certainly and uncertainly. McCarthy and Carter (1994) point out that modality indicates the writers’ attitude toward information communicated in a text. In expressing their personal certainty, they use modality, particularly modalisation. This term covers both probability and usuality. It deals with the writers’ view about how something is likely to be true (probability) as well as how common it is to be true (usuality). The probability are

generally expressed by using the scales such as possible, probable, and certainly, while usuality is realized by using adverbs of frequency such as often, always, usually, and frequently (Thompson, 2004). Furthermore, modality also can be expressed by attributive clauses such as *I'm certain, it tends to, and it's likely*, as well as mental process clauses such as *I think* and *I doubt* (Lock, 1996).

In line with modality, Thompson (2004) proposes the idea of modal responsibility and modal commitment. Modal responsibility refers to how sure the writers to be responsible in expressing their personal judgment, whether they want to acknowledge that the opinion is their subjective point of view or it is pointed objectively from a quality of the event itself. Both subjective and objective modal responsibility can be expressed either implicitly or explicitly. The modals are implicit, when they are included in the same clause with their proposition. On the contrary, they are explicit when they are separated from their proposition. The following examples will make this discussion clearer:

*I'm sure she is coming tomorrow* -----→ Explicit Subjective  
*He might have prepared all of this for me*-----→ Implicit Subjective  
*It's probably that they have read this story*---→ Explicit Objective  
*They probably have read this story*-----→ Implicit Objective

Just as modal responsibility, modal commitment is also related to the personal view of the writers. Commitment refers to the degree to which the writers commit themselves to the validity about what they are expressing. This has an important implication in an academic article. In this kind of discourse 'a writer has to judge very carefully the extent to which he advances a claim as certain or still open to doubt' (Thompson, 2004, p. 69). The degree of commitment is classified into three levels; low, median, and high. The low degree can be indicated with *may* and *might*. *Should, ought to, likely, and probably* indicate the median level, while the high degree is signalled with *must, sure, certain, and certainly*.

### Attitudinal Evaluation

Many discourse analysts have proposed their own term for attitudinal evaluation such as appraisal and stance. However, this assignment prefers the term attitu-

dinal evaluation to others since it is more familiar. Attitudinal evaluation is another kind of interpersonal interaction. It implies that the writers interact with the readers by valuing things, events, people, situations and etc. In this part, the discussion will be focused on evaluation parameters, types of evaluation, and the importance of evaluation.

- Evaluation parameters

The attitude on evaluating something can be expressed in several evaluation constraints. The most prevalent parameter is good-bad or positive- negative parameters. The writers usually value something as good or bad. The good thing sometimes can also be evaluated negatively and vice versa. This implies that evaluation is personal rather than objective. It depends on what values the writers intend to emphasize. Another kind of parameter is expectedness. It is related to how obvious the writers state about something for the readers. For example, the word *clearly* can signal the obviousness or expectedness of what is followed. The last kind of constraint is importance. This can be signalled by adjectives and adverbs such as *important* and *significantly* (Hunston & Thompson, 2000).

- Types of Evaluation

There are three types or systems of appraisal; affect, judgement, and appreciation. Affect deals with emotional reactions to behaviour and phenomena (fear, sorrow, joy, etc.). Judgment is used for showing behavioural evaluation or ethical assessment on a person (brave, heroic, foolish, etc.). Appreciation evaluates the aesthetic value of an event or phenomena (comfortable, modest, immodest, etc.) (Martin, 1999). The use of these evaluation types can be seen in the following examples:

I admire Celine Dion's lyrics-----Affect

Our director is very wise in making decisions-----Judgment

His paintings are marvellous and unique-----Appreciation

- The importance of Evaluation

Evaluation, in Martin's point of view, is a significant feature in a discourse. It is not simply a personal matter of a writer in viewing something, but it is really an

interpersonal matter in which the underlying reason for putting forward an opinion is to draw out the addressee's attention and responses.

In line with this, Hunston and Thompson (2000) suggest three important functions of evaluation; to express the writers' opinion on valuing something, to build up relations between the writers and readers, and to organise the discourse. Overall, evaluation is concerned with informing the readers about what the writers think about something and persuading the readers by using manipulative and persuasive language.

## TEXT ANALYSIS

### Certainty and Uncertainty

I will now go on to analyse how the writer expresses certainty and uncertainty as well as attitudinal evaluation in this extract. To some extent, the writer seems quite certain with most of what he is saying due to his frequent use of high degree of modality such as *must*, *would*, *will*, and *certainly*. There are 14 examples of high modality which can be found in sentences (5), (8), (15), (16), (17), (22), (30), (32), (35), and (36). However, the writer seems rather uncertain about his view on something in some ways. He uses the low level of likelihood quite often, though it is not as frequent as the high ones. There are 7 examples of this category of modality found in the extract, such as *may* (20, 23, 24, 32, 34), and *might* (26). Another interesting thing is that the writer only uses a few examples of the median level of certainty which are intended for hedging his opinion. The examples are such as *tend to* (15), *more often* (25), *should* (14), *likely* (7), and *probably* (16).

### Attitudinal Evaluation

In terms of evaluation, there are many evaluative languages found in the extract particularly the ones related to aesthetical value. Appreciation is the most widely used type of evaluation in the extract which is up to 25 examples found. Some of its examples are as follows;

- ...why getting students to read English texts is an important part of the teacher's job (3)

In this sentence, the writer uses the importance parameter in assessing the teacher's job.

- Anything we can do to make reading easier for them must be a good idea (5)

Here, the word easier is used to evaluate reading. This is concerned with importance parameter where the writer might think that to make reading easier is important.

- Reading is useful for other purposes too... (6)

This sentence also shows the writer's view on evaluating something based on importance constraint, though he does not use the word important but the word useful.

- ...,acquisition is likely to be even more successful (7)

In this case, the writer does not only evaluate that acquisition is successful, but he also makes it more interesting by combining a median likelihood; likely, with a boosting device; even. It seems that the boosting makes his opinion more interesting.

- The greatest controversy has centred on whether the texts should be 'authentic' or not (14)

Here are two appreciation examples. Firstly, a superlative is used by the writer to evaluate the *controversy*. He evaluates *controversy* positively, where *controversy* is commonly considered bad. It is signalled by using the word *great*, where this word is usually used to value something good. Yet, this does not seem completely personal, because in the other contexts *great* is also used with the words like *mistake* and *disaster*. The other example is the use of the word *authentic* to evaluate a text. This evaluation is expressed along with the good-bad parameter. An authentic text is valued as a good text, while the artificial one is bad. Since the word *authentic* itself is a controversial notion in ELT, this does not seem to be a straightforward good-bad evaluation. People might assess authentic either as a good or bad point.

- There will be far too many words they have never seen before, the grammar will be (for them) convoluted and the style will finish them off (17)

In this example, *convoluted* evaluates grammar while *Finish them off'* relates to style, so it could be seen as evoked appreciation.

- If they are science students, reading scientific texts may be a priority (24)

In this example, the writer uses a noun instead of adjective for evaluation. The word *priority* appears to evaluate *reading scientific texts*. This kind of evaluation is again based on the importance parameter. Reading scientific texts should be prioritized as it is important.

- But if, as if more often the case, they are a mixed group with differing interest and careers, a more varied diet is appropriate (25)

Here is another adjective with evaluative meaning used for the evaluation. This is again an evaluation with the bad-good constraint. *Appropriate* is considered good, while *inappropriate* is on the contrary.

Now I will continue my analysis to another type of appraisal; *Affect*. There is only one example of *affect* identified in the extract. The following is its example:

- That is because people have worried about more traditional language-teaching materials... (15)
- This shows the emotional responses of people toward the traditional language-teaching materials.

The last type of appraisal is *Judgment*. *Judgment* also has a few examples. Here are its examples:

- However, if you give low-level students a copy of *The Times* or *The Guardian* ..., they will probably not be able to understand them at all (16)

The evaluative word here is understand. This word is not evaluative itself but is used to evaluate the students' behaviour toward the reading material.

- There is some authentic written material which beginner students can understand to some degree (19)

This is similar to the previous one where the students' behaviour toward *authentic written material* is also assessed by the word '*understand*'.

- Just as with scanning, if they try to gather all the details at this stage, they will get bogged down and may not be able to get the general idea because they are concentrating too hard on specifics (32)

It can be argued that *get bogged down* is not evaluative but just a description. This assumption might be derived due to the difficulty in drawing lines between evaluation and description which causes borderline cases. In this context, I would say that this is an evoked judgment toward the students' action. Afterward, here the writer judges the students' behaviour toward *the specifics* by using the words *concentrating too hard*.

## DISCUSSION

This part discusses two main features concerning the result of the analysis which encompass the way the writer expresses certainty and uncertainty as well as evaluation to put across his message, and the extent to which the writer is successful in creating a clear and persuasive argument for the reader.

In terms of certainty and uncertainty, the writer seems quite certain to some extent with what he states in the text which is signalled by the use of high probability scales such as *must* and *certainly*. It implies that he is quite confident with most of his points of view. His certain views seem convincing for the target reader. However, there are also some points which the writer seems not quite sure with. It is not because the points are not valid, but it is more related to the avoidance of making claims. In order to avoid any misjudgement, the writer prefers to express them in rather low certainty level such as *may*, *likely*, and *probably*. Furthermore, the writer builds up the relationship with the readers by expressing evaluations. Among the three types of appraisal, judgment, affect, and appreciation, the writer uses appreciation the most. It means that the writer focuses more on evaluating things, events or aesthetic rather than behaviour and emotional responses. It is reasonable since there are not many characters and emotional reactions involved which are common for narrative texts.

Overall, the writer seems fairly successful in persuading the target readers. This is indicated through the fairly convincing views he makes. It is also supported by

the evaluations he expresses. He tends to evaluate guidance and suggestions for teaching reading positively. This kind of interpersonal interaction constructed by the author throughout the extract seems persuasive enough to make the teachers, as the intended reader, interested in employing the textbook in their classrooms. In addition, the success of the author to interact interpersonally with the readers is resulted from the fact that a written discourse is produced after 'an extensive checking and editing' (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 1997, p 34). The author has unlimited amount of time to check and edit the text until it meets his expectation and communicative purpose.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis and discussion have responded to the aims of study set in the introduction. The extract is considered convincing and evaluative as well as quite successful in persuading the readers. The use of high level certainty toward the important points stated in the text has resulted in a convincing effect for the readers. In line with this, by valuing the important points with positive evaluation also make the text more persuasive. These features characterise a written discourse, particularly a piece of text extracted from a textbook. This text, which is full of the guidelines for teachers as the target reader, seems quite assuring and evaluative with the points concerning the guidance and suggestions. In short, the views signalled with high level of certainty as well as positive evaluation make this text very successful in convincing the teachers as the target readers to use the textbook in their classrooms.

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