TRACKING INTERPERSONAL STYLE: THE USE OF FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE ANALYSIS IN COLLEGE WRITING INSTRUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Rhetorical Genre Studies, or RGS, has had much influence in recent years on reconceptualizing the goals of college level writing instruction in North America, both in the contexts of first-year composition (FYC) and upper-level writing in the disciplines. One broad goal for FYC specifically has been conceptualized as helping students gain "genre awareness" (see the work of Beaufort; Devitt; Johns) or "awareness of the social and ideological aspects of genre production and consumption" (Cheng, 2007, p. 304). By assisting students to develop a nuanced awareness of genre—and not just familiarity with particular genres—it is hoped that students will be better equipped to examine samples of a genre they are working in with a keen rhetorical eye, approach unfamiliar writing situations with greater confidence in their existing store of genre knowledge, and learn to make more deliberate genre choices in their own writing—which may include motivated disruptions of genre expectations. A key instructional method for fostering this kind of nuanced genre awareness is to train students to analyze genres, tracking how textual choices shape, and are shaped by, contextual dynamics. This approach is discussed by, among others, Amy Devitt, Anis Bawarshi, and Mary Jo Reiff ("Materiality"), who argue that RGS informs a discourse analytic approach that "links patterns of language use to patterns of social behavior" and thus "allows students and researchers to recognize how 'lived textuality' plays a role in the lived experience of a group" (2003, p. 542). The advantage of the approach, as Devitt et al. explain, is that it "focuses on the actual uses of texts, in all their messiness and with all their potential consequences" and "ties that use to actual language, to the smaller bits of language that alert analysts to underlying ideas, values, and beliefs" (2003, p. 543).

As suggested by the focus on language and text in the above explanation, undertaking genre analysis in FYC has the potential to place stylistic analysis back on composition's center stage in a theoretically-grounded manner, enabling instructors and students to track textual patterns in a way that is sensitive to contextual dynamics. Nevertheless, I'd like to suggest in this chapter that the approach has not been as fully operationalized for the classroom as it could be if the textual aspects of genre analysis were considered with more systematic attention to language use. As Devitt notes ("Refusing"), RGS has largely distanced itself from matters of form, and so the "smaller bits of language" referred to above have not been foregrounded in published genre analyses, nor have specific analytic constructs that students and instructors can use to guide the process of noticing these bits of language, connecting them to other bits of language, and discerning their socio-rhetorical purposes in samples of genre under analysis. My argument in this chapter is that systematic approaches to text analysis are necessary if writing instructors are to support students' analyses of genre in ways that help them to identify subtle patterns of text that connect to context. Starting from this initial position, I'd like to suggest that genre-register theory in systemic functional linguistics, or SFL, can offer one very useful way to get started connecting genre as an abstract concept to the nuts and bolts of analyzing genre samples systematically and in detail.

SFL is a theory of language developed from the work of the linguist Michael Halliday (see, e.g., "Explorations"; "An Introduction") that explores how our choices in language reflect, and work to realize, key contextual variables that are always at play in situations where language is used. These are the field (the topic of the text, the nature of the social action), the tenor (the relationship between participants, i.e. writer and reader), and the mode (the part that language plays, and what the participants expect the language to do for them in the situation). According to this theory, stylistic qualities of a given text are constructed through patterns of language choices that are motivated by the field, tenor, and mode. For example, as Jonathan Buehl's chapter (this volume) helps us to understand, science discourse is the way that it is (lexically dense and highly nominalized) because the discourse has evolved over time to accommodate the expression of new kinds of knowledge (field) and interpersonal relationships (tenor).

Williams' lessons in *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* draw liberally from Halliday's meaning-based grammar and from Halliday and Hasan's work on textual cohesion. Building on this earlier work in SFL, James R. Martin and David Rose, among others, have recently developed a set of discourse-based tools for "tackling a text" (Martin & Rose, 2007), and these tools enable analysts to explore how meanings (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) are constructed in discourse. Because these analytic tools do not assume prior knowledge of

SFL, they are ideal for use in composition classrooms when the goal is to unpick how a text's abstract qualities—such as its "flow" or "style"—are constructed through language.

In this chapter, I focus specifically on the SFL-based Appraisal framework (developed most fully in Martin and White) in order to discuss how patterns of language use construct a text's interpersonal style. Building from the clause-level resources described by Halliday ("An Introduction"), the Appraisal framework is useful for tracking how a particular "voice" or persona is constructed in a text; how other voices and perspectives are brought into play; how affect and judgment are encoded; how evaluative meanings are scaled up and down in force and focus; and how community-recognized knowledge and values are signaled. As an analytic tool, Appraisal helps to explore how these meanings may be infused in a text below readers' and writers' consciousness, patterning together in certain ways to construct the text's interpersonal style. In this way, the analysis is useful for getting students and instructors to think concretely in terms of the frequently cited dictum that stylistic choices are meaningful.

In order to motivate the use of SFL-based discourse analysis in composition instruction, I begin with a very brief explanation of composition's relationship to linguistics and then turn to recent work in rhetoric and composition studies on rhetorical grammar. I place emphasis on aspects of that approach that seem to be working toward the goal of operationalizing rhetorical genre analysis for the composition class and those aspects that do not. I then use this critique to demonstrate how key analytic concepts from SFL, including genre, register, and interpersonal meanings, can aid in the stylistic analysis of academic texts. This discussion builds on Nora Bacon's general point (in this volume) that style is very much present in academic discourse, and that analysis of stylistic choices in academic writing is of high educational value for FYC instruction.

THE BACKGROUNDING OF LANGUAGE IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

Because I am suggesting that students and instructors take up linguistic analysis to analyze stylistic patterns in genre samples, a brief discussion of composition's relationship to the field of linguistics seems relevant. Composition's distancing from linguistics has been well documented (see, for example, Barton and Stygall; Johnson and Pace; and MacDonald), and it is more than partly justified. It has to do with at least three interconnected phenomena: the shift from a product to process-oriented view of writing, which had the effect of positioning questions about textual patterns as representative of a "product"

or static view of writing; the increasing awareness that the structuralist and generative linguistics of the sixties and seventies had little to offer either our teaching of writing or our study of the production and reception of actual texts; and, perhaps most importantly, the increasing use of social constructionist theories to examine texts, which had the effect of shifting attention away from the texts themselves to their larger social contexts. This latter move, referred to widely as "the social turn," has been important for bringing about a de-centering of language and text in favor of a stronger focus on the social patterns of activity revolving around the interpretation and (re)production of texts.

This de-centering of language is understandable given composition's past privileging of form without consideration of context, as seen in older formalist approaches. It is also understandable given the field's past focus on the individual writer engaged solely in a cognitive process of problem-solving, a point of view reflected in much work on text linguistics (e.g., Beaugrande and Dressler). I'd like to suggest, however, that the "social turn" has succeeded so well in directing the field's gaze upwards and outwards, above and beyond the linguistic features of texts, that most compositionists nowadays tend not to think about meaning as construed through the language we use to construct texts but rather as residing in the activities that surround and govern the workings of texts. As a result, the field's theoretical understanding of language and how it functions as a meaning-making resource has been under-explored.

This de-centering of language is evident in Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reiff's genre-based textbook *Scenes of Writing*, which is geared toward training students to analyze genres and raise their genre awareness. To analyze a genre, the authors outline four analytical steps:

1. Collect Samples of the Genre
2. Identify the Scene and Describe the Situation in Which the Genre is Used
3. Identify and Describe Patterns in the Genre's Features
4. Analyze What These Patterns Reveal about the Situation and Scene (2003, pp. 93-94)

These four steps provide a useful overarching direction for analysis. They do not, however, provide the type of detailed support needed to account for salient patterns in language use that are not apparent after initially scanning a text. Under the third step, students are prompted to consider "patterns in the genre's features," for example whether sentences are long or short, complex or simple, and whether they are in passive or active voice. Students are also prompted to consider whether the sentences "share a certain style" and "what diction is most common" (Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff, 2003, p. 94). This level of analysis, I'd like to suggest, is not as nuanced as it could be to guide students toward analyzing

how "smaller bits of language" can reveal "underlying ideas, values, and beliefs," as suggested above, and so a number of questions arise. For one, what advice can we give students if they cannot identify recurring patterns in the texts they are analyzing? What analytic tools are available to guide students' process of identifying recurring and co-occurring patterns—ones that may not stand out after initial scans—and then connecting those patterns to larger rhetorical functions? How can students develop an analytic vocabulary, or meta-language, for talking about word/phrase, clause, and text level features in genres under examination in meaningful and concrete ways?

RHETORICAL GRAMMAR

Rhetorical grammar is one approach to analyzing word/phrase, clause, and text level features of discourse that is potentially valuable for students' genre analysis projects. Laura Micciche defines rhetorical grammar as "using grammatical devices that enable us to respond appropriately and effectively to a situation" (2004, p. 719). As opposed to analyzing "style," which Micciche defines as the "'extraordinary' use of language," analyzing rhetorical grammar means tracking the rhetorical purposes of seemingly minor choices in "the 'ordinary' use of language—grammar" (2004, p. 717). In this way, Micciche endorses a pedagogical goal that rings familiar with Devitt's goal of alerting students to "purposes behind forms" (2004, p. 197). As Micciche writes:

> The grammatical choices we make—including pronoun use,
> active or passive verb constructions, and sentence patterns—
> represent relations between writers and the world they live in.
> Word choice and sentence structure are an expression of the
> way we attend to the words of others, the way we position
> ourselves in relation to others. (2004, p. 719)

Instruction in rhetorical grammar, Micciche points out, can assist learners in coming to see the rhetorical effects of particular syntactic and lexical choices. For this reason, rhetorical grammar is "just as central to composition's driving commitment to teach critical thinking and cultural critique as is reading rhetorically, understanding the significance of cultural difference, and engaging in community work through service-learning initiatives" (2004, p. 717).

A concrete method that Micciche explains for sharpening students' sensitivity to rhetorical grammar is to have students keep commonplace books in which they record grammatical patterns from their readings that are of

interest to them and then practice using those patterns to construct texts of their own. This method encourages students to "tinker with language, seeing how it is crafted and directed rather than as simply 'correct' or 'incorrect'" (Micciche, 2004, p. 724). Further, by tinkering with grammatical choices, students can begin to take notice of how subtle manipulation of language can have important political ramifications. Micciche demonstrates, for example, how an analysis of "hedging" devices such "likely" and the verb "believe" in George Bush's 2002 speech to the United Nations—as in Bush's claim that "U.N. inspectors *believe* Iraq has produced two to four times the amount of biological agents it declared"—can open up a discussion with students about standards for providing evidence when making a case for declaring war (2004, p. 725). Keeping commonplace books, therefore, pushes students "to think in unfamiliar ways about texts to which they have developed familiar responses" (Micciche, 2004, p. 727). In this way, instruction in rhetorical grammar can arm students with concrete ways of looking at and talking about language and, potentially, can enable them to home in on subtle ways that arguments are built up through language in particular texts. Micciche's discussion of rhetorical grammar, therefore, goes a long way toward revealing the tension between formal constraint and choice that gives rise to creative expression and nuanced rhetorical decisions.

One potential limitation of the approach, however, is that it is not clear how rhetorical grammar analysis is informed and shaped by considerations of genre. In particular, neither Micciche's article, nor Martha Kolln's widely used textbook, treats explicitly the ways in which genre acts as a superordinate constraint on the array of possible grammatical choices speakers/writers can make in a given rhetorical context, or the ways genre serves as a guidepost for directing the process of rhetorical grammar analysis. To return to Micciche's example of Bush's speech, an important sequence of questions for analyzing this speech from a genre and rhetorical grammar perspective include: What are the communicative purposes of U.S. presidential speeches to the U.N.? Under what circumstances are they typically delivered? What are some typical rhetorical moves used in other crisis speeches? How does Bush's particular speech relate to these genres and how is its structure similar to or different from typical organizational stages in these other genres? Then, we may ask: in which moves do "hedging" devices, or expressions of modality, accumulate most abundantly? What rhetorical work do these devices accomplish within the context of a particular move or argumentative stage? What language features accumulate and pattern together with other language features in other moves?

In pursuing questions such as these, rhetorical grammar and genre analysis can be brought together so that instructors and students can track ways that

grammatical choices accumulate and pattern together in particular phases of a text as it unfolds; students and instructors can discuss how these patterns create waves of meaning that achieve generic purposes and perhaps give rise to a particular style for the sample of the genre under investigation.

A second limitation of rhetorical grammar analysis—one that is characteristic of most other linguistically oriented approaches to discourse analysis—is that the discussions of grammatical/rhetorical "choices" do not specify what exactly it is that is chosen when a grammatical or rhetorical choice is made. In other words, making a choice suggests that a speaker/writer is at least tacitly aware of multiple other available options for producing related meanings in a particular situation, but those other available options tend not to be discussed explicitly. The usefulness of the SFL approach to discourse analysis, to which I now turn, is that it proposes networks of increasingly delicate levels of options that are available in various linguistic systems (for example the system of mood) to achieve particular discourse level meanings. These system networks help analysts track the choices that speakers/writers have made from a network of other choices they could have made but did not.

LOCATING STYLE IN SFL GENRE/REGISTER THEORY

As mentioned above, SFL explores language choices in terms of the meanings they realize. As Mary Schleppegrell explains,

> Every language offers its speakers/writers a wealth of options for construing meaning. SFL facilitates exploration of meaning in context through a comprehensive text-based grammar than enables analysts to recognize the choices speakers and writers make from the linguistic systems, and to explore how those choices are functional for construing meanings of different kinds. (2011, p. 21)

These choices and meanings are analyzed at the most general level through the connected concepts of *genre* and *register.*

GENRE

Genre in SFL has been defined as "staged, goal-oriented social processes" (Martin, 1998, p. 412). Importantly, genre in this view operates at the broad context of culture, which is a point of view somewhat at odds with the RGS view

of genre as socially situated. Specific differences in perspectives and purposes of SFL and RGS approaches to genre have been discussed in detail elsewhere (see, e.g., Bawarshi & Reiff; Devitt; Hyon; Martin & Rose, 2008), but primarily it should be noted that, in the RGS view, genres are fluid modes of action that can be located within particular communities (i.e., they are socially situated); this is because they regularly facilitate communicative purposes among participants in a particular social group. In the SFL perspective, genres are recurring text types that grow out of social purposes within the culture at large; *narratives*, for example, are used to resolve complications in a story and *critical responses* are used to challenge the message of a text.

It is conceivably possible to reconcile the RGS and SFL views of genre, as others have noted, by casting the SFL conceptualization as "elemental" genres that pattern together in particular ways to construct larger "macro" genres. Tenure and promotion reports, for example, are socially situated genres that are comprised of *accounts*, *explanations*, *narratives*, *personal responses*, and so on, and these elemental genres are realized through recurring textual stages. Attempting to reconcile the two approaches in this way has merit, but to proceed with genre analysis it is arguably more important to understand the SFL concept of *register*. Register is the crucial component in SFL genre theory that tends to be under-discussed in others' accounts of SFL genre theory and pedagogy.

REGISTER

Analyzing the schematic structure of elemental genres like *accounts* and *expositions* does little in and of itself to help forward our understanding of how genres are infused with meanings, or how meanings vary in specific instances or realizations of a genre in a particular context. Register, therefore, is a specific theory of social context that helps to answer these questions. Register analysis explores how three contextual variables are both reflected and realized in every situation where language is used. These variables are, as identified above, the *field* of discourse (the topic of the text, the nature of the social action), the *tenor* of discourse (the relationship between participants, i.e., writer and reader), and the *mode* of discourse (the part that language plays, what the participants expect the language to do for them in the situation). Using this linguistically oriented theory of context, we can talk, for example, about how interpersonal meanings are realized through specific lexico-grammatical choices that both reflect and shape the tenor, or participant relations, in a given context.

As illustration of this last point, consider the case of the *critical response* genre. Critical responses are one of many response genres frequently assigned in school contexts (on response genres, see Christie & Derewianka; Martin

& Rose, 2008). The critical response is realized through the stages of *evaluation*, *deconstruction*, and *challenge*. Generally, the author(s) first evaluates a text (evaluation), then breaks the text down by explaining how it works (deconstruction), and then challenges some aspect of the message in the text (challenge). When an individual author constructs a critical response in a given situational context—for a particular group of readers, on a particular topic, through a particular mode of discourse—his or her specific choices in language range in degree of formality, commitment, explicitness, and other factors related to the interpersonal context. To illustrate, consider the following two versions of an excerpt from a *challenge* stage of a published *New Left Review* article by Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers. The one on the left is the actual published version and the one on the right is my modified version.

Published Version by Cohen & Rogers	**My Modified Version**
Chomsky presents reams of evidence for the [propaganda] model…. Nonetheless, Chomsky's view of the media and the manufacture of consent seems overstated in three ways. First, the claim that business people and state managers are in the main relatively "free of illusion" seems overdrawn, at least when that claim is offered (as Chomsky usually offers it) without substantial qualification….	Evidence is presented for the [propaganda] model…. Nonetheless, in three ways Chomsky overstates the argument that the media manufacture consent. First, he completely overdraws the claim that business people and state managers are in the main relatively "free of illusion"; he certainly overdraws this claim when he offers it without substantial qualification, as he frequently does….

One similarity between the versions is that they are both relatively formal. They both use diction appropriate for scholarly journalistic discourse (e.g., *nonetheless*, *overstates*, *overdraws*, *substantial qualification*). In addition, the length and complexity of clauses are comparable, and they both use a mix of active and passive constructions. But the differences in meaning are important, and they are accomplished through language in two basic ways.

First, there is a difference in the kind of nouns that serve as the theme for the forthcoming evaluations. As Nora Bacon notes in her chapter in this volume, academic writing often cannot use persons as grammatical subjects because of the frequent need to deal with abstract concepts. The use of abstract sentence subjects (rather than personal ones) can become even more complex when the

task at hand is to critically evaluate others' work. In Cohen and Rogers's text (the published one), only the first clause and one parenthetical clause toward the end of the passage thematize a person, *Chomsky*, whereas the second clause and each remaining clause thematize abstractions, *Chomsky's view …*, *the claim …*, and *that claim.* The pattern is reversed in my modified version, where the first clause thematizes an abstraction, *Evidence,* and the second and remaining clauses thematize a person, *Chomsky*, *he*, *he*, and *he*. The choice, then, about what to take as the point of departure for the message turns on whether the forthcoming evaluation can be interpreted as praise or as critique. In other words, that there is evidence presented for the propaganda model can be understood as a positive appraisal, while the other appraisals can only be understood as critiques (*overstated*, *overdrawn*). The difference in theme selection here therefore bears on the degree of interpersonal alignment with the subject of the evaluation: Chomsky and his views on the media. Cohen and Rogers' grammatical choices, that is, are at least partly guided by their purpose of constructing a critically distanced stance when engaging in critique of Chomsky's work on the media.

Second, there is a difference in the way the authorial voice modulates its commitment to the evaluations being put forth. In the published version, the authorial voice reduces the level of commitment when putting forth critiques. This is accomplished through the use of the expressions *seems* and *usually*, while the authorial voice amplifies the proposition that *Chomsky presents evidence.* (Compare <u>reams of evidence</u> with <u>much evidence</u>). The opposite pattern obtains in my modified version. The authorial voice is highly committed to the critiques (<u>completely</u> overdraws, <u>frequently</u> does), while the passive construction of the first clause works to construct a more reluctant concession regarding the existence of evidence.

Through this brief register analysis, then, we can be very explicit about how Cohen and Rogers construct a textual voice that is at once critical of Chomsky's views on the media and committed to the basic set of value configurations that many *New Left Review* readers are likely to associate with Chomsky's point of view. This positive positioning is accomplished by placing *Chomsky* in theme position and amplifying the positive evaluation—that this person, Chomsky, *presents <u>reams of evidence</u>.* In terms of negative evaluations, the textual voice is more distant; this distance is accomplished by backgrounding the human participant, thematizing abstractions, and using the appearance-based evidential *seems* to signal willingness to reconsider the critique. In my version, the interpersonal positioning is the opposite. Choices in wording frame the textual voice as interpersonally involved and committed to the *critiques* of Chomsky's views on the media, but distant from Chomsky as a person (or, the values he represents) when it comes to saying anything positive. A close

examination of Cohen and Rogers' article reveals, in addition to many other complex rhetorical strategies, recurring patterns in these configurations. Here are further examples (positive/negative appraisals are in *italics*, and appearance-based evidentials are shaded):

Positive evaluation
- With *copious* documentation, he *effectively* makes the case that …

Negative evaluations
- Second … the model's claim that … seems *exaggerated* …
- The "Backroom Boys" example just given indicates *otherwise*

This brief analysis, then, challenges the view that these textual patterns represent some stylistic "tic" that is characteristic to Cohen and Rogers as individual authors. Rather, I am suggesting that we can account for these patterns in terms of the register variables of field, tenor, and mode. Specifically, the difference in meanings between the original version and my modified one can be best analyzed in terms of tenor, in this case the interpersonal distance between the authors and the subject of the critique (Chomsky and his media analyses) and also, importantly, the ways the authors choose to position themselves in relation to their readers' perspectives on Chomsky and his work. The particular set of values that the *New Left Review* represents and that its readers are likely to bring to their reading of the article factor into Cohen and Rogers' (perhaps tacit) choices for what to place in theme position and how to construct an interpersonal stance in regard to those values. We could imagine register configurations where my modified version would be more interpersonally effective, for example contexts where Chomsky's work on the media tends to be met with more committed resistance.

Through this type of analysis, students can come to see how particular stylistic choices—for example, the choice to be dialogically expansive (*this seems to be the case*), dialogically contractive (*this is definitely the case*), or dialogically disengaged (*this is the case*)—may vary within instances of the same genre (e.g., a critical review article) in light of particular contextual variables. To make increasingly subtler shades of distinctions in interpersonal positioning, and begin to home in on a particular text's or author's style of interpersonal positioning, SFL-based Appraisal theory is useful for tracking the choices that speakers/writers make to encode attitudinal meanings, adjust degrees of evaluations, and contract and expand dialogical space. As Martin and White explain, the framework explores "how writers/speakers construe for themselves particular authorial identities or personae, with how they align or disalign themselves with actual or potential

Table 1: Engagement resources in excerpts from economics and political theory term papers

From challenge stage of A-graded critical response in economics	*From challenge stage of A-graded critical response in political theory*
(1) The result of this kind of market structure is a system in which insurance firms control significant market power, as a monopsony to medical practitioners and a monopoly to patients. (2) The Supreme Court rejected the argument that the Federation's actions were designed to protect patients from insufficient dental treatment, stating that the idea of the provision of information leading to adverse outcomes was directly against the spirit of the Sherman Act. (3) <u>However</u>, their reasoning that insurance companies act almost as simple representatives of patients is <u>not</u> upheld by the current situation. (4) The object of the health insurance company is to maximize profit, <u>not</u> to maximize the health of the patient. (5) If insurance were purchased directly by the patient, competition among providers could equate the objects of both provider and patient. (6) <u>However</u> a perfectly competitive market <u>clearly</u> is <u>not</u> available to many of the consumers who purchase insurance directly.	(1) With his theory established, I think Rawls' first response to Fraser would be that the cultural injustices she believes require recognition are already accounted for in his "fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights." (2) Rawls proposes that one way of forming a list of basic rights and liberties is to consider what is essential to "provide the political and social conditions essential for the adequate development and full exercise of the two moral powers of free and equal persons." (3) It seems <u>obvious</u> that persons are unable to adequately develop and exercise their moral powers under conditions of extreme cultural disenfranchisement. (4) If a person is "routinely maligned or disparaged … in everyday life interactions", then it is unlikely that they will be able to participate in the means of acquiring the moral powers and will <u>certainly</u> be unable to fully exercise their moral power. (5) For example, if a woman is unable to go to school and be educated, then it is unlikely she will be able to adequately develop her moral power. (6) Further, if she is then unable to fully participate in society, she will be limited in the exercise of her moral power.

respondents, and with how they construct for their texts an intended or ideal audience" (2005, p. 1).

TRACKING INTERPERSONAL STANCE-TAKING

Appraisal theory makes use of three interrelated sub-systems to track choices in interpersonal meaning. Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement. *Attitude* tracks meanings related to feelings and affect, judgment of people (their motives and behavior), and appreciation of the aesthetic quality of things. *Graduation* tracks meanings related to raising or lowering the force and focus of propositions (in terms of intensity, quantity, preciseness, and protypicality). And finally *Engagement*, inspired as it is by Bakhtinian notions of heteroglossia and dialogism, tracks meanings related to engagement with others' voices and perspectives. Appraisal analysis is useful for systematically tracking how the sequencing and configuration of various interpersonal resources of language vary depending on the genre under analysis.

To illustrate, the following paragraph is from a second year student's argumentative essay written in a political science course. This paragraph demonstrates how particular configurations of Appraisal resources can cluster together to create a distinct interpersonal style. (Resources of Attitude are in underlined and resources of Graduation are in SMALL CAPS.)

(1) Firstly, Zakaria's implication that the forces that moved into power in Bosnia were counterproductive ones to the American ends is TOTALLY irrelevant. (2) If America found democracy to TRULY be such a noble cause to spread, then SURELY it would not violate a nation's sovereignty in an attempt to preserve its democratic status. (3) Although ostensibly this would tie into his greater thesis regarding liberty as a lesser need than democracy as ideals America has worked to spread, his generous usage of the term democracy here and his inability to PROPERLY hold it true to its definition TOTALLY undermines his insistence in conceptual exactness and differentiation between democracy and liberty in the first place.

This paragraph makes use of many Appraisal resources. The meanings that overwhelm the paragraph, however, have to do with, on the one hand, *Attitudinal* resources of judgment (*noble, violate, generous, inability to properly hold it true to its definition*) and appreciation (*irrelevant, undermines*), and,

on the other hand, *Graduation* resources of force (*totally, surely*) and focus (*truly*, *properly*). In terms of sequencing, the high force appreciation in the first sentence—that Zakaria's claim is "totally irrelevant"—sets up a wave of strongly negative meanings that spread through the remainder of the paragraph. This general spreading-through partly explains why the use of the conditional structure in the first part of sentence 2 (*If America found …*) works to reinforce the negative meaning by ironically reconsidering Zakaria's claim after having just forcefully rejected it. This ironic meaning is carried through in the second part of sentence 2—*then SURELY it would not …*—by strongly negating a proposition that we can assume the author in fact endorses, that "America" has violated a nation's sovereignty. Finally, the ironically and forcefully critical stance is carried through in the lengthy third sentence by the sarcastic judgment of Zakaria's use of the term "democracy" as *generous*, combined with the more explicitly negative judgment, his *inability to properly hold it true to its definition.* This student's critiques of Zakaria's reasoning, then, are expressed in a style of stance-taking that is explicitly evaluative, strongly committed, and dialogically contractive.

Appraisal analyses of undergraduate student writing (Coffin; Derewianka; Tang; Wu) show that the style of stance-taking displayed in this critique of Zakaria is not always rewarded in university contexts calling for "critical discussion" of texts. Particularly as students progress into upper-level writing courses in the disciplines, they are expected to construct stances that are at once critical, authoritative, and dialogically expansive. Beverly Derewianka found, for example, that writing from more advanced students tended to construct stances that were "explicitly open to other voices and possibilities" (2009, p. 162). Through the use of various *Engagement* strategies, more advanced and proficient writers tend to encode in their texts "an awareness of the problematic, constructed and intersubjective nature of meaning-making" (Derewianka, 2009, p. 163). Unlike the critique of Zakaria above, which uses heavily ramped up and ironic judgments, the texts Derewianka analyzed in her study of student writing worked to carefully juxtapose "other voices [that] are explicitly drawn into the discussion, interpreted, analyzed, critiqued and played off against each other" (2009, p. 163).

The particular choices explored by the Appraisal sub-system of *Engagement* involve the way writers/speakers engage with other voices and perspectives by directly acknowledging them or by denying, countering, conceding, or entertaining those perspectives. Dialogically contractive wordings work to boost the speaker's/writer's commitment to the proposition being put forth; in so doing, they contract space for the inclusion of alternative perspectives. Options for contracting the dialogic space include:

> pronouncing an assertion (I am convinced that …)
>
> affirming a proposition (clearly, certainly, obviously it is true/ is the case)
>
> disclaiming alternative views (It is not the case … rather …).
>
> conceding and countering alternative views (It is true that …, but …)

Dialogically expansive wordings, in contrast, lower the speaker's/writer's commitment to the proposition being put forth and thus expand space for the inclusion of alternative perspectives. Available options for opening up the dialogic space include:

> suggesting (one way to proceed is …)
>
> conjecturing (perhaps, probably, it is likely …)
>
> evidentializing (it seems/appears that …)
>
> hypothetical reasoning (if we grant that …, then we …)
>
> attributing views to others (Chomsky states that …, according to experts)

The options of conjecturing and evidentializing have been viewed in the linguistics literature on hedging, or displaying uncertainty and/or "deference, modesty, or respect" (Hyland, 2000, p. 88). In the *Engagement* framework they are seen more as functioning to open up space for the inclusion of alternative views and, as Martin and White explain, to extend offers of solidarity to imagined readers who are not already aligned with the author's point of view (2005, p. 126). Through the use of this framework, analysts can make explicit the specific choices in interpersonal stance-taking that speakers/writers have made and track the ways those choices pattern together to create a particular interpersonal style.

USING ENGAGEMENT TO ANALYZE DISCIPLINARY STYLES OF STANCE-TAKING

One useful project that students and instructors can explore in the context of FYC is the ways in which similar genres across disciplines may be characterized by different stance-taking styles. For example, how might argumentation in the contexts of classroom genres calling for "discussion" or "critical reasoning"

assume subtly different and discipline-specific ways of positioning the textual voices vis-à-vis anticipated readers?

Before proceeding with illustrations, let me concede that such a project is a complex undertaking. One finding from Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki's *Engaged Writers, Dynamic Disciplines* is that the causes for miscommunication between students and faculty about good writing often result from five largely unexamined contexts at work in the design and evaluation of any writing assignment: "the academic; the disciplinary; the subdisciplinary; the local or institutional; and the idiosyncratic or personal" (2006, p. 138). Many or most instructors have difficulty stepping outside their own "ways of knowing, doing, and writing" (Carter, 2007, p. 385) to reflect on which of these contexts are at play when they design writing assignments and develop evaluative criteria. When it comes to talking about stylistic patterns at work in student writing, therefore, analyses of student-produced classroom genres may point to valued features of a general academic style (as opposed to a journalistic or conversational style), a broad disciplinary style (economics discourse), a sub-disciplinary style (discourse in economic regulation and antitrust policy), a sub-disciplinary style favored at a particular institution, or an author's idiosyncratic style. For this last context, Bacon (this volume) lists such factors as the writers' "personality, mood, knowledge, experience, professional status, ethnicity, gender, proficiency with language, and so on." When an interpersonal style is unpicked, then, any of these contextual variables may be seen as relevant, and making these complex interpretations can be a valuable exercise for student writers in the context of FYC.

Pursuing this line of analysis, I used the *Engagement* framework discussed above to code two undergraduate students' argumentative essays, one in economics and the other in political theory. The two paragraphs presented below are comparable because (a) they are both from the critical response sections of the respective papers, which called for evaluation and reasoned argumentation; (b) they were both written by fourth year students at the same large public university who were majoring in the respective disciplines; and (c) they both received A's and were praised by the instructors for sophisticated "critical reasoning." The economics text was written in an upper-level undergraduate course focused on economic regulation and antitrust policy, and in this passage the student is challenging the reasoning of the Supreme Court. The political theory text was written an upper-level undergraduate course on twentieth century political thought, and in this passage the student is using John Rawl's concept of justice as fairness to challenge Nancy Fraser's argument in her paper "From Redistribution to Recognition." (Dialogically expansive resources are set

in shaded text and contractive resources are <u>underlined</u>. As with my analysis of the student's critique of Zakaria above, I have highlighted here the lexico-grammatical "triggers" for discourse semantic options.)

An important similarity between the two excerpts is that both authorial voices are highly engaged dialogically**.** Both texts, that is, use strategies of attributions (e.g., *argument*, *stating*, *proposes*) and hypothetical reasoning to expand dialogical space, subtly allowing for alternative views, and they use pronouncements (*clearly*, *obvious*, *certainly*) to contract that space and guide the readers toward their own points of view**.** What this heteroglossic engagement suggests is that both authors are aware that, in academic contexts, writers are expected to negotiate assertions with an imagined reader who is not already aligned with the author's point of view but rather "is coolly rational, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response" (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006, p. 7). Furthermore, the juxtaposition of perspectives accomplished by alternating between expansive and contractive wordings may be characteristic of academic writing valued for "critical" reasoning. In her study of the ways experts in anthropology evaluated student writing in a general education course, Mary Soliday found that readers tended to reward a "reflective stance," which involves a "student's ability to appreciate diverse positions and then to commit to a judgment within [that] context" (2004, p. 74).

In the two paragraphs in Table 1, we can see that such appreciation, or at least awareness, of diverse positions is subtly infused throughout the texts as the writers open up dialogical space by acknowledging and entertaining other points of view before committing to a stance. For example, in the economics paragraph, the direct denial in sentence 4 (<u>*not*</u> *to maximize the health of the patient*) is followed by an expansively worded elaboration in sentence 5 that works to entertain a concession (*If insurance … <u>could</u> equate …*); the dialogic space is then once contracted in sentence 6 through the use of a counter (*However*) and pronounced denial (<u>*clearly*</u> *is <u>not</u> available*).

In terms of differences, the paragraph from economics generally takes a more committed stance. It makes use of dialogically contractive options that the political theory text avoids, namely the strategy of directly disclaiming other views (e.g., *However … is <u>not</u> upheld by the current situation*). It also grounds its propositions in a more objective voice, as seen in the bare assertion in sentence 1 and the lack of self-mentions. In contrast, the excerpt from political theory uses more expansive options to build its argument, particularly the option of entertaining alternative views, which is accomplished not only through the use of attributions and hypothetical reasoning, which the economics text makes use of as well, but also conjecturing (*I think*; *it is unlikely*) and evidentializing

(*it seems obvious*). Through the use of these strategies, the student author gently challenges Fraser's views rather than directly countering or denying them.

One pedagogical question raised by this type of analysis, then, is whether or not argumentative writing in economics is more highly valued when it adopts a direct and committed stance-taking style, and whether argumentative writing in political theory is more highly valued when it adopts a less committed style. Obviously, there is no way to give a generalized answer to this question on the basis of two students' essays. We certainly would not want to over-estimate the value of committed and direct argumentation in economics, especially in light of the economist Deirdre McCloskey's suggestion that "the economist looks always at other possibilities in a world of imagination, the opportunity cost, the alternatives foregone by the actions in question" (1998, p. 94) or Trine Dahl's recent finding that writers of research articles in economics excel at constructing knowledge claims that "achieve the optimal balance of caution, modesty, and self-promotion" (2009, p. 385).

Perhaps, then, we need to consider the sub-disciplinary contexts. For the economics paragraph, this context is the field of economic regulation and antitrust policy, and thus the course material (and likely style of argumentation) shunts back and forth between the discourses of economics and law. In this regard, the frequent disclaim moves found in the economics paragraph may be more characteristic of the "lawyerly" rhetoric identified by McCloskey in the economist Robert Coase's discourse (McCloskey, 2009. p. 90). Furthermore, on a personal/idiosyncratic level, we might consider the fact that the graduate student instructor (GSI) who graded the papers in the course was pursuing a joint PhD in law and economics and that, as stated in an interview, he valued explicit counter-argumentation.

Likewise, it would be unfair to conclude that the dialogically expansive style evident in the political theory paragraph represents a political scientist's mode of argumentation. The particular context is political theory, and the professor of the course, who was trained in philosophy, remarked in an interview that the writing assignments in his courses tended to be more "humanities oriented" than social science. At the same time, however, another possible understanding of this paragraph, one suggesting a more "idiosyncratic" stylistic reading, is that the dialogical positioning in the paragraph is too complex and thus the writer misses an opportunity to align the reader with his/her own point of view. In particular, it seems that the writer could have wrapped-up the paragraph with a more contractive move rather than ending with the hypothetical examples. Yet another reading, one which rings with the skillful use of dialogically contractive language that appears in the conclusion of this paper, is that the writer is trying out a "voice" perceived to be appropriate for a political theory

discussion, in which critical argumentation should not be carried out in a heavy handed manner but through the careful juxtaposition of various positions and evaluation of them with respect to one another.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I have discussed ways that SFL-based genre/register theory and Appraisal theory can guide the textual dimensions of genre analysis projects in the context of college writing instruction. Through the type of systematic attention to the interpersonal dimensions of texts that I have illustrated in this chapter, students and instructors can trouble some of the hard and fast stylistic principles that many students bring with them to their FYC courses, principles such as "be assertive, use active verbs, be clear and concise, eliminate 'filler' words, avoid repetition," and so on. What I would like to suggest, then, is that my discussion of texts in this chapter can serve as a model for the types of discussions that can take place in the context of FYC instruction that is focused on analyzing classroom genres across the curriculum. What drives my discussion is the general question of what sorts of interpretations can be made about fine-grained language choices in academic writing. What enables me to have this discussion is a concrete analytic framework and robust meta-language for talking about linguistic choices as they are related to meaning, in this case interpersonal interaction and dialogical stance-taking.

Use of an analytic framework allows students to adopt a critical distance from the texts they are analyzing. In this way it can facilitate the process of observing and tracking recurring patterns of language use that are otherwise difficult to notice from more casual scanning. Research from English for Specific Purposes contexts shows that students equipped with concrete analytic constructs for analyzing texts are better able to engage in reflection on their own rhetorical choices. Cheng, for example, discusses the gains graduate students made when reflecting on their rhetorical "moves" and "steps" when writing research article introductions (after John Swales' CARS model). Cheng's main argument is that in order to recontextualize discursive/rhetorical strategies from one genre to another, novice academic writers need a set of concrete analytic constructs that allows them to notice recurring patterns in the texts they read and then articulate their meta-reflections about their own use of such patterns. This process of noticing and reflective articulation can support a rhetorically sensitive transfer of genre features as students learn to use generic features "with a keen awareness of the rhetorical context that facilitates its appropriate use" (Cheng, 2007, p. 303). This argument makes sense when we consider that,

in order to engage in meta-reflection about writing strategies and discursive choices, especially very fine-grained strategies and choices, learners need a specific language of reflection.

In short, I have argued in this paper for particular conceptual and methodological tools of text analysis with the goal of enabling students to conduct genre analysis with control and authority. The larger goal of enabling students to do close, text-based genre analysis, however, is to help them to foster sensitivity to the relations between textual forms and rhetorical effects as they learn to write in various and complex rhetorical situations. As Devitt et al., put it, the idea is to "teach students how to gain knowledge of scenes and genres and how to use that knowledge to make more critically informed and effective writing decisions within various scenes" (2004, p. xvii). This knowledge and sensitivity can be the driving force behind the transfer from successfully analyzing to successfully writing genres, a process whereby students come to read as writers and to write as readers.

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