

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Academic literacy: Responding to a changing context

The field of academic literacy in English is a rapidly expanding one internationally, both as a field of practice and as one of research. This growth in interest can be attributed to a number of key factors. It is in part a consequence of the expansion in many English-speaking communities of tertiary places at undergraduate level. Shifts in the demographics of undergraduate students, from a traditional, relatively small base of middle-class school leavers to one which is numerically larger and socially broader, have brought into focus the expectations and demands of academic study at undergraduate level. From a linguistic perspective, there is a growing awareness that the genres and registers of academic discourse require students to take on new roles and to engage with knowledge in new ways, constructing texts which constitute unfamiliar, unlearnt language for many students, including those who are native speakers of English. A second key factor underlying the expanding field of academic literacy is the growing number of students internationally who are undertaking tertiary studies in English as a second or foreign language. This includes students from language backgrounds other than English who choose to study abroad in English speaking communities, or who take distance degrees through universities based in English speaking communities, or who attend institutions in non-English speaking communities where the medium of instruction is English. Here the issue is not only one of unfamiliar genres and registers, but one of negotiating and constructing these texts in a second or foreign language.

The changing context of academic literacy has generated a range of responses in the field of tertiary education. These responses can be broadly characterised as those that focus primarily on supporting students in managing the unfamiliar demands of new kinds of discourse, and those that focus primarily on critically reviewing academic literacy practices in terms of issues of social power, and the privileging or marginalisation of different groups of students.

At a practical level, responses of the first kind are manifested in a number of ways. A linguistic orientation is reflected in the significant expansion in language support programs and teaching resources specifically designed to teach academic literacy or English for

academic purposes (EAP)¹. EAP programs may be offered as pre-study or as parallel support, as credit bearing courses or in the form of optional assistance for individual students. Programs may offer generic or disciplinary specific academic language support. Some programs may foreground 'activity' over 'text', and give greater emphasis to processes of acculturating students into discourse communities of practice, that is they may emphasise ways of doing more than ways of writing. Also evident are more cognitive responses such as the requirement in many undergraduate programs to include objectives to enhance students 'critical thinking skills' as a means to facilitate student engagement with academic knowledge. From a research point of view the field of EAP is supported with an expanding range of publications and research journals, including most recently the specialist Journal of English for Academic Purposes, and EAP courses are integral to many postgraduate programs in the area of English language teacher education.

However, changes in the pedagogic context have also focused more attention on critiquing the discourse practices of the academy, and have raised issues of relevance and legitimacy in relation to those practices. Critiques of discourse practices may be in terms of challenging the kinds of language and the kinds of social practices that reflect unequal power relations in terms of gender, race and class, and/or in terms of critiquing the dominance of a specific language, in particular English, as increasingly the language of power in academic contexts internationally.

The position taken in this thesis is that neither of the general responses outlined above need be exclusive of the other, that is, that aiming to support students in meeting current expectations does not necessarily mean undermining a critique of current practices in terms of the ways those practices privilege 'elite' discourses or 'elite' languages. However, I also want to argue that there is a need for a clearer understanding of what is at stake from an epistemological point of view in valuing, promoting or privileging particular kinds of academic literacy practices over others. In the project of this thesis, which is to analyse evaluative discourse in the context of academic research writing in English, there is a strong underlying pedagogic intention to make the nature of the discourse more apparent, accessible, and available for novice academic writers. However, I am not simply aiming to explicate texts in order for students to be able to reproduce them more readily. A further objective is to be able to reveal the ways in which academic knowledge is socially constructed in and through discourse, in dialogue with other knowledge and other knowers, that is, to further an understanding of what it means to mean in an academic sense.

¹ The pedagogic distinction between academic literacy and EAP is usually made on the basis that academic literacy is the more general term encompassing academic writing support for native and non-native English speakers, and that EAP is a sub-category, focusing specifically on academic English for non-native speakers. Because this study draws on texts from students who are non-native English speakers, I will generally use the label EAP. However, I will also at times refer generally to academic literacy.

An exploration of the data in this study therefore begins from a theoretical perspective that understands language as constructing meaning, or in other words as constructing knowledge, not simply as a conduit for meaning or knowledge. The theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that underlies the study theorises language as a social semiotic, that is, as a meaning-making system (Halliday 1978). A brief introductory outline of this theory is provided later in this chapter, with further explanation in chapter 3. The issue to highlight here, however, is that from such a theoretical position, different kinds of discourse are seen to implicate different ways of knowing, and to construct different kinds of knowledge. Also relevant to this line of argument is Bernstein's theorising of the sociology of education (1996, 2000), and most particularly his analyses of what he refers to as Horizontal and Vertical discourses, contrasting localised (descriptive) and generative (theorised) ways of knowing. The question for reforming academic literacy practices therefore becomes one not simply of what kind of discourses in which to construct knowledge, but what kinds of knowledge to construct.

1.2 Locating the current study

1.2.1 The general context of undergraduate academic literacy

In researching the construction of academic texts, the context of undergraduate studies provides a significant site in that it represents a site of transition from school literacy practices to those that characterise expert professional academic practices. This transition can be bluntly characterised as one of mainly mono-vocal reproduction of knowledge, to the multi-vocal discursive construction of knowledge. The former is reflected in writing tasks where the student constructs an argument that is essentially single-voiced, and uncontested, even when arrived at with reference to the views of others. The latter requires writers to navigate amongst other voices and contributions to knowledge, within the text, in order to position themselves in relation to these other points of view. As students progress to the completion of their undergraduate studies, many are required to add a further dimension to this discourse, in which they argue for their own primary research. In this case they are required to discursively produce and position new knowledge. It is this context of academic writing that is the focus of my study, with specific attention to similarities and differences in the ways in which undergraduate and published writers argue for their own research in the introductions to their papers.

My characterisation of distinctions between school literacy practices and those of undergraduate research writing is necessarily highly generalised and will not of course hold in all circumstances. What is more, I do not wish to argue that language issues faced by undergraduate novice writers are not relevant to academic literacy in a school context, or for that matter to post-graduate and professional academic writing. However, the issues facing undergraduate research students are to some extent intensified in this site of transition, and this is even more the case where students are making the shift in a non-native language, as is the case in this study.

1.2.2 The specific context of Hong Kong

The study is located in Hong Kong, for a number of reasons. The first is pragmatic, in that I was a member of staff in an English medium university in the Special Administrative Region at the time of commencing the research. Beyond this though, there are a number of factors that make Hong Kong a most relevant site to investigate issues in undergraduate academic English literacy practices. In Hong Kong, factors identified above as underlying concerns in how to respond to changes in the field of academic literacy come together in a tertiary context in which undergraduate places have expanded in little over a decade from two percent of the school leaving population to approximately 18 percent. Moreover, the majority of universities in Hong Kong are English medium, which means that most students are studying in English as a second/foreign language. While current intakes of students have theoretically completed their secondary education in English medium schools, there is widespread debate in the community about the realisation of this policy in practice, as well as concerns for the standard of English of the teachers and students in schools, attested to by the introduction of compulsory English language tests for English language teachers in schools in 2001. In part as a consequence of concerns for the standard of English in schools, policy changes since 1998 have seen approximately three quarters of the secondary schools in Hong Kong revert to Chinese-medium instruction. In coming years the majority of new tertiary students will be experiencing English medium instruction for the first time. In Hong Kong the need for specific academic English support programs is well-recognised, and supported at a government and institutional level with a range of initiatives. EAP support programs draw on a healthy international and local research base exploring issues from a wide range of theoretical perspectives in linguistics and education. Staff and students also have access to internationally and locally published EAP teaching and learning resources in print and electronic form, and there is an increasingly well-qualified specialist teaching staff. In spite of this level of support there are major and on-going concerns about students' academic writing in English at undergraduate level.

1.3 Introducing the research design

1.3.1 The emergence of the research focus

The focus of this study grew out of my own experiences in consulting, teaching and researching in academic literacy in English at tertiary level in Hong Kong, and a first-hand recognition of the difficulties many students encountered in writing in academic English. In spite of the levels of support provided, this remains a persistently frustrating issue for teaching staff across the university as well as for students themselves. While not expressed specifically as a linguistic issue, one widely-voiced concern amongst academic staff is the lack of a critical perspective in students' work, that is a perspective that questions and evaluates knowledge, rather than one that aims for reproduction. The concern to do more to assist students to develop a critical stance in exploring and constructing knowledge is reflected in both government and institutional level educational policies. For example, one of the key objectives for higher education outlined in a consultation document for the Review of Education System Reform (May 2000) by the Education Commission of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, is 'to develop students' independent and critical thinking', and at an institutional level, a draft of the University's Teaching and Learning Policy (2001) includes the following aims:

The University believes that (...) learning embraces not just professional knowledge and skills but also (...) the ability to make independent judgement, an inquiring and innovative attitude...

(...) the University aims to facilitate communities of learners capable of making discoveries and solving problems, to create an environment and provide experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves...(Hong Kong Polytechnic University 2001)

Concerns are also reflected in institutional level workshops on teaching and learning that focus on developing a 'deep approach' to learning in contrast to a 'surface approach' (Ramsden 1992, Gibbs 1992), where 'deep approach' is taken to mean a concern with reasoning and critical analysis.

Explanations for the apparent lack of critique in students' writing are generally framed in the literature in terms of naivety, unwillingness, or incapacity. Groom (2000), for example, suggests that many struggling student writers do not have a clear understanding of the nature and function of argument as an academic genre. They do not appreciate that they are expected to develop a position of their own in relation to a question, issue or field, or a position in relation to the contributions of other sources within a field. They are unaware that an evaluative stance is required. However, even with

such insights, novice writers within an academic disciplinary community may be reluctant to take a critical stance. They may be unwilling to posit a critical view of a published author whom they regard as necessarily having greater insight, or they may simply lack confidence that they have in fact understood crucial aspects of what they have read. An unwillingness to take a stance may also be attributed to socio-cultural heritage, where community cultural values, norms and discourse practices are seen to be at odds with expectations for academic critique in English (Taylor and Chen 1991, Connor and Kramer 1995). For Chinese students, for example, it is sometimes suggested that a tradition of Confucianism that values maintaining social harmony may preclude the student, especially as a novice, from taking a critical stance in relation to literature being reviewed, especially the literature of experts (Ballard and Clanchy 1991, Carson 1992). However, Bloch and Chi (1995) question whether Chinese students in learning to write academic English have in fact been introduced to, and apprenticed into expectations for, and methods of, evaluating the contribution of other sources. Hyland and Milton (1997) in a study of writing in British and Hong Kong secondary schools point to rigid practices in the exam-driven secondary schools in Hong Kong as contributing to a lack of stance in students' academic writing. These practices are seen to discourage questioning in favour of formulaic responses (c.f. Hamp-Lyons 1999).

As I have noted already in this discussion, the kinds of responses that are advocated vary with the interpretation of the 'problem', and range from calls for more access to English language support programs, to the teaching of 'critical thinking skills' (see, for example, Hill and Resnick 1995, and critiques of such in Gee 1990, Fox 1994, and Atkinson 1997), to more effective processes of acculturating students into academic discourse practices in English (Geisler 1994, Bizzel 1992), to calls for reform of, or resistance to the global hegemonic practices of academic English (Ivanic 1998, Pennycook 1994). In Hong Kong this latter position translates in part to an on-going undercurrent in discussion of language policy of the possibility of shifting to Mandarin as the primary language of instruction at tertiary level, and in practice to the on-going extensive use of Cantonese in many pedagogic encounters in officially English medium tertiary institutions (Pennington and Balla 1996). However, one issue that remains, whatever the language of instruction, is that tertiary literacy practices are different in significant ways from those that students experience in their secondary schooling. Tertiary literacy practices require a different relationship with knowledge, as being constructed in their texts and not just re-presented, and they require a new engagement with other knowers, as they construct multi-voiced texts. An important premise of this thesis is that there is more to understand in terms of the nature of academic discourse as a means for the construction of knowledge, and that making more transparent the discursive constructedness of academic argument in English is especially significant where discourse practices are expected to differ from those experienced by students in their first language and home culture. As Belcher and Braine (1995:xv) argue, explicit 'awareness of texts, subtexts and

contexts' can 'provide a sense of the "sociorhetorical community", shared awareness of the rules of academic games and the strategies that successful players use'.

The focus of this thesis is therefore on the linguistic analysis of academic texts, especially texts which represent the construction of new knowledge, to explore how this process of knowledge construction is managed by professional academics and by novice writers. In particular, I want to consider the linguistic demands underlying expectations that students will critically evaluate other knowledge and other knowers as they construct an argument for their own research. Linguistic considerations are, I argue, an essential contribution to debates and discussions on expected outcomes of pedagogy. Whatever the position taken in discussions on academic discourse, whether the orientation is towards the reproduction of existing academic discourse practices, or to challenging and changing those practices, there is an on-going need for expectations to be shared by teaching and supervisory staff and by students; and a sharing of expectations involves an articulation of how they can be realised in texts. A linguistic perspective on the ways students are expected to engage with the construction of academic knowledge, has an important contribution to make to the many academic literacy programs that support the very significant and expanding numbers of students internationally studying in English as a second language, or learning academic discourse in English as their native language. This study is therefore situated at the intersection of education and linguistics, and aims to make a contribution in both directions.

1.3.2 The kinds of texts

One site that foregrounds a critical engagement with the construction of knowledge in academic discourse is the research dissertation required of final year undergraduate students, and in particular the introductory section that functions to contextualise the writer's own study with reference to relevant literature in the field. Such texts are often considered problematic in terms of the inability of novice writers to take a review of the literature beyond an 'annotated bibliographic form' (Swales and Lindemann 2002, c.f. Hart 1998). This study is situated in the disciplinary context of the social sciences, and all texts analysed are from within fields related to education and communication. However, in the institution in which the data for this study were collected, there is a perception amongst many academic staff across disciplinary fields that this component of the dissertation constitutes one of the least successful sections of the larger dissertation text². The criticisms include the view that students are not adequately contextualising their research, that their literature base is too

² These views were expressed to the researcher in interviews and informal discussions in her role as a member of the Effective English Communication for Teaching and Research (EECTR) program offering English language support for academic staff.

narrow, that they are not discriminating in their selection of sources to cite, and that the structure is often that of an annotated bibliography rather than a synthesised argument. In other words students are not taking a critical evaluative stance in constructing a position for their own research. The problems perceived by staff are mirrored in the difficulties and frustrations expressed by many students. Students often understand their difficulties as beginning with the task of locating and making sense of texts that can frame their own study and continuing through to the means for constructing the final product. Similar views were expressed by the students whose texts inform this study. Figure 1.1 presents excerpts from a seminar discussion recorded towards the end of a 6 x 1 hour EAP module on writing a literature review, which was undertaken by the students in their third year of study. The underlined comments highlight students' concerns with evaluating the literature they are reading (which include evaluations made of other authors), and incorporating these evaluations into texts in such a way as to relate them to their own research, and in the process to maintain an apparent 'objectivity'.

Fig. 1.1: Excerpts from a student seminar discussion on writing a literature review (Year 3, class 6)

S8: Ahh ...the difficulty of writing literature reviews. I think the problem is how to comment on previous studies. Do you know what I mean? We find out some ideas from the book but it is very difficult to make some comment on it. Maybe we only know how to read ahh quotes, quotes, quote his voice but do not add some ... our ideas. It is very difficult to add my ideas.

S5:... And and another thing I think, umm literature reviews are difficult because I think it is time consuming to read many different papers in a specific area. It is difficult to find out the main points from sometime because in the literature review the writer quoted many many writers... their ideas. So it is quite confused to find out what's the point. So that is very difficult. And sometimes I find it is hard to rephrase the ideas of the writer, and I think this is the same as ... I don't know how to comment.

S1: My difficulty of literature review is very simple. Umm ... the English is quite difficult to understand because I think, who.. the article...how is it... the writer who ah write the article must ah... be at at some certain level about that aspect, but I'm only a student and I'm think his idea may be too difficult or the English he use is quite difficult to understand and also the structure. Ah since we grown in Hong Kong we think short sentences are better for us than long ones. (*laughter*) Because the writer may be the foreigner and they always use very very long sentences. Yeah so very very difficult to catch up what they are writing about. That's my view.

S4: (*Laugh*) – yes that's what I want to point out is that.. because in actual situations there is no material that's provided so I think the first problem is how to find material, right books or material. And the second is how to ...also like .. is understanding the concept inside because actually the literature review, the language of the literature review is quite abstract and very difficult for the second language students to understand it. And if I want .. I think if we solve these prob... these two of the problems, there is also the third and fourth problem is synthesis or evaluate it. When, how to comment on it. And I think these steps will have very different kinds of difficulty.

...

S3: I think when we are writing a literature review usually there are two opposing points of

view on a point, so we can write the positive side and the negative side, and we can have many styles to show your opinion. Just like what we learnt in the last year, put the points we agree on at the last. This is one kind of style to express you opinion.

S6: But it is quite difficult to make our evaluation to be objective?

S3: Objective this is just another skill. How do select the wording and but the main point is we select the important points from the other writers and show what you agree on and what you disagree on. Some ideas that you will discuss later in some other part of the research or the report.

S6: I think since you mentioned before, you can just jot down advantages and disadvantages or any limitations in some points and try to group them.

S3: That is much more easy for you to evaluate.

S6: Is that .. the question is how we can make the evaluation to be objective? The question. What is the question?

S3: Just how to evaluate and give an opinion.

Student concerns around the construction of an evaluative stance, such as those expressed above become key issues for investigation in this study. My specific concerns focus on the need for clearer descriptions and explanations of what is expected from undergraduate students in undertaking and writing up research, and for how these expectations can be realised in language. If we aim to apprentice undergraduate students into an academic discourse community that values ‘independent judgement’, ‘critical thinking’ and ‘an innovative attitude’ in the ‘construction of knowledge’, what does this mean linguistically? In what ways can published texts constitute pedagogic models to guide students towards this goal? What kinds of evaluative strategies do published writers use, and to what extent are these strategies relevant to student writers? To what extent are students managing a critical evaluative stance in their research writing? What objectives might be built into programs of academic writing support? If we change the kinds of texts that are expected of students, what are the implications for the kinds of knowledge that is constructed through the texts?

1.3.3 The particular linguistic focus

An understanding of evaluation in academic writing, from a linguistic perspective, has been well informed by studies focusing on genre or move structure, beginning with Swales’ (1990) very influential studies of research articles. This approach is taken up in numerous other studies of the generic structures of academic texts (e.g. Paltridge 1997, Dudley-Evans 1997, Hyon 1996, Samraj 2002), and in teaching resources (e.g. Swales and Feak 1994, 2000). The research base in the grammar of academic writing is also extensive. In this area, the field of Pragmatics has had a very strong influence, with explorations of the functions of a range of formal syntactic features (e.g. Connor and Kramer 1995). The formal orientation to

grammar that characterises much work in Pragmatics has more recently been complemented with a growing body of research that approaches an analysis of the grammatical construction of academic texts from a functional linguistic theoretical base, for example, Drury (1991) on grammatical features of student summaries, Green, Christopher and Mei (2000) on theme choices in Chinese students' writing in English, and Martinez (2001) on transitivity choices at different stages of research articles.

At a practical level much of the linguistic response to students' writing in EAP to date, as evidenced, for example, in feedback to students on the construction of their texts, is addressed to their awareness and control of conventions of generic staging or conjunctive relations. Typical response comments from such a genre or move perspective might include, for example, "*this chapter of the thesis lacks an introduction*", or "*your conclusion inappropriately introduces new concepts*", or "*you need to signal the transition between these two sections*". Beyond a focus on generic staging or moves and text level cohesion, the focus very often shifts directly to language at the level of grammar, although predominantly from a structural rather than a functional perspective. Attention is given to students' syntactic errors such as omission of articles, subject-verb agreement, and so on (see Schleppegrell 2002). Feedback to students may also focus on stylistic features such as an inappropriate register choice (perhaps highlighting examples such as "*they did some research*"; "*Actually there appears to be a discrepancy...*"), or on what may be considered an overly explicit and subjective coding of position ("*I think...*", "*In my opinion...*").

What is largely lacking in both a practical and a research sense, however, is close attention in a theoretically informed way to the inter-relationship of language choices across texts, in other words, a discourse semantic perspective on academic language. A discourse semantic perspective on interpersonal meaning in academic texts can explain how meanings are realised through the distributions, positioning and co-articulation of interpersonal resources across phases of text. It contributes a way of making sense of texts, and a way of making meaning in texts in the 'missing middle ground' (Martin 2002c) between genre and grammar. An important research design decision is therefore the language stratum at which linguistic analyses are focused, and the aim of this thesis is to explore, from a discourse semantic perspective, the task of constructing an evaluative stance in introducing one's own research. In this study, evaluative stance is taken to refer to the ways writers position their own research in relation to other knowledge and other knowers. Evaluative stance is understood therefore not as a fixed writer viewpoint that characterizes a whole text, but as a dynamic process of positioning throughout the text, realized through the strategic deployment of resources of interpersonal meaning.

1.3.4 The nature and role of language theory in the research design

The research design is one that foregrounds a theoretical model as a point of departure for an exploration of the discourse semantics of evaluative stance. Interpretations of the functioning of language choices in the data are made with reference to the theory, and writers' linguistic choices are considered in relation to the predictions established by the theory. At the same time an application of this theory to a study of academic discourse involves a simultaneous interrogation of the theory itself, which is further developed in its application to this specific register and the specific instances of language in the data. The specific theoretical model drawn upon in this study is that of Appraisal theory (Martin 1997, 2000) within a broader model of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1985, 1994, Martin 1992b, Halliday and Matthiessen 1999). Because of the centrality of the theoretical model to the design of the research, I introduce some key concepts in this theory here in chapter 1, although relevant features are further explained in chapter 3, and are also necessarily elaborated in chapters that discuss particular aspects of analyses of the data.

1.3.4.1 Key tenets in Systemic Functional Linguistic theory

The theory that underpins this study is that of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday 1985, 1994, Martin 1992b, Halliday and Matthiessen 1999). The fundamental advantages of this theory are firstly that language is modelled as a social semiotic, in other words as a meaning-making resource (Halliday 1978). Eggins (1994:22) provides the following explanation.

If language is a semiotic system, then the process of language use is a process of making meanings by choosing. In making a choice from a linguistic system, what someone writes or says gets meaning by being seen (interpreted) against the background of what could have been meant (said or written) in that context but was not.

Within SFL theory, meaning is theorised metafunctionally as simultaneously construing an ideational 'reality', an interpersonal 'reality' and a textual 'reality'. Interpersonal meanings are therefore intrinsic to the model and are not interpreted as something that language *does*, but as something that language *is*. This represents an important theoretical contrast to the modelling of language as syntax, semantics and pragmatics, where semantics is understood to focus on ideational aspects of meaning, and an interpersonal dimension is relegated to the domain of pragmatic interpretation (see, for example, Channell 1994).

In SFL, the relationship of language to context is one of construal in the sense that language is seen to reflect and at the same time to construct contexts of meaning. From an interpersonal perspective, for example, language is seen not only as a representation of different relationships and values but as constitutive of those relationships and values. The relationship of language to context is a systematic one in that choices in systems of language implicate choices in meanings,

and vice versa. At the level of grammar, for example, options within choices of mood construe particular roles relationships for others to take up in a text, and different role relationships in the context will be reflected in mood choices in the clause structure of the text (Halliday 1994, Eggins 1994).

As a comprehensive functional model of language, SFL also theorises language as a tri-stratal system, with a two-level content plane of discourse semantics and lexicogrammar, representing meanings and wordings, and a third plane of expression in phonology/ graphology (Halliday 1994, Eggins 1994). The diagram in figure 1.2 is adapted from Eggins 1994:21).

Fig. 1.2: Levels or strata of language (from Eggins 1994)

	Folk Names	Technical Terms
CONTENT	meanings	discourse semantics
	wordings (words and structures)	lexicogrammar
EXPRESSION	sounds/letters	phonology/graphology

Systems of language at the level of discourse semantics are realised through choices from the system of lexicogrammar, and in turn expressed through systems of phonology/graphology.

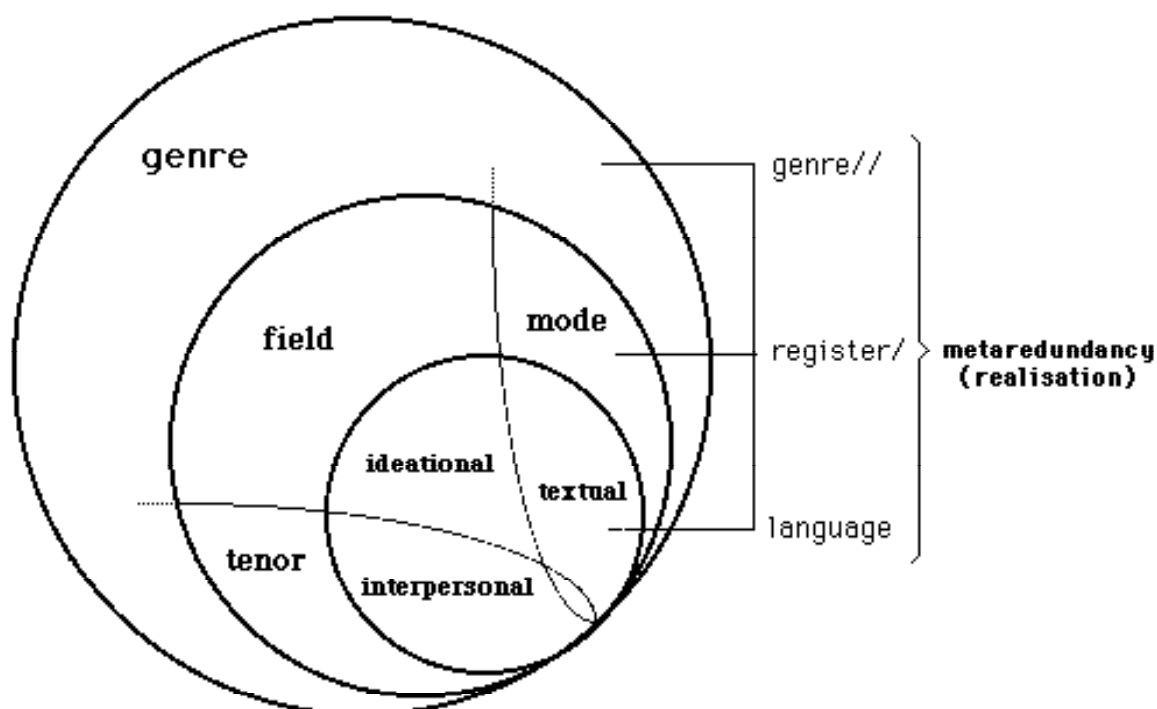
However, the level of discourse semantics represents a more abstract system of meaning making than does lexicogrammar, and enables analyses of meanings in text to take into account a range of grammatical resources. As Martin (1992b:19) explains

...setting up a level of discourse semantics stratified with respect to lexicogrammar on the content plane (...) permit(s) generalisations to be made across structural and non-structural textual relations. (...) [S]tratifaction (...) gives rise to a model in which the discourse semantics both generalises across grammatical resources and accounts for relations between as well as within clause complexes. The discourse semantics is therefore more abstract than, and deals with larger units than, lexicogrammar.

Lemke (1995) refers to the relationship from one stratal plane to the next as one of 'meta-redundancy' in the sense that discourse semantics can be said to meta-redund with lexicogrammar, representing patterns of lexicogrammatical choices.

In theorising the relationship of language to context, SFL proposes two levels of context, those of register and of genre (Martin 1992b, Eggins 1994). Register (or context of situation) is context seen from the perspective of language and reflects the metafunctional diversity of language in the register variables of field, tenor and mode. Genre (or context of culture) is context seen from the perspective of culture, and is 'interpreted as a system of social processes' (Martin 1992b: 494). The relationship of genre to register to language is represented diagrammatically in figure 1.3.

Fig. 1.3: Genre, register and language, from Martin and Rose 2003:254



Genres therefore represent culturally conventionalised or institutionalised representations of meanings.

1.3.4.2 An introduction to Appraisal theory

The model of Appraisal, the theoretical framework that informs this study, is a functional model of interpersonal meaning at the level of discourse semantics. The framework of Appraisal theory accommodates analyses of stance as positioning in relation to values and voices in the text. The model of Appraisal includes a system of options for encoding semantic categories of Attitude, enabling an exploration of the kinds of values that are encoded in the discourse. It includes a system of options for grading meanings (Graduation), enabling an investigation of how phenomena are valued by degree. And finally, it includes a system of options for expanding or contracting space for other voices in discourse (Engagement), enabling an investigation of the dynamic management of other voices by the writer. The model of Appraisal therefore provides a basis for a theoretically informed analysis of the interpersonal meanings construed in the discourse semantics of texts.

A number of features of Appraisal theory make it most relevant to this study. In the first instance, it models interpersonal meaning at the level of discourse semantics. The options in Appraisal networks of Attitude, Graduation and Engagement are *semantic* options. As such they can be realised in a range of grammatical systems. So, for example, expressions of Attitude can be realised congruently as adjectives functioning as attributes, as in '*a useful*

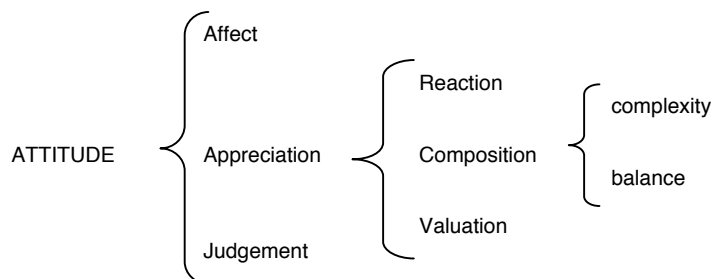
technique. Alternatively, they can be encoded as nouns, functioning as the head of a nominal group, as in ‘the *benefits* of ...’, or realising as a process, such as in ‘*clarify* their thoughts’. In other words, language choices that are diverse in their grammatical structuring can be related systematically as construing common semantic options, contributing to a consistent rhetorical effect or evaluative positioning. The model therefore has the potential to bring together under a coherent framework a wide range of constructions in the grammar that are frequently investigated in isolation in the research literature on evaluation. In that sense Appraisal theory offers a more comprehensive means for systematically modelling evaluative stance than has been otherwise available.

Secondly, the semantic system networks of Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement also function at graded levels of delicacy. As Eggins (1994) explains,

each system in a system network represents a point at which a choice has to be made. The first choice that has to be made (from the system at the most left-hand side of the system network) is called the least delicate choice. (...) As the network extends to the right, we say we are moving in delicacy (Eggins 1994:208).

This movement in delicacy from left to right across the networks is exemplified for a segment of the system of Attitude within the Appraisal network, in figure 1.4.

Fig. 1.4: Semantic network of Attitude as discussed in Martin (2000)



The degrees of delicacy, built into the system network, enable more general or more delicate distinctions to be made in the analyses of the data. The level of delicacy chosen for analysis will depend on the questions asked of particular texts, and the kinds of differences and similarities that emerge in comparisons across texts.

Finally, Appraisal theory is a component of a broader metafunctional theory of language in SFL. While the focus of Appraisal theory is interpersonal meaning, SFL recognises the simultaneous encoding of interpersonal, ideational and textual meanings. The metafunctional perspective is important in recognising the ways in which interpersonal meanings relate to ideational and textual choices in the discourse. An understanding of the characteristic patterning of different metafunctions in discourse informs an analysis of how interpersonal meanings are distributed in the discourse, how they are foregrounded or backgrounded, and

how they interrelate with each other. In other words, a metafunctional perspective provides a means of modelling the dynamic construal of evaluative stance across texts.

1.3.5 A discourse analytic approach in contrast to corpus-based studies of the functioning of language

The model of Appraisal theorises interpersonal meaning making not at the level of clause, but at the level of whole texts. The concern in this study is therefore with the interaction of multiple features of texts and with how language choices co-articulate with each other across the text in making meaning that is more than the accumulation of the meanings construed in each clause. For this reason, and in the absence of more sophisticated tools for the functional coding of discourse than are currently available (Martin 2002c), the research design is qualitative and interpretive in approach. The orientation is to an in-depth analysis of a relatively small number of texts (ten texts in this study) rather than to a quantitative corpus-based study suited to the exploration of the functioning of a small number of features across a larger data set.

An advantage of a detailed study of the discourse semantics of individual texts is that it enables the exploration of multiple aspects of meaning that are realised dynamically across a web of inter-related lexical and grammatical choices. Such studies contribute to an understanding of the logogenesis of the discourse, that is, of how language evolves progressively throughout a text. As Martin and Rose argue,

[i]n contrast to some views on analysing discourse, we do believe it is important to analyse instances in individual texts. What is unique about a specific text may be just what matters; we don't want to lose what's special by only valuing generalizations across a text corpus. Beyond this, as discourse analysts generalize, the tendency at this stage of our work is to lose sight of how texture is construed as a text unfolds, through its particular logogenetic contingencies.' (2003: 272)

Essentially there is a trade-off in the choice of approach in any one study, which is that of depth versus breadth, or complexity versus generality, and the challenge in this thesis is to be able to model the complexity in ways that make language choices and discursive strategies accessible to novice writers.

However there are also important epistemological considerations in the design of the study arising from the underlying theory. Because SFL theorises language as not just realising meanings but also as constructing meanings, in other words constructing knowledge, the theory is not simply a set of tools for categorising certain lexicogrammatical or discourse features in texts. Rather it is a means for explicating the kinds of meanings that are being constructed. A discourse analytic study within SFL is therefore a fundamentally different

orientation to a study of discourse from that undertaken in pragmatically oriented studies. This issue is elaborated in chapter 2.

1.3.6 The approach to analyses of the data

The research design incorporates a study of the introductory sections of both published research articles as well as student dissertations. The introductory sections in both sets of data share a common functional goal, that is to provide a context and justification for the writer's own study. The published texts provide the data for an initial study of the nature and functioning of evaluative resources used by writers in contextualising and arguing for their own research. This initial analysis then becomes a reference point for a consideration of the resources and strategies used by undergraduate students in writing the introductory sections to their dissertations. While the published texts do represent to some extent textual realisations of target academic discourse in the given disciplinary field, clearly the contexts for writing differ across the data sets, as well as internally within each set to some extent. There are differences in writer roles within their respective discourse communities and differences in the intended readership. There are also some differences in topic or field of research, and in research methodologies across and within data sets. The research design of this study is not premised on an assumption that student texts should aim to replicate in all ways those of expert published academic writers. Rather the published texts become the starting point for theorising the notion of evaluative stance. This theoretical modelling of evaluative stance is then applied to analyses of the student texts, providing frames of reference beyond those of generic staging for identifying how student writers construct an evaluative stance, and whether or in what ways published research articles might provide pedagogic models for novice writers. The development of a comprehensive framework for the description of the discourse semantics of evaluative stance can provide a basis for more clearly articulating and negotiating expectations with students, for assessing and giving feedback on their texts, and for informing the design of pedagogic pathways for apprenticing students into academic writing of this kind. The representations of how published writers construct stance in their texts can also function to achieve another important objective, and that is to make apparent to novice writers the constructed-ness of the texts.

In summary, the general context for this study is the field of academic literacy in English; the specific context is the research writing of undergraduate ESL students studying in English as a second language in Hong Kong; and the focus is on the linguistic resources deployed in the construction of an evaluative stance at the level of discourse semantics, with attention to the similarities and differences in the evaluative strategies and resources used by published writers and those used by student writers in constructing arguments for their own research.

The study represents both an exploration of the discourse and an exploration of theory with contributions in both directions, and ultimately aims to inform EAP pedagogy and more general discussions of academic literacy practices.

1.3.7 Research questions

The research focus outlined above is formulated as a set of general and specific research questions, as follows.

The general question addressed in the thesis is:

In what ways, and by what means is evaluative stance encoded in the discourse of academic research paper introductions, and with what pedagogic implications for novice academic research writers?

The focus is specified further as a series of questions and sub-questions.

1. How is an evaluative stance construed in the discourse semantics in the introductory sections of a set of published research articles?
 - a. How is evaluative stance construed through the expression of graded values in the discourse of the published texts?
 - (i) What characteristic preferences and variations in the expression of values are evident in the texts?
 - (ii) How are value positions construed dynamically and interactively in the discourse?
 - (iii) How do variations in the ways values are encoded reflect variations in the construal of evaluative stance?
 - b. How is evaluative stance construed through the voicing of values in the published texts?
 - (i) To what extent are the texts single-voiced or multi-voiced?
 - (ii) Who gets to do what kind of evaluating?
 - (iii) How do variations in the ways values are voiced constitute variations in writer strategy? What is the rhetorical implication?
 - (iv) What is the epistemological implication?
 - c. How is evaluative stance construed through the interaction of values and voices in the published texts?
 - (i) How does the writer incorporate multiple values and voices into a coherent argument?
 - (ii) How is the reader positioned dynamically throughout the text, to align with the writer's argument?

2. How do the student writers construct evaluative stance in the introductory sections of their dissertations? What similarities and differences are evident in relation to the published texts?
 - a. How is evaluative stance construed through the expression of graded values in the discourse of the student texts?
 - b. How is evaluative stance construed through the voicing of values in the student texts?
 - c. How is evaluative stance construed through the interaction of values and voices in the student texts?

3. What are the implications for EAP/academic literacy pedagogy?
 - a. How can the findings of the study inform the teaching of academic writing?
 - b. How can the findings of the study inform debates about changing academic literacy practices?

1.4 Significance of the thesis

This thesis makes a number of significant contributions to understanding the discourse of academic argument. At a general level, the study contributes importantly to the middle ground between studies that focus on the generic structuring of academic texts as argument, and studies that focus on the functioning of specific grammatical resources at the level of clause, in relation to the construal of interpersonal meaning.

As a study informed by a functional theory of language (SFL), it provides an important alternative to interpretations of evaluative stance as represented, for example, in accounts of 'hedging' within the field of pragmatics.

Specifically, the thesis contributes new understandings of the discourse semantics of evaluative stance from a functional perspective, including explanations of:

- the ways in which academic writers manage the dual demands of appearing to be 'objective' while arguing for their own research. While novice writers are frequently encouraged to make their writing less personal, the study reveals that a key strategy in evaluating other research is in fact to subjectify 'objective' meanings.
- the means by which academic writers manage to maintain a solidarity with their academic discourse community while at the same time constructing differences that provide space for their own research.

- the ways in which writers orchestrate the multiple voices and values they incorporate into their texts, so that the ‘ideal’ reader aligns overall with the writer’s meta-argument.
- why it is that alternative ‘voice roles’, or ways of evaluating, represent different epistemological positions or different ways of knowing.

The thesis also makes an important contribution to the linguistic theory upon which it draws. The research is informed by a comprehensive functional theory of interpersonal meaning in discourse, namely Appraisal theory (Martin 1997, 2000). The application of Appraisal theory to the study of evaluative stance in the introductory sections of academic research papers has also informed aspects of the theory itself, and has resulted in an expansion of the theoretical model. In particular, an interrogation of the theory in the context of this study has enabled an expansion of the system network of Graduation, and pointed to the significant role that the grading of non-attitudinal meanings plays in evoking attitude in this register.

A further contribution of the thesis is to the teaching of academic literacy.

- The multidimensional and dynamic explanation of evaluative stance developed in this study, provides an important new means by which teachers of academic literacy can model evaluative strategies in texts. The outcomes of this study can translate directly into the development of teaching resources that model the discourse semantics of the construal of evaluative stance, in ways that make writer strategies at this level more accessible to novice writers.
- The framework for analysing evaluative stance modelled in this thesis enables teachers to determine whether, and in what ways, published texts might provide effective models of rhetorical strategies for novice academic writers. Pedagogic model texts can be used to illustrate i) the ways in which different fields are construed, ii) the ways in which writers encode attitude strategically in relation to those fields, including the encoding of attitude indirectly through grading experiential meanings, iii) the strategic positioning of attitude at particular points in the text, and iv) the ways in which different voice roles can be taken up by the writer themselves, or by other sources through different expressions of attitude.
- Explanations of the task can also be more effectively conveyed. The often stated request of students to ‘evaluate’ the literature review, a request that might be interpreted as an expectation to ‘judge’, can be unpacked in helpful ways in terms of the discourse strategies identified in the research.
- Analyses identify a range of evaluative strategies used by writers in constructing arguments for their own research. These options and their exemplification in pedagogic models can provide a point of reference for staff and students in negotiating appropriate

ways for students to introduce their own research, and for evaluating the effectiveness of their texts.

- The modelling of evaluative strategies in the discourse semantics of texts provides an effective means by which the constructedness of academic argument can be made apparent to novice writers. An awareness of the kinds of meanings that can be construed, and the linguistic resources that come into play, is an important step in students' learning to manage these resources in their own writing.

At a more general pedagogic level, the study points to potential pedagogic pathways for students in EAP and academic literacy support programs, where students progressively extend their control of evaluative strategies for introducing and arguing for their own research.

The study also makes a valuable contribution to discussion on changing academic practices, by highlighting the need for a more informed understanding of the relationship between the nature of the discourse and the construction of knowledge.

1.5 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis argues for a theoretically principled and comprehensive explanation of the discourse semantic construal of evaluative stance in the introductions of research papers. A comprehensive explanation of evaluative stance is developed throughout the thesis making apparent the strategies that are employed by both the published writers and the student writers. The complexity of this task is reflected in the organization of the thesis in a number of respects.

In the first instance, the significance of linguistic theory in this study means that it is addressed progressively through a number of chapters in the thesis. A very general explanation of the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics and in particular Appraisal theory is provided in this introductory **chapter 1**, as part of an overall framing of the focus and approach to the study.

The theoretical approach is further explained in **chapter 2**, the literature review, in terms of how it relates to other work in the field, and specific aspects of the theory are explained in more detail in **chapter 3** within an overall description of the research design. Specific components of the theory, namely Attitude, Graduation and Engagement, are drawn upon in

analyses of the data in chapters 4, 5, and 6, and are further developed through their application in this study.

The application of Appraisal theory to an investigation of how academic writers construe evaluative stance is begun in **chapter 4**. Chapter 4 functions as a transition to chapters 5 and 6, providing the necessary theoretical justifications for the analyses and interpretations in the subsequent two chapters.

In **chapter 5**, I begin to construct the initial layer of a discourse semantic explanation of stance that links language choices to the interpersonal functioning of the texts. This first layer of explanation accounts for the encoding of values, and specifically answers the questions of what values are encoded and how, and to what rhetorical effect. The initial modelling of the encoding of values in the published texts is then applied to an analysis of the student texts to identify potential pedagogic implications. The objective here is to identify the extent to which the same kinds of writer strategies are evident amongst the published writers and the student writers. On this basis decisions can be made on the potential for such published texts to function as models in support programs for novice academic research writers, or as points of reference in the negotiation of appropriate strategies for undergraduate research writers. The analysis of the encoding of values in the student texts also reveals particular areas in which the student writers need support in managing their chosen rhetorical strategies.

The explanation of evaluative stance is then further developed in **section 1 of chapter 6** with a second layer of analysis that focuses in the issue of the 'voicing' of values. The issue of voice is approached from two perspectives. The first could be described as the more concrete sense of voice, and addresses the question of the actual source of a given proposition or evaluation. The source is identified as either the writer of the text, or another author that is introduced into the text by the writer. The second sense of voice is a more abstract one, and refers to the ways in which phases of text are characterised by particular kinds of configurations of resources of Appraisal that constitute ways of talking evaluatively. In this study these configurations are referred to as 'voice roles'. The analyses address the question of who gets to do what kind of evaluating in the texts. In this case both the rhetorical effect and the epistemological implications are discussed. Once again the modelling of stance in respect to the voicing of values in the published texts is then applied to the student texts, to investigate pedagogic potential and implications. In **section 2 of chapter 6**, I propose one final layer of explanation of the discourse semantics of evaluative stance by considering the writer/reader interface. I examine the ways in which writers navigate a pathway for readers among the multiple voices and values encoded in their texts,

so as, ultimately, to align the reader to the writer's meta-argument for the value of their own research contribution. A network of options for aligning the reader with voices and values in the text is developed as a reconfiguration of the network of Engagement (White 2003a, 2003c, Martin and White forthcoming) within Appraisal theory. The alignment network is then applied to analyses of the published texts and the student texts to explore its potential in further explicating the complex and dynamic process of construing evaluative stance in academic writing.

In **chapter 7**, I conclude by summarising the major findings of the research and by discussing the contribution of the study to both the linguistic study of evaluation in texts, and to pedagogy of academic writing in English. A final section considers a number of ways in which the study can contribute to other research and to specific pedagogic projects.