Chapter 3 Explaining the research design and rationale

Introduction

The focus of this thesis is the ways in which writers evaluatively position themselves, and their readers in relation to other knowledge and other knowers in the introductions to their written research papers. The study was motivated by concerns and questions arising from experiences in teaching and supervising undergraduate students writing in English as a second language. This experience suggests the need to be able to articulate more clearly the rhetorical strategies available for students as novice academic researchers and writers, to explain the implications of choosing amongst different strategies, and to model expectations in more accessible ways. Towards this goal, I argue in this thesis for a more comprehensive and theoretically informed understanding of what it means to take an evaluative stance in positioning one's own research, to identify options available in construing evaluative stance and implications of particular choices. The specific textual foci of this thesis are the introductory sections of both published and student research papers.

The specific research questions addressed in this study are presented in chapter 1 of the thesis. They are reproduced here as a point of reference in a discussion of the research design.

The overall research question 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?

This general question is broken down into a number of more specific questions, namely,

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?

3.1   Research Design

3.1.1 The theoretical foundation

In this thesis I argue that recent developments in Systemic Functional theory at a discourse semantic level, namely the work on Appraisal theory by Martin and colleagues (Martin 1997,

2000, Martin and Rose 2003, White 2003a), provide an important theoretical framework for a comprehensive study of evaluative stance in academic texts. The theory enables different aspects of evaluation, including expressions of attitude, the identification of the source of the attitude, and the writer's positioning of those other sources, to be integrated in one model. At the same time this model sits within a broader functional theory of language that enables choices in language to be related in a theoretically principled way to the construal of different kinds of meanings. The theory is briefly introduced in chapter 1 in a general introduction to the thesis, but is further developed at this point, with an explanation of key concepts and components.

3.1.1.1 The development of Appraisal theory

Within Systemic Functional Linguistic theory, interpersonal meaning at the level of lexicogrammar is analysed as choices in systems of mood and modality, and as attitudinal lexis (Halliday 1985, 1994). Early work on interpersonal meaning beyond the level of grammar, that is in the discourse semantics of texts, focused initially on exchange structure (Berry 1981, Ventola 1987, Martin 1992b). However, as Martin (2000:144) suggests, these approaches to interpersonal meaning within SFL have tended to omit a detailed focus on 'the semantics of evaluation – how the interlocutors are feeling, the judgements they make, and the value they place in the various phenomena of their experience'. In the 1980s, a major renewed interest in evaluative meanings in texts began with Poynton's (1985/1989) work on tenor especially in expressions of affect and variations in the use of vocatives. Of importance also, are early studies of genres, building on Labov and Waletzky's (1967) work on narrative texts (Plum 1998, Martin and Rothery 1980, 1981, and Rothery 1990) with interest in the encoding of evaluation across different stages of the narrative. The emergence of the theory of Appraisal (Martin 1997, 2000) traces back to Martin's (1992a) paper, 'Macroproposals: Meaning by degree' in which he explores gradable systems in English and points to the fact that choices in a gradable system of meanings, always 'enter into oppositions concerned with the evaluation of experience' (1992a: 366). The theory was then further developed in the 1990s in research into a range of discourses in schools and workplaces. Studies were undertaken on the discourses of science (Veel 1998), history (Coffin 2000), administration (Iedema 2003), and the media (Iedema, Feez and White 1994, White 2003a). Applications of Appraisal theory also include studies of evaluation in casual conversation (Eggins and Slade 1997), in narratives and in literary response texts (Rothery and Stenglin 200 and Macken-Horarik (2003) and in popular science (Fuller 1998). Fuller's work in particular was foundational for more recent developments of the dimension of Engagement in Appraisal theory (White 2003a, White 2003b, Martin and White forthcoming).

3.1.1.2 Key aspects of Appraisal theory

The most recent comprehensive accounts of the theory are to be found in Martin and Rose (2003), Macken-Horarik and Martin (2003), and Martin and White (forthcoming). In brief, the system of Appraisal is a multi-dimensional one incorporating the expression of values - as categories of Attitude, the manipulation of degrees of values - as Graduation, and the introduction and management of voices to whom values are attributed - as options for Engagement. The model of Appraisal represented in figure 3.1 is reproduced from Martin and Rose (2003). The square brackets represent either/or choices and the curly brackets represent options with the potential to be co-construed.

Fig. 3.1: Model of Appraisal from Martin and Rose (2003)
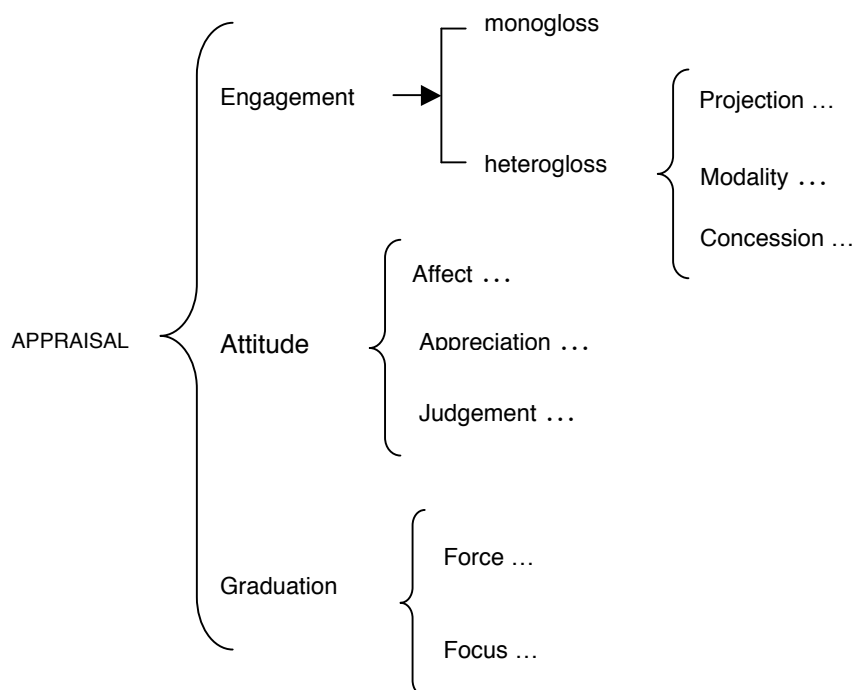
Categories of Attitude include Affect, Appreciation and Judgement. These categories of Attitude can themselves be sub-categorised (see Martin 1997, 2000). Attitude can be realized explicitly in overtly attitudinal lexis, or it can be evoked through indirect means. Graduation addresses the grading of meanings by adjusting the Force of a value, or the Focus of a categorical boundary (see chapters 4 and 5).

As a model at the level of discourse, the systems of Appraisal, including Attitude and Graduation, are realised across a range of grammatical categories. The third dimension of Engagement draws on Bakhtin's (1981,1986) notion of heteroglossia, and identifies system network options for expanding and contracting space for other voices in texts (see chapter 6). The resources drawn upon in introducing other voices and in manipulating the

hetroglossic space around those other voices include those of projection, modality, and counter-expectancy.

3.1.1.3 The application of Appraisal theory to a study of evaluative stance

The question for research is in what ways and by what means is evaluative stance encoded, and with what pedagogic implications for novice academic research writers? All three dimensions of Appraisal are implicated in this investigation of an evaluative stance in academic writing, and each contributes a different but complementary angle on addressing the research question. In the first instance, I focus on the values that are encoded into texts. I identify preferences in the encoding of values that are characteristic of the discourse, and examine how they are distributed and positioned in texts, and how they co-articulate with each other. Secondly I consider the ways in which writers project different kinds of evaluating 'voices' into their texts, taking up different kinds of evaluative roles, and how texts are constructed as dynamic interactions amongst these different 'voice roles'. And finally, I look at how writers navigate us as readers through the voices and values they project into their texts, in order, ultimately, to align us with their meta-evaluation, that is, that their own study is warranted or worthwhile. The aim of this study is to construct a comprehensive explanation of the nature of evaluation in particular kinds of research writing as a means of contributing to EAP pedagogy in terms of teaching resources, program design, and further research.

3.1.2 A qualitative approach to discourse analysis

A qualitative paradigm has been chosen for this study. The specific research approach involves a detailed discourse analytic analysis of a small set of texts. Such an approach foregrounds depth over breadth and allows insights into texts that are not available through quantitative studies of large corpora. In particular, a detailed study of the discourse semantics of individual texts can contribute important insights into the logogenesis of the discourse, that is, of how language evolves progressively throughout a text. Martin and Rose's argument for the importance of analysing individual instances of text, referred to in chapter 1, is reiterated here.

> 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)

In the case of this study, a close analysis of whole texts enables the exploration of multiple aspects of meaning that are realised dynamically across a web of inter-related lexical and grammatical choices.

This approach, focusing on the close study of whole texts, contrasts with, and at the same time is complementary to, the quantitative approaches using corpus-based studies that characterise much of the recent work in text analysis (Biber, Conrad and Reppen 1998, Biber and Conrad 2002, Channell 2000, Hyland 1998). While this study is designed to examine the integration of multiple resources and associated meanings across whole texts, studies of language use by means of large corpora, focus most often on a small number of features of language, typically a small number of grammatical constructions or set of vocabulary items, across large numbers of texts. Quantitative corpus-based studies aggregate variables in order to arrive at an overall picture of distributions and relationships between features in a general sense in a language as a whole, or in a register or mode of language use (Conrad and Biber 2000). Each approach no doubt answers questions that cannot be addressed by the other, and there are a growing number of valuable contributions from corpus studies within the context of English for academic purposes (e.g. Barton 1993, Hunston 1995, Myers 1996, Hyland 1998, Biber, Conrad and Reppen 1998).

While the two approaches of corpus linguistics and detailed contextually-based discourse analysis provide contrasting orientations to a study of language in use, they should not be seen as necessarily discrete. There is a potential complementarity in the two approaches. Corpus-based studies, while fundamentally quantitative in nature, are most often embedded in qualitative processes of interpretation. The data yielded from statistical analyses of frequencies and co-occurrences provide a basis for subsequent inference and interpretation, and quantitative data are often supplemented with closer attention to the functioning of specific features in instances of discourse. Biber et al (1998:4) argue in fact that one of the four basic characteristics of corpus studies is that they depend on 'both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques'.

Equally importantly, corpus-based studies are productively informed by detailed discourse analytic studies of whole texts in context. Bauer, Gaskell and Allum (2000) argue, in fact, that qualitative investigations are a necessary precursor to quantitative studies. They draw the following analogy:

> If one wants to know the colour distribution in a field of flowers, one first needs to establish the set of colours that are in the field; then one can start counting the flowers of a particular colour (Bauer et al 2000:8).

Gill (2000) similarly argues that

> a prerequisite for counting the instances of a particular category is a detailed explication of how to decide whether something is or is not an instance of the relevant phenomenon (2000:187).

While the dominant approach in this study is qualitative, there are nonetheless quantitative aspects to the study in terms of quantifying preferences for particular kinds of expressions of attitude across the data as a whole, as well as quantifying the distribution of attitude according to field.

Different research designs also have different pedagogic implications. McCarthy and Carter (2001) note some important implications for the teaching of language that derive from corpus linguistics. Teaching resources within EAP are now beginning to incorporate insights into the grammatical structures or vocabulary that are characteristic of a particular discourse field or genre derived form language corpora. Swales and Feak (2000) for example, draw on Hyland's (1999) corpus-based cross-disciplinary investigations of the patterns in the use of reporting verbs in research articles, and there are also direct uses made of concordances as teaching and learning materials (Thurstun and Candlin 1997, McCarthy and Carter 2001). On the other hand, the detailed deconstruction of individual texts in language teaching can provide insights and understandings that are not available through the use of concordances or by focusing on specific occurrences across large numbers of texts. As important as it is for teachers and students to appreciate language choices that are characteristic of the registers and genres they aim to construct, it is equally important to understand the organization and interrelatedness of language choices within texts. Meanings are derived from the distribution, positioning and co-articulation of resources, not simply their presence or absence or co-occurrences in the immediate co-text. Martin and Rose caution

> not to mistake a lot of clause analysis for discourse analysis. It doesn't matter how many clauses we analyze, it's only once we analyze meaning beyond the clause that we'll be analysing discourse (2003:272).

One of the motivations in this study is ultimately to inform the teaching of EAP through being able to model the interrelatedness of resources for construing interpersonal meanings in texts at the level of discourse, in ways accessible to EAP teaching staff and to their students (see chapter 7). It is hoped that such understandings can also inform the body of work in corpus-based linguistics in EAP.

3.1.3 A social constructivist approach to discourse analysis

Essentially there is a trade-off in the choice of approach in any one study of discourse, which is that of complexity versus generality. However, the argument for the discourse analytic approach taken in this study is not simply one of depth over breadth, or complexity over generality. The research is designed as a particular kind of discourse study, one that is intrinsic to the theory of language upon which it draws. As a theory of language as social semiotic (Halliday 1978), SFL represents a social constructivist model of language as meaning potential. From this perspective, as Halliday (1993: 46) explains,

> language actively construes human experience, from the "commonsense" constructions of the everyday in mother tongue to the highly elaborate edifices of the disciplines as they are taught in schools and universities. In this perspective, the grammar of every natural language is (…) a theory of human experience; it is through our acts of meaning that we transform our experience into the coherent – though far from consistent – patchwork that we learn to project as "reality".

He goes on to argue that

> [a]n act of meaning is not the coding and transmitting of some pre-existing information or state of mind, but a critical component in a complex process of reality construction (1993:53).

The language choices in the discourse of the texts in this study are not therefore analysed and interpreted as the encoding of meanings that lie outside of language as system, but as instances of the construction of meanings. The categorisation of different language choices in discourse is therefore seen as identifying kinds of meanings.

3.1.4 The role of theory in the research design

While I argue above that a choice of approach warrants a pay-off for detail over generality, it should not be assumed that a detailed study of a small number of texts in context has no contribution to make to a generalised understanding of how language works in a particular register. Towards this end what is crucial is that the analyses of the texts draw on sound and robust linguistic theory, theory that attends to the systematic relationship of language to context or to register (see chapter 1 and 2 for an articulation and justification for the underlying theoretical model of Appraisal). Working from such a theoretical base we can explore a text as an instance within a system. Our explorations will be informed by and at the same time inform our understanding of the system (Halliday 1991). The relationship of the system of language to the instance of a text is modelled in the diagrammatic representation in figure 3.2.

Fig. 3.2: Language and Context (from Halliday 1991: 8)

the system
(potential)   the instance

Context in   CULTURE ◄──────────────────► SITUATION
which language
functions   (Cultural   (situation
                            domain)   type)

language   SYSTEM ◄──────────────────► TEXT
                            (register)   (text type)

left -right = instantiation
right - left = realization

In explaining the relationship between text and system in this diagram Halliday draws an
analogy of climate as system and weather as text.

> Climate and weather are not two different things; they are the same thing that we
> call weather when we are looking at it close up, and climate when we are looking at
> it from a distance. The weather goes on around us all the time; it is the actual
> instances of temperature and precipitation and air movement that you can see and
> hear and feel. The climate is the potential that lies behind all these things; it is the
> weather seen from a distance by an observer standing some way off in time. So of
> course there is a continuum from one to the other; there is no way of deciding when
> a "long term weather pattern" becomes a "temporary condition of climate", or when
> "climatic variation" becomes merely changes in the "weather" (Halliday 1991: 9).

In explaining the need to account in text analysis both for the system and the instant,
Halliday argues that

> [d]iscourse analysis has to be founded on a study of the system of the language. At
> the same time, the main reason for studying the system is to throw light on
> discourse – on what people say and write and listen to and read. Both system and
> text have to be in focus of attention. Otherwise there is no way of comparing one
> text with another, or with what it might itself have been but was not (Halliday
> 1985/1994:xxii).

The approach taken in this study is therefore one of moving between analyses of texts as
instances and language theory as system or potential. The aim is a theoretically informed
application of what is happening in the instance, and at the same time an enrichment of the
theory to account for different contexts of use.

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3. 2   The texts and their contexts of production and use

3.2.1   The texts

The research is designed around the analysis of data from two sources. The first source is a set of four introductory sections from published research articles, representing the writing of experienced academic writers. The introductory sections of the articles vary in length from approximately 650 to 1200 words. The second source is a set of six introductory sections from undergraduate student dissertations. The introductory section in each set is taken to be the initial section of the longer text (research article or dissertation) that follows any abstract and precedes any description of methodology. While the student dissertations are produced according to common guidelines within the same educational and disciplinary context, they vary in the specific research topic. The recommended length of the dissertation is eight to nine thousand words, but there is no specific guidance given for the length or organization of the introductory sections of the larger texts. These sections also vary in length from approximately 450 to 1700 words. In the research design, an analysis of the ways and means by which experienced writers argue for their own research in the context of research articles is juxtaposed with an analysis of the strategies and resources used by novice writers introducing their research in a dissertation. This allows for comparisons and contrasts within and across the two sets of data, taking into account variations in the context of text production and publication between the two sets of data. The objective, however, is not primarily to make comparative generalisations about how published writers and student writers evaluate. Rather the aim is to develop a theoretical framework to explain the evaluative strategies that are encoded in various texts, and the implications of choosing amongst different strategies. This framework can then be used to point to ways in which published texts might provide pedagogic models for student writing, as well as ways in which student writers may choose to adopt different rhetorical strategies, or to more effectively enact the strategies of their choice. (See Appendices 1a and 1b for the complete texts).

3.2.2   Rationale for the selection of the data

The rationale for the selection of the introductory sections of research papers as the focus of the study is two-fold. First, regardless of the final forms of the research papers, that is, whether they are published articles, chapters or dissertations, these sections share a common set of general purposes. In their introductions the writers contextualise their own research by positioning it within a topic and in relation to a body of theory or research. In the process the writers construct an argument

for the their own study. Secondly, the nature of the texts as argument means that they provide a relevant site for an investigation of evaluative strategies in academic writing.

3.2.2.2 The student texts

The student texts were all collected from one cohort of students in the final (third) year of their undergraduate honours degree. This allowed for a maximising of the contextual information available with respect to the students' writing. As a teacher to the students in an English for academic purposes (EAP) course, as part of a larger group in the second year of their studies, I was able, retrospectively, to document activities in this second year class from a teaching perspective. Subsequently, I was able to observe the students throughout a third year EAP module taught by another member of staff. At the completion of their third year of study, I had access to the final drafts of their dissertations. From the original second year class of 16 students, eight students formed a common seminar group for their third year EAP class. From these eight students, six chose to write their final year dissertations in English. (While the university is officially an English-medium institution, the students were enrolled in a bilingual studies program and could therefore choose to write their dissertation in either English or Chinese.) The student introductions analysed in this study are from these six dissertations.

3.2.2.3 The published texts

In selecting the published texts a number of options presented themselves. One possibility was to randomly select the texts from a relevant disciplinary area. However, given that the underlying aim in this research is to inform EAP pedagogy, including the development of theoretically informed criteria for identifying models and informing guidelines for student writing, I decided to select texts that had already been chosen by EAP teaching staff as relevant and appropriate for use as teaching/learning resources in the context of EAP programs. The four published texts that comprise the second set of data in the study were all used as pedagogic resources in the EAP modules attended by the six students identified above. Text P1 was used as a teaching resource in the second year module and texts P2, P3 and P4 were used in an EAP module in the third year. The published texts were chosen for teaching purposes through a process of consultation amongst staff teaching on the EAP programs in the faculty. They were considered to be suitable for pedagogic purposes for a number of reasons. In the first instance, the published texts were all chosen as being broadly relevant to the disciplinary and research interests of the students, and were on topics relevant to the students' general experience. The students were all studying for a degree in language and communication. Text P1 concerns a study of age and performance at university, and the other three, texts P2, P3 and P4, share a common focus on an approach to language teaching. All students were themselves studying at tertiary level and

were all students of English as a second language, and their chosen research topics related to some aspect of language and communication in social life. Two student texts focused on educational settings, two on communication in voluntary organizations, one on language in the media, and one on interruptions in language interaction. Secondly, three of the studies reported in the published texts (P2, P3, P4) were of a relatively small scale, corresponding generally to the scale of research to be undertaken by the students in their dissertations. These three studies all represented qualitative and classroom-based research designs. The fourth article (P1) presented a more broadly based quantitative study involving statistical analyses of data. In their research design, students were able to take a quantitative or a qualitative approach, although the students in this study all drew on qualitative research methodologies. Three of the texts (P2, P3, P4) were published in journals targeting researchers and educational practitioners in the tertiary and schools sectors. The quantitative study, P1, was originally published in an edited volume on issues in higher education targeting the general academic community. The extract used in class was subsequently reproduced in a guidebook for novice research writers (Bell 1993), where it was presented as a model literature review for relatively small-scale research projects, that is, studies lasting a few months. Bell presents the text in the context of advice that a review in a dissertation or report of this kind

> should provide the reader with a picture, albeit limited (…) of the state of knowledge and of major questions in the subject area being investigated. It is suggested that '[t]his review is more thorough than would normally be required for small projects, but the approach is much the same (Bell 1993:38).

The teaching staff considered that the relatively short time frame for the research underlying the published text and length of the text as an introduction to research reflected more or less the level of demand made on the students in undertaking their final year dissertation. It was also considered to provide an accessible canonical model of an introduction/literature review for a research paper.

3.2.3 The pedagogic context

One question concerning the selection of published texts relates to the kinds of comparisons that can be made with student texts. The published texts used in this study were introduced to students in their EAP classes, as examples and/or as content reference texts for their own writing. They were not, however, used to specifically model the evaluative features that are analysed in the student texts in this study. The student texts are not therefore seen as representing attempts to model deliberately the resources and strategies of the published writers. And, while the four published texts were ones with which all six students engaged in the context of two EAP modules, students were also involved in

the close reading of other published research articles related to particular EAP assignments. They also engaged closely with other published texts in the context of undertaking their own dissertation study. The focus of this research is therefore not concerned with the specific influence of this set of published texts on the student writing. Rather the concern is at a more general level, with how writers (experienced and novice) use evaluative resources in constructing an argument for their own research. The aim of this research is to inform programs of support for apprenticing students more effectively into discourses of academic argument. The development of a comprehensive means for modelling evaluative stance can address questions of how published texts might function as models for student writing, and of how EAP teachers might more effectively negotiate rhetorical strategies with students, and assess student efforts towards their chosen objectives.

While the four published texts were not seen as directly influencing students' writing in respect to the construction of an evaluative stance, a brief account of the pedagogic purposes to which the published texts were put provides additional background information in which to situate the student texts. The text P1 was used in an EAP module in the students' second year of their degree. The objectives of the module were two-fold. The first was to familiarise students with the overall function and conventional organisational structure for writing an introductory section in a research report or dissertation. The second was to encourage students to go beyond summarising source texts one by one in their review of literature, to synthesise the source texts, and to evaluate their contribution to the field. In relation to the first objective, students were introduced to Swales 'CARS- Creating a Research Space' model of research article introductions (1990). The students read text P1 and were asked to identify and discuss the stages or moves in the text. In relation to the second objective, students were asked to discuss and explain the writer's rationale for grouping source texts into categories represented by the paragraph structuring of the text. Some attention was addressed to the writer's evaluation of the source texts, as students were asked to identify what sources, if any, they thought were presented to the reader in a positive light and what, if any, were presented in a negative light. They were also asked to identify any language that indicated a positive or negative evaluation of source texts. In response to this task, students were able to identify some explicit evaluative expressions in the text. Students were also asked to locate the concessive conjunctions such as 'however', and to discuss their role in signalling contrast in evaluation. Emphasis was given in class discussion to the need to evaluate source texts in writing a literature review. However, the discussion of resources of evaluation did not extend beyond identifying some explicit expressions of attitude, and the role of concessive conjunctions.

Texts P2, P3 and P4 were all used as teaching resources in a third year EAP module, that corresponded with the commencement of the students' research projects. In addition to relevance criteria of field and length, the texts were chosen as relating to the same topic, that of the use of peer review in language teaching, while representing research on this topic from different times and contexts. This was to enable the texts to be read one against the other in terms of their contribution to knowledge in the field. They could then become source texts within the students' own literature review essays on the topic. The three texts were given to students one at a time over several weeks. The texts were accompanied by a set of questions as a guide to reading. The questions then became the basis for paired, group, or whole class discussion. While only the introductory sections of the complete articles were used in analyses in this study, the students were presented with complete texts. The guide questions focused students' attention on the overall structure of the articles with some specific attention drawn to the nature and functioning of the introductory sections of the whole article. Other questions drew students' attention to some specific grammatical, lexical or punctuation choices in the texts.

3.2.3.1 Examples of student discussions in an EAP module

Classroom discourse recorded in the third year module revealed that students were willing to evaluate source texts both positively and negatively, and that they were aware of this expectation in relation to their own research writing. The short extracts in figures 3.3 and 3.4 are indicative of classroom discussion amongst students. In their first class (figure 3.3) students are discussing what they understand is expected from them in writing a literature review. The underlined comments highlight issues related to this understanding.

Fig. 3.3: Excerpts of student discussion on purpose and nature of literature reviews
(Year 3, class 1)

S8: Me first. I think literature review is a previous study of the research so that in the literature review we will quote others with ...in the study to <u>show something they have been done about the research we will going to investigate</u>.

S1: I think it is a kind of summary, <u>to summarise the previous studies</u> that we are interested.

S4: Me too. I've got summary of previous studies. And maybe <u>you can add some comments or you can see it from different angles</u> and things that the articles ... And with the value of other studies, and then summarise something, and that kind of things can... the literature review does <u>provide the writer to know more about this topic</u>. (…)

S1: So this is the reason why people do literature review. (?)

S4: I think the literature review tries to give some information about the research we are going to do and then also gives the support on the question of the research <u>to let others know the research is very thorough</u> and <u>we will also have other new ideas based on such previous studies</u>.

S8: <u>New ideas</u>?

S4: <u>Other angles</u>

In a later class in the same course, the students are discussing two of the published texts (figure 3.4). The underlined comments point to the students' willingness to make evaluative comments on the texts.

Fig. 3.4: Excerpts of student discussion evaluating specific published research papers (Year 3, class 5)

S4: Umm the structure <u>is quite clear and formal, and like a formal research literature review paper</u>. He (P2) he <u>looked for a lot of literature</u> review and different points and then a lot of the … also has some statistics to support, the <u>evidence to support his viewpoint</u>, and I think he also .. umm what's <u>the best is he tells a lot of information</u> about the students, for example their age, their education background, what's their language level, and so and so to umm… <u>I think it's better than</u> thats two of the passage.

…

S5: And I think in (P2)'s article, she first <u>give a clear definition</u> of literature review so that the audience will know what is a peer review, and then he also state the benefits. So <u>this supports his study</u> about peer reviews I think.

…

S4: Can I add one point of view? I also find (P3)'s article is also, some benefits from this passage, I get some benefits from this passage. Umm he is <u>not just tell the advantage of the peer review. Also discuss the disadvantage</u>, each procedures, strengthen or limits of these procedures. I think is umm is the another point of view, you can see the umm …

S5: <u>the whole picture</u>

S4: <u>see the whole picture and see the picture in another angle</u>, and <u>not just like the other two tell the advantage</u>…just umm tell the discuss the advantage. Maybe the purpose will be, the writing purpose may be different which affect that, but I think it's also to help us revise our thinking, fresh our views to think more about the strategies of the peer review. ……
And <u>maybe not bias to a point of view</u> ... you know my point?

It is apparent from the excerpts of classroom discussion that the students whose texts contribute to this study are approaching the writing of their final year dissertation with a considerable meta-awareness of the requirements of the task, and with a degree of experience in reviewing and reflecting on published research articles in terms of the way they are constructed and the way they function rhetorically. This degree of awareness would, needless to say, vary considerably amongst different groups of undergraduate research writers.

3.3   Ethical considerations

In undertaking this study, there were a number of ethical considerations. Paramount was the need to ensure that students who contributed data to this study did so willingly and without coercion, and that they would remain anonymous in the study. All students whose texts contribute to this study were informed of the general parameters of the research and willingly gave their permission early in the research design process. As the data collection process was undertaken over an extended period, permission was confirmed with all students at the time of collection of the students' final drafts of their dissertations. After the completion of the data collection process and preliminary analyses a casual meeting with the students provided an opportunity to inform students of the kinds of questions being asked of their data. Their response continued to be one of interest in and enthusiastic support for the study. All data were numerically coded immediately upon collection so that individual students were not identifiable by name. While the research topic of an individual text might have provided a means for identification, the relevant academic department does not maintain long-term collections of undergraduate dissertations.

The approach to the analyses of texts was not a judgemental one, based on assessing or rating performances in relation to each other, nor a deficit one based on what students were unable to do. Rather the focus is explanatory, investigating the texts as typical of undergraduate research writing in the educational context from which they are drawn, in an attempt to better understand the language demands placed on undergraduate students, and to inform academic writing support programs. The other sources of data in the study are extracts from published research papers that are in the public domain.

3.4   Conclusion

The research design represents a moving back and forth from theory to text, or from system to instance, as one is used to interrogate the other. The application of the theoretical framework of Appraisal provides insights into the nature of evaluative stance in the academic texts interrogated in this study. At the same time, an analysis of the ways in which evaluative stance is construed in the texts, functions to interrogate the theory itself, resulting in refinements and extensions to the model of Appraisal. In a similar two-way process of analysis, the analyses of the published texts are drawn upon to inform the analyses of the

student texts, and in turn the findings in relation to the student texts, inform the bigger picture of the nature of the construal of evaluative stance in academic research writing as a whole.

In the following chapter (chapter 4), I provide a detailed account the coding decisions made in analysing Attitude and Graduation in both the published texts and the student texts. The chapter provides the link from the general description of theory and methodology outlined to this point, and the analyses and interpretation discussed in subsequent chapters.