Expressing an evaluative stance in English and Malay research article conclusions: International publications versus local publications ☆

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ABSTRACT

This paper constitutes a multidimensional explanation of an integration of genre-based knowledge and evaluative stance in the context of academic arguments employed in the conclusion sections of English and Malay research articles. For this purpose, it draws on an analysis of the features in Appraisal theory (Martin & Rose, 2003) integrated with an analysis of communicative purposes within a genre analysis framework (Swales, 1990, 2004). Among others, the findings include the observation that evaluative and dialogic stances jointly produce rhetorical effects in both English and Malay conclusions. English conclusions contain a subtle balance of assertion and mitigation while Malay conclusions tend to contract dialogic space and thus could be interpreted as less reader-friendly. This suggests that evaluation and the meaning potential of the genre are experienced and valued differently by scholars publishing in these two different scientific communities (international and local). This variation seems to be due to linguistic, contextual, and potential social cultural influences within the two academic discourse communities. The present study has pedagogical implications in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom.

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1. Introduction

It is attested in the literature that there is a lack of stance in student academic writing (Hood, 2004; Hyland & Milton, 1997) and many are unaware of the nature and function of argument as an academic genre (Groom, 2000). This could be due to the linguistic and rhetorical differences between second language (L2) learners and their native-speaker counterparts (Hyland, 2006; Silva, 1993) as well as an ineffective and inadequate English as Second Language (ESL) pedagogy approach in preparing student writers to achieve an evaluative stance in presenting their work (Chang & Schleppegrell, 2011). Such a problem has called for more thoughtful pedagogical interventions to assist ESL students tackle academic writing. This paper thus constitutes a pedagogically motivated and multidimensional explanation of an integration of genre-based knowledge and

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evaluative stance in the context of academic argument by drawing on the genre analysis framework (Swales, 1990, 2004) and the Appraisal theory (Martin & Rose, 2003) respectively. These two aspects (genre-based knowledge and evaluative stance) are inter-related as 'social rhetorical practices' are enacted in or through discourse (Bhatia, 1993, 1997; Hood, 2004, p. 24; Hyland, 1998; Swales, 1990, 2004). As Hood (2004, p. 26) aptly put it, "in reading social practices, we are reading texts".

On a similar note, Chang and Schleppegrell (2011) noted that the rhetorical moves and steps generally propose rhetorical guidelines for academic writing and these discursive activities are closely tied to the presentation of an author's stance. In their study, they examined the introduction sections of research articles. By drawing on one of the three dimensions in the Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), which is the Engagement network, they illustrated the different approaches to the introductions sections of research articles in connection with their rhetorical purposes. Similar to Chang and Schleppegrell (2011) study, we look at how linguistic resources co-articulate with each other to produce the writers' rhetorical effects. Responding to their suggestions for future studies, this study complements/extends theirs in the following ways. Firstly, the focus of the present study is on the conclusion sections of research articles from two different languages (English and Malay). Secondly, the present study looks into all the three dimensions available within Appraisal theory, namely Attitude, Graduation and Engagement options. Thirdly, unlike their study, which is qualitative, the present study is both qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data tabulates statistics for the functional moves (Swales, 1990, 2004) and the options available within the Appraisal framework (Martin & Rose, 2003) to illustrate how stance is used in connection with their rhetorical purposes (see the Methodology section for further details).

Another study which is worthy of mention here is Hood (2004) work in examining the stance-taking by published writers and student writers using the Appraisal theory (Martin & Rose, 2003). She found that published writers used more linguistic resources relating to the Appreciation kind of Attitude to evaluate findings while student writers constructed their texts as more personal and subjective by using Affect and Judgment Attitudes. In her study, she incorporated the resources of Attitude and Graduation to reconfigure the Engagement network as one of Alignment. In her Alignment network, she demonstrated that the observer's voice role is used by writers to evaluate aspects related to domain while the researcher's voice role is used to evaluate aspects related to the writer's own research.

On a separate note, Love and Arkoudis (2006) study constituted an explanation of stances not in the context of academic writing but professional discussion by teachers in an Australian school. Similarly, they drew on the Appraisal theory (Martin, 1995) as their analysis framework to illustrate a range of opinions, attitudes and positions that teachers adopt towards Chinese international students by situating the discussions in a single case study context. Love and Arkoudis (2006) made an interesting comment with regard to the stances adopted by some teachers. They held that such stances are the realization of the gender expectations of the teachers' culture, namely that "women are conversationally supportive while men are more conversationally performative" (Eggins, 1994) (as cited in Love & Arkoudis, 2006, p. 274).

As we can see from the studies reviewed above, to the best of our knowledge, there has not been a published work relating to stance-taking in Malay research articles. Besides filling this gap in the literature, the need for undertaking the present study has, to a certain extent, been motivated by the following reasons (in addition to the pedagogically-motivated reason stated in the earlier part of this section). Firstly, it is related to the increasing importance of the Conclusion section of a research article over time. According to Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988, p.119), there may have been a 'marked shift away from unevaluated reporting to lengthy and explicit writer comment' in research articles. Their claim was based on the findings that since 1930 there had been a relative decline in the importance of the methods and equipment sections of research articles, when compared with the discussion and conclusion sections. Secondly, fewer studies (e.g. Amnuai & Wannaruk, 2013; Kobayashi, 2003; Posteguillo, 1999; Weissberg & Buker, 1990) have looked at the Conclusion section compared to the Introduction section (e.g. Hirano, 2009; Lim, 2012; Samraj, 2002) and the Results section (e.g. Brett, 1994; Lim, 2010; Williams, 1999).

This paper explicates a range of rhetorical strategies employed by academic writers of English and Malay research articles in concluding their studies. It also demonstrates how different evaluative stances have been employed to realize these strategies by drawing on an analysis of the features in Appraisal theory (Martin & Rose, 2003) integrated with the analysis of communicative purposes within the genre analysis framework (Swales, 1990, 2004) (see the Methodology section for the description of the two frameworks). From the pedagogical perspective, a functional model which has emerged from the present analysis provides insights and resources for ESL writing instructors and Malay ESL learners in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom with regard to Appraisal options that can be used to produce compelling and yet persuasive rhetorical effects in academic prose (see Table 4 in Appendix). In general, the purpose of the present study is therefore twofold: (i) to investigate the genre structure of English and Malay research article conclusions in terms of *moves* and *steps* using Swales's (1990, 2004) notion of genre analysis and (ii) to explore the evaluative stance by drawing on Martin and Rose (2003) model of Appraisal. The major research questions addressed in the present study are:

  i. What are the rhetorical strategies used in English and Malay research article conclusions in terms of rhetorical *moves* and *steps*?
 ii. What are the similarities and differences between the two sets of conclusions in the use of Attitude, Graduation and Engagement options within Appraisal theory?
iii. In constructing the writers' stances, how do Attitude, Graduation and Engagement options co-articulate with each other to produce the rhetorical effects in (i)?