

EVALUATIVE POTENTIAL OF REPORTING VERBS AND INTERACTIVE CHARACTER OF ACADEMIC WRITING

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Written academic discourse is considered to be an impersonal style of communication without any sign of subjective opinion or writer's presence. Impersonality is a significant feature of written academic discourse and one of the first norms of academic way of writing learnt by novices to academic community. Nevertheless, latest research shows that it is not completely true. Formal manifestation of written academic discourse is truly predominantly impersonal, or faceless, but when looking at it more closely, writer's own views shaped into different linguistic forms surface. More and more authors emphasize interactive character of academic writing.

Bachtin [1988: 284-285] likened academic writing to a dialogue as each work reacts to other works and answers them. In other words, scientific works do not exist in isolation, but react to the previous research – their writers interact with each other. Really, mutual communication of scientists is important for the development of scientific knowledge, because without it, the knowledge would be isolated and purposeless.

Interactive character of academic writing can be conveyed by various means. In this article, it is the evaluative function of reporting verbs which is to be studied. Reporting verbs are connected with citations which are among the most prominent features of academic writing. When a writer of a text uses somebody else's words or ideas, he or she develops certain relationship with an author of given words. The writer expresses his or her opinion about the value of the author's text. Thus, the writer communicates with the author via the evaluation of the used text. At the same time, the writer also communicates with the readership, because he or she conveys their views of different ideas.

As to the classification of citations, those can be divided into integral and non-integral according to the ways of integrating the names of authors [Swales 1990]. Thompson [2005: 313] points out that this distinction is not only formal but also functional. Integral citations use a name of an author and thus shift the focus to that author as an information source, while non-integral citations by giving the name of an author into parentheses divert the attention to the information itself. Both, integral and non-integral citations can contain reporting verbs. These are the verbs introducing cited texts. In this article, the attention will be paid to those citations which involve reporting verbs.

This article deals with reporting verbs, which show signs of evaluation of cited text by a citing writer. Closer analysis of these verbs proves that their use is not accidental but a deliberate choice of a writer. Swales [1990: 154] even claims that also the choice of the tense can convey the writer's stance towards the cited text. Whereas citations and citing as such are important parts of academic writing, their incorporation

into a text with the help of reporting verbs can tell much about the interactive character of academic discourse in its written form.

A writer of a text interacts with its readers and other authors cited in his or her text. He or she communicates his or her attitude towards what is written in the text and what is presented to the readership. This way, the writer creates social relations and observes given norms [Hyland 2004: 13]. Coulthard [1994: 6] points out that while citing other authors, the writer does not lose responsibility for what is cited. His or her responsibility rests upon a role of an evaluator of the cited text.

Hyland [2004:13-30] also deals with the evaluative aspect of academic writing, which he considers to be linguistic expression of interactive character of scientific writing linked with given situation and its users. Hyland identifies this aspect with Martin's „appraisal“, Biber's „stance“ or Crismore's „interpersonal metadiscourse“ [ibid.: 13]. Hyland himself differentiates between „stance“ – with the help of which a writer expresses his or her subjective opinion towards the written text – and „engagement“ – when a writer communicates with the readership [ibid.: 15]. Hunston and Thompson [1999: 5] characterize evaluation as: „... the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about.” Similarly, Thompson and Yiyun [1991: 365-382] also deal with evaluation, which is defined as a signalization of the writer's aims and views on information used in his or her text. Evaluation displays itself on the level of discourse, not grammar. As it can be seen, all these views have something in common – an interaction or communication with participants within the writing process. This clearly expresses the point of this article.

Concerning reporting verbs, many linguists dealing with this topic, e.g. Swales [1990: 149] and Groom [2000: 17], agree that they are significant features of English academic texts. However, Bazerman [Swales 1991: 151] claims that reporting verbs have been replaced by active verbs in recent years, which is the result of the change of focus – from an author to the research itself. Nevertheless, Swales [ibid.] claims that reporting verbs will always be present in the works of academics, because there is a large „repertoire“ of them – he suggests circa fifty possible verbs which can be used as reporting verbs – some of them are more frequent than others.

As to their classification, reporting verbs can be divided according to their evaluative function into „factive“, „non-factive“ and „counter-factive“ [Hyland 1999]. It means that when a writer introduces ideas or words of some other author, he or she intentionally or unintentionally expresses his or her attitude towards the introduced text. In case of factive reporting verbs, these verbs express the writer's view of the text as factual; it is a fact. Non-factive verbs can express positive, neutral, tentative or even critical evaluation of the text by the writer. Counter-factive verbs give negative opinion of the writer [ibid.].

Thompson and Yiyun [1991: 371-372] identify three factors of evaluation in reporting verbs: „author's stance“, „writer's stance“, and „writer's interpretation.“ There are two basic oppositions in this classification: first, it is the distinction between a writer and an author; and second, it is stance versus interpretation. The first distinction reflects

the two sides involved in the process of writing, and the second one illustrates two ways of evaluation by a writer.

Following citation analysis of research articles from various disciplines, Hyland [1999: 349] concludes that articles from philosophy contain the highest number of reporting verbs – 57,1 per article, while physics use them the least – 6,6 per article. There is also an interesting variation among disciplines as to the use of specific reporting verbs – philosophers preferred the verb *say*, linguists *suggest*, *argue*, *show*, *explain*, *find* or *point out*, while physics used verbs such as *develop*, *report* or *study*. Comparing hard and soft sciences, Hyland finds out that verbs *report*, *describe* and *show* were predominantly used in hard sciences, such as biology or physics, and *argue*, *suggest* and *study* in the field of soft sciences, such as applied linguistics or philosophy [ibid.].

As to the evaluative aspect of reporting verbs, Hyland [1999: 351] concludes that soft sciences prefer non-factive verbs with neutral or positive evaluation of cited text. The least used were verbs with critical evaluative meaning, which means that soft sciences prefer neutral or positive evaluation to negative one. Hard sciences also use non-factive verbs the most but as to evaluative options, hard sciences predominantly use author neutral evaluation, with author tentative coming second. It shows that hard sciences are more likely to question the cited text's ideas, possibly shifting from neutral to tentative tone. As it can be seen, both hard and soft sciences predominantly use non-factive reporting verbs with neutral author evaluation, which shows that cited texts are not taken as facts.

To sum it up, written academic discourse is impersonal, but when looking at it more closely, its interactive character displays itself in various linguistic forms. In this article, it is the evaluative potential of reporting verbs which illustrates writer's presence in the text. Evaluation is a linguistic way of expressing writer's stance towards the cited text. Hyland's research shows that both hard and soft sciences prefer non-factive reporting verbs of neutral author evaluation. Thus, it can be concluded that the analysis of reporting verbs can prove their evaluative potential and intentional use by academic writers.

Literature

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Summary

Formal manifestation of written academic discourse is predominantly impersonal, but when looking at it more closely, writer's own views shaped into different linguistic forms surface. Interactive character of academic writing can be conveyed by various means. In this article, the evaluative function of reporting verbs is studied. Closer analysis of these verbs proves that their use is not accidental but a deliberate choice of a writer expressing his or her evaluation of a cited text.