



## Stance and Voice in Written Academic Genres

**Ken Hyland, Carmen Sancho Guinda (eds).**

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Evaluation and criticism are recurrent in research in academic writing in recent years. However, the present volume takes a different standpoint. It tries to provide a comprehensive overview of these two concepts, “stance” and “voice”, not only from the perspective of the professional discourse but also taking into account student genres.

One of the strong points of the book is the wide range of leading figures in this research theme, as well as the distribution of topics, that range from a set of clear and complementary definitions of the concepts of stance and voice to their application to research on academic writing. Very interesting and new is the last part of the book, with four chapters that provide an overview of stance and voice from four different perspectives: across channels, across disciplines, across cultures and along time.

The volume has four parts. Part I is devoted to the contemporary views of stance and voice. It consists of two chapters, one devoted to each concept. BETHANY GRAY and DOUGLAS BIBER take two parameters to define stance, the meaning of the assessment (epistemic stance and attitudinal stance) and the linguistic realizations of stance. They conclude that overt stance expressions are rare in academic writing when compared to other genres, and that not enough research has been devoted to the choice of evaluative lexis. On the other hand, CHRISTINE M. TARDY defines voice in three broad dimensions: individual aspects (representation of self in or behind the words), social aspects (disciplinary or social groups and context) and voice as dialogue (co-construction of voice between the individual and the social, and also from the interpretation of the reader).

The second part, with four chapters, deals with stance and voice in professional genres. In the first chapter, SUSAN HOOD following a Systemic Functional Linguistics approach, distinguishes three voices in introductions to research articles: observer, critic, and participant. A second chapter deals

with stance in academic bios. Though POLLY TSE seems to reach some conclusions about disciplinary differences regarding the two features analysed, the research presented is very poor and seems to be forced in the context of this volume. In the third chapter, ALAN GROSS and PAULA CHELSEY track back the origins of the study of stance and voice to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and propose an analysis of hedging as a marker of stance in biomedical research journals. They prove that articles reporting industry-sponsored research are more assertive, and therefore, use less hedging in order to persuade the reader about their claims. The relevance of the results in this chapter is based on its scope. It does not only try to explore the epistemic and interpersonal functions of hedging but goes further to explore its rhetorical function and its role in the social context in which biomedical research journals operate. The fourth chapter in this part analyses authorial voice comparing research articles and textbooks. MARINA BONDI reports that while the textbook writer moves between the "recounter" and the "interpreter", the author of research articles prefers to act as an "academic arguer".

The third part focuses on students' genres: from PhD theses to students' essays and graph commentaries. PAUL THOMPSON's main contribution is the distinction between the propositional level where the writer or other sources' voice is responsible for a given statement, and the level of the whole thesis, where the voice is the accumulative impression constructed by the writer through the whole text. This chapter adds an overview of stance and voice in PhD dissertations, though something more specific of this genre could have been added. Much more concrete and enlightening is the chapter by KEN HYLAND where he compares final year reports by Hong Kong students with research articles. The results show that students are more extreme and add more emotive evaluations, while research articles show persuasion through more calculated and measured expressions of attitude. Students try to demonstrate in their final reports an appropriate level of autonomy and knowledge without forgetting the greater experience and authority of the reader. PAUL KEI MATSUDA and JILL V. JEFFREY explore voice in curricula guidelines and assessment rubrics in US secondary and higher education. In higher education, curriculum guidelines follow the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition* (available at URL: <http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>) and include voice, which is not included in assessment rubrics. At secondary level, the notion of voice is included both in curricula and in rubrics, though the interpretations of voice are heterogeneous. This

is an interesting study and could be used as a point of departure in order to analyse the differences between states in US as well as between countries. CARMEN SANCHO GUINDA concentrates her research on a very specific genre, the graph commentaries, especially relevant for students in engineering who have English as a foreign or second language. These students often deviate pragmatically from the conventions of academic writing and tend to avoid the two moves that convey direct stance: panoramic evaluations of a trend and data discussions. After a very thorough and accurate study, she concludes that students need to learn through formal instruction about the reader they address when they write (socioliteracy) and the linguistic and rhetorical features they have to use (stance pragmatics).

The fourth part presents four chapters which deal with stance and voice across channels, across disciplines, across cultures and along time. ANN HEWINGS analyses the new genres stemming from the use of electronic devices and how new channels affect stance and voice. In some of these channels, students are asked to give their opinions and have their own voices (forums, email), while in others they have to co-construct knowledge (wikis). In all these new genres, students are asked to write thinking of their readers. This research sheds light about how stance and voice is expressed through these new channels which provide greater freedom and versatility to the student. In a second chapter in this part, MARC SILVER takes the perspective of cognitive linguistics to analyse qualitatively voice and stance in research article introductions in three disciplines: Microbiology, History of Science and Art History. Though accurately described by the author, cross-disciplinary differences should have been more thoroughly interpreted. In a third chapter in this part, KJERSTI FLØTTUM focuses on the cross-cultural variation of voice in research articles. Though she identifies language and culture, she recognises later that texts produced in English, French and Norwegian can be influenced by a multitude of factors apart from the language chosen: native language of the author, scholarly background, discipline, etc. She poses an interesting question: to what extent is there a process of standardization influenced by English? In the last chapter, FRANÇOISE SALAGER-MEYER, MARÍA ÁNGELES ALCARAZ ARIZA and MARIANELA LUZARDO BRICEÑO provide a view of the diachronic variation of stance and voice through the analysis of book reviews. Voice position and stance seem to have evolved along time with a progressive objectivization and impersonalization of academic writing. These authors claim the

importance of time and historical context as another variable to take into account when studying academic discourse.

The final part of the book is an Epilogue. DEBORAH CAMERON writes in a narrative tone, reminding fiction, where this kind of section is much more common. She embeds references to the several topics dealt with in the book in her life experience with an underlying line of argument: the dilemma the academic writer faces between self-assertion, individual creativity and presence of own culture, on the one hand, and alignment with the norms, on the other. She finally concludes that any present or future academic writer should be provided with all the choices s/he has in order to be able to decide which way to take.

This is a very interesting and enlightening volume, an obliged reading for all those who want to learn about the evaluative meaning of academic discourse both looking at the past and at the future of its genres.

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