

INTRODUCTION

Pattern and argument live in each other; and it is by the brevity, clearness, charm, or emphasis of the second, that we judge the strength and fitness of the first.

(R.L. Stevenson, *On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature*, 1885)

This issue of *Textus* deals with a subject which is as elusive as pervasive in discourse – pervasive, because no text or utterance is ever absolutely free from it; elusive, because it may be difficult to say exactly what it is that gives the text or utterance that certain quality. This intriguing subject is evaluation, which we may find even in the seemingly most neutral, objective statement. Even an apparently innocent comment like “It’s early” may invite the reply “By your standards”, which underlines the subjectivity of the proposition – i.e., its evaluative remit. If we look closely enough, we will see that there are always elements in it, whether lexical items with a certain connotation, the choice of mode, the intonation of the utterance, or indeed non-linguistic elements (a gesture, a look, a flourish of the pen), that may reveal the encoder’s attitude towards that specific predication.¹

¹ It is not unlikely for such elements to coexist and interact with each other in one

In present-day printed materials we are all familiar with different typographic devices conveying importance (e.g., italics, boldface, underlined letters); indeed, electronic communication may include visual elements, such as emoticons, to convey stance. Older stages of the language, however, were not immune to this type of strategy. Apart from the use of underlined characters, which may be observed in many private manuscripts, if we look at business correspondence of the nineteenth-century we see that different hands were employed for different parts of the letter (see Dury, forthcoming), and indeed Dury (2006: 201-203) discusses the function of ornamental letters in private correspondence between business partners.

The simultaneous elusiveness and pervasiveness of evaluation might induce us to think that any study of this phenomenon is perhaps too ambitious. In fact, in recent years various scholars have approached this subject with increasingly important and interesting results. Hence the decision to focus on what changes appear to have taken place in the ways in which evaluation is expressed and studied, what evolutions are witnessed both on the textual and on the methodological levels, and to what extent they can be said to be revolutionary.

Already as far as terminology is concerned we see that scholars appear to have refined, redefined and clarified their choices. While “evaluation” may be acknowledged to be a useful superordinate for a series of other terms, such as stance, attitude, appraisal, judgment, modality and modalization, we suggest that such terms should not be used interchangeably. Indeed, we seem to have moved from descriptive models of specific features (e.g., Conrad and Biber 2000) or pertaining to specific registers, in particular academic discourse,² to more encompassing theories. After Hunston and Thompson (2000), which is certainly one of the landmarks in this field, we have witnessed the rise of models that aim to account for contextual fea-

and the same proposition, hence the need advocated by Hunston and Sinclair (2000) for a “local grammar of evaluation”.

² See, most recently, Hyland (2000, 2005), Bondi and Mauranen (2003), Anderson and Bamford (2004), Del Lungo Camiciotti and Tognini-Bonelli (2004, 2005), and Hyland and Bondi (2006).

tures and provide more fine-grained descriptors relating to them.³

On the other hand, an aspect that does not seem to have been investigated in great depth yet is the existence and definition of the “norm” to which evaluation implicitly or explicitly refers. If we are dealing with epistemic modality, i.e., with the evaluation of certainty or probability, the norm is defined by the encoder’s beliefs, and does not necessarily coincide with the recipient’s perceptions. See for instance an exchange like the following:

A: You may be right.

B: Of course I am!

In this case both statements are equally subjective, but while the former conveys hesitation, the latter challenges any uncertainty as to the validity of the predication.

If we are dealing with judgments, the picture changes slightly, because the encoder’s views are expected to be shared by the recipient in at least two different respects. First of all, the recipient is expected to understand what is meant, no matter how vague the evaluative item may be (for instance, how much is “an *appropriate* quantity?”). In addition to vagueness, potential ambiguity should also be taken into account. For instance, if a statement like “He came up with a really clever solution” is meant to be sarcastic, the polarity of the adjective “clever” is reversed altogether. Similarly, the polarity of a phrase like “That’s all I need” can only be interpreted in context. More specifically, it depends on whether “that” refers anaphorically to an item that is interpreted positively (e.g., “time”, or “love”, or “money”), or negatively (e.g., “The kitchen’s flooded”); in the latter case the phrase “That’s all I need” expresses bitter irony.

Secondly, the recipient is expected to accept this judgment as valid – any challenge would prove uncooperative and therefore face-threatening. As pointed out by Leech (1983), speakers tend to maximize agreement and minimize disagreement; hence an exchange like

³ See Martin (2000), Miller (2002, 2004), White (2002, 2003) and Martin and White (2005).

the following, in which one participant's evaluation is challenged by the other, violates the Politeness Maxim of Agreement:

A: The film / record / play was a disappointment.

B: I liked it actually.

If B wanted to mitigate the threat to A's face, preparing the recipient for the disagreement through a pre-head move, it would be necessary to ask for confirmation of the evaluation first: e.g.,

B₁: Really? / Was it? / You think so? I liked it actually.

This takes us to the next feature allowing us to emphasize the importance of evaluation: its pragmatic power.

When encoders express evaluation by conveying their point of view, they do not expect overt challenges, except in situations of conflict, whether in progress or envisaged (see Gotti, Heller and Dossena 2002). Such a presupposition of agreement might be said to pose a threat to the recipient's positive face.

Studies of evaluation in older stages of the language show that we seem to have gone from more direct to more indirect ways of expressing opinions and judgments. Political pamphlets, for instance, were quite forcefully argumentative at a certain point in time (see Dossena 2006a), but Salager-Meyer (2001) and Gunnarsson (2001) have shown a distinct trend towards indirectness in scientific discourse. In business contexts, the asymmetrical power relationship allowed nineteenth-century encoders to convey greater or lesser "authority" or "modesty" (i.e., focus on negative or positive face) depending on the purpose of the communication and the relative status of the recipient (see Dossena 2006b and 2006c).

Such findings suggest that over time we seem to have developed a fairly broad range of strategies for the expression of evaluation, and greater sensitivity seems to have risen as to the concept of appropriateness to register and social context. To what extent such changes may be perceived to have been "revolutionary" is perhaps difficult to assess; they have certainly not occurred in a limited time-span, but

they have had a definite impact on the encoder-recipient relationship.

As our epigraph reminds us, the success of the illocution is a direct function of the appropriateness of the locution – the perlocution thus becomes an act of evaluation in itself. In addition, the “norm” against which evaluation is expressed relies on a common cultural background that encoders either assume exists, or intend to establish – in both cases evaluators presuppose superiority over the recipients, as they take responsibility for defining or presupposing the existence of the norm. In addition, such “common” cultural background may be inclusive or exclusive. It is inclusive when encoders, recipients, and any third parties are intended to be sharing it; it is exclusive when encoders address specific participants and presuppose divergence from the views of any third parties (for instance, this is frequently the case in political and other types of more or less forcefully argumentative discourse).

As for methodological approaches, the appeal to integrate quantitative and qualitative investigations (Drew 2004) does not seem to have gone unheard. An increasing number of studies combines the methodology of corpus linguistics with close analyses of both co-text and context, syntactic patterns and pragmatic values. This is possibly due to the elusive nature of evaluation, the actual force of which can only be perceived when a larger picture is viewed. As we saw above, the evaluative overtones of certain lexical items, or phrases, become visible, or reverse their polarity, depending on these surrounding factors.

The Contributions in this Issue

The papers presented here all focus on varieties of present-day English and deal with three main branches in which the expression of evaluation has a crucial bearing on the predication: academic discourse, media discourse and political discourse. In all three, argumentation plays a very important role, and the success of the encoder’s persuasive strategies largely depends on the extent to which they

appear to be acceptable to the recipient. As a result, skilful use of evaluating expressions is required, whether the polarity is positive or negative.

In academic discourse the encoder's stance in relation to previous studies and indeed to current investigations is conveyed in ways that may aim at the active participation of the recipient, eliciting agreement that may add strength to the claims of the encoder. This, however, may be problematic when the encoder wishes to express negative evaluations with which the recipient may not agree. **Julia Bamford**'s contribution focuses on this issue in academic lectures, also with the aim of comparing what is observed in spoken language and what occurs in written academic genres. As a matter of fact, all the other papers in this section deal with written texts. While **Giuliana Diani** discusses evaluation and argumentation in book review articles, **Davide Simone Giannoni** compares journal editorials in two different disciplines, applied linguistics and medicine, in order to assess the extent to which evaluation is expressed consistently with a possibly increasing need for popularization on the part of the journal. **Sara Gesuato**, instead, takes into consideration book-length studies, and focuses on back-cover blurbs as a *sui generis* promotional genre. The author highlights the strategies employed to establish credentials, stress the value of the work, and encourage potential readers to appreciate the "product". Finally, **Alessandra Molino** studies how learners of English as a foreign language employ evaluation in written texts. The aim is to highlight in what ways this usage diverges from what is observed in texts encoded by native speakers, and discuss the strategies that might make the learners' choices more effective.

The next group of contributions deals with evaluation in political discourse. In particular, three papers focus on parliamentary debate. In the first of these, **Paul Bayley** analyzes how Members of the House of Commons engage in adversarial discourse while respecting the norms of politeness, or indeed "pseudo-politeness". An interesting strategy is observed when the speaker appears to entertain an alternative viewpoint, but then disclaims it immediately, in order to state his or her own views. Similarly, the speaker may seem to appre-

ciate an opponent's statement, before challenging it. Also relying on data from Westminster debates, **Cinzia Bevitori** discusses evaluation as occurring in the language of women MPs: the corpus investigated is a series of statements made during the debate on the 2003 war on Iraq, and the research question aims to highlight whether any significant specificities emerge. Her results indicate that, although the expression of sympathy and support (expected in women's usage) do play a crucial role, they do not indicate powerlessness on the part of the encoders. Finally, **Donna R. Miller** compares findings from a previous study on debates in Britain with those of a more recent investigation on US data, in order to assess the extent to which Martin and White's theoretical approach is now capable of describing factors not previously accounted for, thus combining the discussion of data with that of theoretical issues. **Silvia Masi's** contribution deals with the way in which debates are reported in English and in Italian. Clearly, reporting is never a completely neutral operation, as the verbs of report themselves may be selected to guide the recipient's interpretation of the message. Any lack of correspondence between two languages is therefore a crucially important element, as there are two cutting-off points owing to which the original meaning of the encoder may be obfuscated: the choice of verb of report, which may be evaluative, and its (non-)equivalent in translation.

Usage in media discourse is the main object of study in the next set of papers, which opens with **Paola Attolino's** investigation of journalistic style guides and how they seem to influence choices on the part of actual encoders. The selection of more or less evaluative terms reflects the aim to adhere to (and convey) a certain stance on the problems under discussion, in accordance with the main editorial line of the newspaper and its readership. Combining the study of print and electronic media, **Ilaria Moschini's** analysis of a specific case study sheds light on the strategies observed in both types of texts in order to persuade readers of the credibility of a large company's stance in relation to environmental problems. (Self-)evaluation as an important marketing strategy is also discussed by **Rita Salvi** and **Judith Turnbull**, whose investigation of three corporate websites shows how the "virtual" encoder is in fact personified

throughout, in an attempt to establish a certain degree of fictive familiarity with the reader and assert one's authority in relation to the validity of the company's statements (or perhaps claims!). Last but not least, the recipient of such messages, i.e., the consumer, takes centre stage in **Anna Franca Plastina's** study of online product reviews. In this emerging genre users convey their own opinions of products and services with varying degrees of assertiveness, and occasionally engage in actual dialogues with other reviewers, thus setting up a virtual discourse community of great interest.

Whatever the object of study, or the choice of methodological approach and terminology, what all these contributions certainly have in common is a very deep awareness of the importance of both encoders and recipients in the negotiation of evaluative discourse. While the former may manipulate language with the introduction of elements of subjectivity aimed at enhancing the persuasiveness of discourse, the latter is empowered through a critical approach to such strategies, thus becoming able to see through the patterns of involvement that the encoder has created, and to choose whether to accept or reject them. We hope that this collection may help future readers benefit from this awareness and the findings presented here, in order to pursue further lines of research in this field. Though it may sound unashamedly evaluative to describe it as very rich and varied, we may be confident we are not conveying anything too subjective and open to challenge.

Marina Dossena and Andreas H. Jucker

REFERENCES

- Anderson L. and J. Bamford (eds), 2004, *Evaluation in Spoken and Written Academic Discourse*, Officina, Roma.
- Bondi M. and A. Mauranen (eds), 2003, *Evaluation in Academic Discourse*, Special issue of *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 2 (4).
- Conrad S. and D. Biber, 2000, "Adverbial Marking of Stance in Speech and Writing. A Corpus-based Account of Evaluative Adverbials in Three Registers of English", in S. Hunston and G. Thompson (eds), pp. 56-73.

- Del Lungo Camiciotti G. and E. Tognini-Bonelli (eds), 2004, *Academic Discourse – New Insights into Evaluation*, Peter Lang, Bern.
- Del Lungo Camiciotti G. and E. Tognini-Bonelli (eds), 2005, *Strategies in Academic Discourse*, Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Dossena M., 2006a, “Forms of Argumentation and Verbal Aggression in the Darien Pamphlets”, in N. Brownlees (ed.), *News Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, Peter Lang, Bern, pp. 235-254.
- Dossena M., 2006b, “Doing Business in Nineteenth-century Scotland: Expressing Authority, Conveying Stance”, *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*. Special issue of *Insights from Corpus Linguistics for Professional Communication* (T. Orr, ed.) 49 (3), pp. 246-253.
- Dossena M., 2006c, “Forms of Self-representation in 19th-century Business Letters”, in M. Dossena and I. Taavitsainen (eds), *Diachronic Perspectives on Domain-Specific English*, Peter Lang, Bern, pp. 173-190.
- Drew P., 2004, “Integrating Qualitative Analysis of Evaluative Discourse with the Quantitative Approach of Corpus Linguistics”, in G. Del Lungo Camiciotti and E. Tognini-Bonelli (eds), pp. 217-229.
- Dury R., 2006, “A Corpus of Nineteenth-century Business Correspondence: Methodology of Transcription”, in M. Dossena and S.M. Fitzmaurice (eds), *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations*, Peter Lang, Bern, pp. 193-205.
- Dury R., forthcoming, “The History of the Copperplate Hand and the Importance of Noting Handwriting Styles in Letter Transcriptions”, paper presented at 14 ICEHL, Bergamo (I), 2006.
- Gotti M., D. Heller and M. Dossena (eds), 2002, *Conflict and Negotiation in Specialized Texts*, Peter Lang, Bern.
- Gunnarsson B.-L., 2001, “Expressing Criticism and Evaluation during Three Centuries”, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2 (1), pp. 115-139.
- Hunston S. and J. Sinclair, 2000, “A Local Grammar of Evaluation”, in S. Hunston and G. Thompson (eds), pp. 74-101.
- Hunston S. and G. Thompson (eds), 2000, *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*, O.U.P., Oxford.
- Hyland K., 2000, *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*, Longman, London.
- Hyland K., 2005, *Metadiscourse*, Continuum, London.
- Hyland K. and M. Bondi (eds), 2006, *Academic Discourse Across Disciplines*, Peter Lang, Bern.
- Leech G., 1983, *Principles of Pragmatics*, Longman, London.
- Martin J.R., 2000, “Beyond Exchange: APPRAISAL Systems in English”, in S. Hunston and G. Thompson (eds), pp. 142-175.
- Martin J.R. and P.P.R. White, 2005, *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Miller D.R., 2002, “Multiple Judicial Opinions as Specialized Sites of Engagement: Conflicting Paradigms of Valuation and Legitimation in *Bush v. Gore 2000*”, in M. Gotti, D. Heller and M. Dossena (eds), pp. 119-141.

- Miller D.R., 2004, "...to meet our common challenge': ENGAGEMENT Strategies of Alignment and Alienation in Current US International Discourse", in M. Gotti and C. Candlin (eds), *Intercultural Discourse in Domain-specific English*, *Textus* XVIII (1), pp. 39-62.
- Nevala M., 2004, *Address in Early English Correspondence: Its Forms and Socio-Pragmatic Functions*, Société Néophilologique, Helsinki.
- Salager-Meyer F., 2001, "From Self-highlightedness to Self-effacement: A Genre-based Study of the Socio-pragmatic Function of Criticism in Medical Discourse", *LSP and Professional Communication* 1/2, pp. 63-84.
- White P.R.R., 2002, "Appraisal – The Language of Evaluation and Stance", in J. Verschueren, J. Östman, J. Blommaert and C. Bulcaen (eds), *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 1-27.
- White P.R.R., 2003, "Beyond Modality and Hedging: A Dialogic View of the Language of Intersubjective Stance", *Text* [special issue on Appraisal] 23 (2), pp. 259-284.