Full Length Research Paper

Systemic analysis of text appraisal on students’ theses writing in English

Magdalena NGONGO

English Study Program of Educational Faculty, Artha Wacana Christian University, P.O. Box 147, Timor- Kupang, Indonesia. E-mail: magda_tars@yahoo.com

Accepted 17 March, 2017

This paper is aimed to describe text appraisal of students’ theses writing in English, as one of the requirements to fulfil undergraduate degree of English teaching. Text appraisal is developed from Systemic Functional Linguistics and it is included in the interpersonal metafunction of meaning. There are 10 English theses writing taken to be analyzed qualitatively. These theses were written by undergraduate students who got ‘A’ grade in their theses examination. Based on the analysis, it was found out that in thesis writing, text appraisal employed covers three types of attitude, namely affect, appreciation and judgements. In addition, graduation and engagement can be also included in language evaluation in which engagement was the most used. Referring to the attitude, judgement was more used than affect and appreciation. This fact indicates that the students’ theses writing were more personal and emotional than appreciative. Engagement was also most used than graduation. This fact indicates that undergraduate students made use of types of expand namely, entertain as well as attribute, whereas in graduation they were more concerned for intensification and quantification and had very limited concerns or even ignored the use of sharpening and softening resource. This fact might suggest that students should be taught and trained more relating to writing, such as academic writing that specifies in evaluating language.

Key words: Text appraisal, theses writing, systemic.

INTRODUCTION

Writing a thesis for students of English study program of Artha Wacana Christian University, Timor, Indonesia is necessary for them as one of the requirements to be fulfilled in the undergraduate degree. Students must write a thesis based on their capacity, interest and field of study, such as teaching English or local languages. It is realized that writing thesis for students needs time to do it. “It is widely acknowledged that writing is seen as a site of interaction between writers and readers.” (Liu, 2013). Through written texts, writers construct solidarity and alignment with potential or target readers (Thompson, 2001 in Liu, 2013). This kind of evaluation and interaction has been a well-established research area in the academic context, and different scholars, for different purposes, had employed different terms to account for phenomena such as attitude (Halliday, 1994), hedging (Hyland, 1998), dialogic orientation (Bakhtin, 1982), stance (Biber and Finegan, 1989), evaluation (Hunston and Thompson, 2000), metadiscourse (Crismore, 1989; Hyland, 1999) and appraisal (Martin, 2000). It seems that there are some researchers or scholars who have conducted or studied on evaluation of language or appraisal, such as Hood (2004), Hyland (2002) and Hyland and Anan (2006). They had specified study to interpersonal language use relating to the importance of constructing a critical voice and building persuasion in argumentative writing. Hadidi and Parvin (2015) stated that Appraisal has not been researched very well in English Language Teaching yet...... This statement means that even though there were many studies of appraisal, there might be little concern to English Language Teaching. Recent study conducted by Wei et al. (2015) stated that the application of appraisal theory has been applied in types of discourse including literary works, news, legal, and scientific academic discourse. Moreover, they recommended that future studies can be
focused on identification and classification of appraisal resource…. (Wei et al., 2015).

Concerning those previous studies, the writer realizes that evaluating language is essential too if it is studied from academic writing especially theses writing written by EFL undergraduate students. Therefore, based on Appraisal Theory (Martin and White, 2005; Martin, 1997), this study is concerned about addressing these linguistic studies on interpersonal meanings in EFL undergraduate students’ English writing.

Appraisal theory was developed by Martin (1997, 2000), Martin and Rose (2003) and Martin and White (2005). It is developed from the view of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) that has a purpose to describe various ways of linguistic realization of interpersonal meanings in language use. It has three subsystems, namely attitude, engagement and graduation. It is stated that each of them has certain sub-subsystems.

Appraisal has three subsystems, (Martin, 1997) namely affect, judgement and appreciation, and each subsystem has certain subcategories. Moreover, Martin (1997) stated that affect deals with the resources for construing emotion, judgement relates to resources for judging behavior in ‘ethical term’, and appreciation concerns to the resources for valuing objects ‘aesthetically’. Those resources relates to appraisal, including additional resources for amplification and engagement. Those types of appraisal “have positive and negative dimension that correspond to positive and negative evaluation of text…” (Martin, 1997).

Appraisal is one of the three major discourse semantic resources construing interpersonal meaning. Moreover, Martin and White (2005) stated that appraisal covers three interacting domains, namely attitude, engagement and graduation. Attitude deals with feelings, including emotional reactions, judgement of behavior and evaluation of things.

Engagement concerns the sourcing of attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. It is concerned with the ways in which resources such as projection, modality, polarity, concession and various comment adverbials position the speaker/writer with respect to the value position being advanced and with respect to potential responses to that value position – by quoting or reporting, acknowledging a possibility, denying, countering, affirming and so on.

Graduation relates to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred. It is also stated that attitude itself is divided into three regions of feeling, namely affect, judgement and appreciation. Affect deals with resources for construing emotional reactions. Judgement is concerned with resources for assessing behavior according to various normative principles. Appreciation covers the resources for construing the value of things, including natural phenomena and semiosis (as either product or process). Therefore, graduation is concerned with gradability. For attitude, since the resources are inherently gradable, graduation has to do with adjusting the degree of an evaluation that relates to how strong or weak the feeling is. This kind of graduation is included as ‘force’ realizations covering intensification, and quantification; ‘focus’ realizations covering sharpening and shortening.

Based on those views of language evaluation in text, the writer can say that analyzing EFL undergraduate written text is needed to be studied in order to get complete understanding of how students in their academic writing in this case in their theses writing applied language evaluation. It is hoped that this study will give contribution to EFL teaching such as in teaching academic writing in which one aspect to be specified in it is language evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

This study was taken from ten academic writing or theses writing in English written by ten undergraduate students of English study program at Artha Wacana Christian University, Timor, Indonesia. The students recently had graduated on February, 2015. This study was aimed to describe the undergraduate students’ interaction to some writers’ views. These theses writing were as final project for undergraduate students to fulfil one of the requirements for undergraduate degree.

Based on the evaluation of examiners, these students who wrote these theses were graded ‘A’. These ten theses were purposively taken based on the purpose of this study that is to describe and analyze students’ language evaluation. Those theses then were studied and all data were specified and analyzed based on appraisal theory. Therefore this type of study can be classified as documentary analysis and they were analyzed qualitatively. The use of simple number in this study was aimed just to give or support more information to the analysis of language evaluation used in texts. Having finished analyzing and interpreting, the results are presented by using formal, informal method and combining formal and informal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part concerns language evaluation analysis that is based on the resources of appraisal system which covers attitude namely, attitude (affect, judgement, appreciation), engagement and graduation. This pattern is regarded as a brief outline of appraisal (Martin, 1997; Martin and White, 2005). The resultant rhetorical effect of the predominance of appreciation values is to make the text sound more appreciative than emotional or judgemental (Hood, 2004 in Liu, 2013).

Based on the ten theses writing written by
undergraduate students, it was found out that there were varieties of subtypes of appraisal resources used. The information relating the number of language evaluation can be seen in Table 1. Table 1 shows the distribution of appraisal system used in writing. It shows that the total use of appraisal system in ten writings is 762. Engagement system was the most used that was 313 (41%) used and followed by judgement which is 174 (23%), graduation is 149 (19.5%), affect is 69 (9%), and appreciation is 57 (7.4%). This fact indicates that students used most engagement system and less use of appreciation. They are more personal in showing behavior of judgement as resources of attitude. More information of each type and subtypes of appraisal system are presented orderly in the following.

### Affect in theses writing

Attitude showing affect subtype was less used than judgement but more used than appreciation. An overview of the affect type of appraisal showing behavior or attitude in theses writing of undergraduate students is presented in Table 2. Table 2 shows the number use of affect type of appraisal system in which the use of security was the most used and followed by happiness and satisfaction. It seems that affect values were rated low if compared to judgement values even if it is higher than appreciation. Resources of security, happiness and satisfaction seems to be used since the undergraduate students state their attitude by expressing their feeling to what they read and then they state their confidence, admiration, happiness from positive and negative attitude. Data relating to affect system can be seen in the Examples 1 and 2.

**Example 1- Thesis writing number 1 (page 26):** Based on the theoretical views of listening and dictogloss above, the writer believes [+affect: security] by using dictogloss technique the students’ skill in listening will improve...

**Example 2- Thesis writing number 8 (page 39):** The writer hesitated [-affect: insecurity] to select between these Manulai 2 and Manulai 1...

The Example number one and two show resources of attitude relating to positive (number one) and negative attitude (number two). Resources for positive affect were realized more positive than negative one.

### Judgment in text writing

The resources of judgment type of appraisal system were realized by the use of social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem relates to normality, capacity and tenacity; whereas social sanction covers veracity and propriety.

---

**Table 1. Types of language used in theses writing.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students number of writing</th>
<th>Affect</th>
<th>Judgement</th>
<th>Appreciation</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69(9%)</td>
<td>174(23%)</td>
<td>57(7.4%)</td>
<td>313(41%)</td>
<td>149(19.5%)</td>
<td>762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Affect Type of appraisal system in theses writing.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the analysis it was found out that the use of judgment in theses writing was 174 (23.5%). It has the highest resources used of attitude system than affect and appreciation. The distribution of judgment used can be seen in Table 3. Table 3 shows the use of judgement type in theses writing in which the use of both Social esteem and Social sanction were used and even social esteem values were higher than social sanction. The use of both values in theses writing implies the writers’ evaluation of people’s intellectual capacity and normality, while social sanction value relating to ethics was not concerned. The examples of judgment types can be seen in the data as follows.

**Example 3-**Thesis writing number 4 (page 1): These alternative approaches and methods can be applied [+judgement: capacity] in English teaching classroom…

**Example 4-**Thesis writing number 3 (page 41): The students can share [+judgement: capacity] their idea with their friends in group and try to understand the material ….

**Example 5-**Thesis writing number 2 (page 9): It is clear [+judgement: tenacity] that sentences are created by combining words, phrases or even clauses.

It seems that the parameters for organizing judgement are reflected by the use of grammatical distinctions in the system of modalization (Halliday, 1994). Resources of normality are to usuality, capacity is to ability, tenacity is to inclination, veracity is to probability, and propriety is to obligation.

**Appreciation in text writing**

Appreciation values were the least used in theses writing. It just consisted of 57 (7.4%) number use. It was the least used than the others such as judgment and affect. Referring to appreciation itself that covers reaction, composition and valuation, the use of valuation was higher (28) than the other two, reaction (9) and composition (11). This implies that explicit valuation was more specified for things or event. This fact is in agreement with Liu (2013). Even though the number used was least, writers still had concern to it by evaluating language as source of attitude system. Table 4 shows more information of the distribution use of appreciation system. It is clearly shown from Table 4 that the number use of valuation consists of 28 and followed by composition and reaction. Writers had very limitation of negative attitude of appreciation. They have more positive attitude to the human views and they quoted, paraphrased or even summarized them for the contribution of their writing. Examples of data concerning to the use of appreciation values are as follows.

**Example 6-**Thesis writing number 10 (page: 13): Body part idiom is very important [+ appreciation: valuation] in learning a language, …

**Example 7-**Thesis number 3 (page: 43): Learning English through the Number Head Together Strategy is very significance. [+appreciation: valuation]

**Engagement system in writing**

Engagement system in theses writing covers the resources use of contractive and expansive. These two subsystem also consist of other subsystem, namely disclaim and proclaim for the type of contract and for expand relates to entertain and attribute. Based on the ten theses writing, it was found out that there were 313 (41%) engagement type used as resources of appraisal system. It is the highest used than attitude and graduation. This fact implies that writers are more
Table 5. Engagement system in theses writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contract</th>
<th>Expand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disclaim</td>
<td>Proclaim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Graduation Type of appraisal in theses writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerned to attribute; they also cited and paraphrased. Writers seems that they make use of types of expand namely, entertain as well as attribute. Each subtype of engagement can be seen in Table 5. Table 5 shows the use of engagement that covers contractive and expansive. Engagement values had 313 use numbers in which expand was more use than contract. This fact implies that writers are more concerned to expand by acknowledging. It seems that type of citation was more typically used in theses writing beside that the writers also paraphrase and summarize. They were less to proclaim or state their view and also they rarely had disclaim. This fact shows that the use of citation was preferably used. This fact also found out by Pascual and Unger (2010) that “the highly recurrent use of this type of citations appears to be typical in the disciplines of Chemistry and physics, ....” Examples of language evaluation relating to engagement are as follows:

**Example 8-Thesis writing number 4 (page 7):** Gardner argues that [+engagement: attribute] we should view intelligence as the ability to solve problems ....

**Example 9-Thesis writing number 4 (page 12):** We can say that [+expand: proclaim] the MI in ELT classroom must be [+expand: entertain] a tool to help students develop a better understanding and appreciation of their strength.

**Graduation in theses writing (academic writing)**

Graduation system as one of appraisal system covers two sets of resources, namely Force and Focus. The number use of graduation system in theses writing was 149 (19%). More information relating to the number use of it can be seen on Table 6. Table 6 shows the use of graduation system in theses writing. Almost all force values dominated the use of graduation system. This implies that writers just concerned intensification and quantification and had very limited concerns or even ignored sharpening and softening resource. The graduation values of intensification and quantification were almost balance. Data of graduation system are presented in these following examples.

**Example 10-Thesis writing number 5 (page:39):** It is because they have many [force: quantification] experience and they have passed many conditions and situations.

**Example 11-page 45:** The use of local language frequently [force: intensification] helps people to maintain their language.

**Example 12-page 51:** The effort from the community activities would be for a genuine [focus; sharpening] attempt to be made....

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

The results of this study have shown that EFL students’ evaluation of language through their interaction to writers’ views covered some types of appraisal system resources. Therefore, it can be concluded that language evaluation in theses writing of EFL undergraduates concerned more judgement subtype as showing behavior or attitude than affect and appreciation. Engagement type is also concerned since they make use of expand subtypes that covers entertain and attribute and are less in contract covering disclaim and proclaim. Relating to graduation, undergraduate students concerned also to intensification and quantification and they ignored to sharpening and softening.

The results of this study make use of appraisal theory and also is in accordance to some previous studies relating to the contribution of understanding appraisal system concerning to interpersonal resources used. Therefore, it could be suggested that future research can be conducted in order to have complete understanding on appraisal theory by having more EFL writing and varieties of academic writing from different field of study.
Future study could cover also positive and negative evaluation, and high, median, and low one. It is also suggested to lecturers or teachers of EFL teaching that they could give more exercises dealing with language evaluation.

REFERENCES


