Guest Editor's Preface

An Introduction to Theme Issue: Systemic Functional Linguistics and Appraisal Analysis: Recent Contributions to English Language Research

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In January, 2015, Dr White and I were privileged to be invited to attend the Third International Conference on Language, Discourse, and Pragmatics at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. Our warm welcome and the intense interest in our work prompted us to make a second visit in 2016—this time to present a series of workshops on appraisal. Then, in 2017, we were again able to visit what by then had become our friends and colleagues in Ahvaz, by attending and presenting at the Fourth International Conference on Language, Discourse, and Pragmatics at Shahid Chamran University. Our original interest in attending was prompted by having been made aware that the Professor of Linguistics at Shahid Chamran University, Dr Alireza Jalilifar, had been introducing his postgraduate students to systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and we were keen to meet with his students and colleagues as a consequence. It became clear on these visits that the level of academic expertise in Iran and at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, in particular, was extremely high, and over the years, we have been lucky to have maintained our close collegial relationships with the people we met on each of our trips. Unsurprisingly, then, when the university began to publish its own journal devoted to language studies, it seemed more than appropriate that we proposed a theme issue focusing on SFL, in general, and appraisal, in particular. In this special edition, we are able to present several research papers, addressing a variety of language contexts, each using the discourse analytic approaches that SFL provides. All but one of the papers in this edition use the appraisal framework as a basis for investigating the data that are the focus of their research agenda.

Because this edition is dedicated to SFL and appraisal, all of the papers here do not provide detailed explanation of what the theory entails, but readers keen to know more are directed to the International Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (ISFLA) Website, which opens with the following statement:

> Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a theory of language centred around the notion of language function. While SFL accounts for the syntactic structure of language, it places the function of language as central (what language does and how it does it), in preference to more structural approaches, which place the elements of language and their combinations as central. SFL starts at social context and looks at how language both acts upon, and is constrained by, this social context. (http://www.isfla.org/Systemics/definition.html)

The appraisal framework is an extension of the interpersonal function of SFL which concentrates on how evaluative acts and the language of evaluation can be taken into account when making an analysis of the texts and social contexts of language in use. Whereas the appraisal framework proposes categories of evaluation so that these types of evaluative instances may be tracked in texts, these categories of appraisal are not seen as existing in the grammar, but are differentially realised through lexicogrammar, and are dependent for interpretation on social context, including the values and knowledge that readers and writers (interlocutors) bring to the 'utterance.' This often means that each analyst creates their own appraisal analysis based on their own experience of the context of situation and their own social and linguistic background, due to the interpersonal nature of evaluation, in general. Thus, what the appraisal framework provides is a means of sharing these analyses of the evaluative charges of texts under scrutiny, comparing texts in terms of the use of language to evaluate and the sometimes subtle differences in positioning of writers and readers that language use invokes. Again, the papers in this edition generally assume knowledge of the appraisal framework, and all of them cite the seminal work in the appraisal literature by Martin and White (*The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*, 2005).

In Simpson-Smith's article, the language of engineering is analysed from the perspective of appraisal and the attitudinal patterns evident in the corpus of texts selected. She focuses on the targets of attitude and the attitudes deployed

in texts written by professional engineers, particularly looking at what is known as appreciation resources. One purpose of her study to is make clear what resources are typically used by professional engineers and to make this type of knowledge available to engineering students who are required in turn to produce their own reports which are recognised as legitimate within the engineering discipline.

The use of appraisal analysis for pedagogic purposes is popular with researchers because it provides useful resources for use in teaching register specific to apprentices in various fields, not only those studying English for academic purposes such as engineering, but those studying English as a second or foreign language. In Devira and Westin, the academic genre of the critical review is the focus of their study where the aim is to provide resources for English language students who are required to produce this type of report in Australian universities. They compare structure and the attitudinal language use in critical review texts written by two students and a model text provided by their instructor, and the results allow the writers to provide suggestions for language instruction with the aim of allowing students to succeed in this academic genre. As a contrast, Hoyte's study looks at the earlier end of the learning journey—that of young children at the beginning of their schooling. She used the appraisal framework to examine evaluative language in the conversations of two pairs of 5-to-6-year-old friends who identified each other as best friends. She makes the point that the evaluation resources that children develop at this age are important for engaging in learning and literacy in school and social contexts throughout their lives. This study provides insights into how children begin to negotiate interpersonal relationships and will be of interest to early learning practitioners and teachers alike.

Whereas appraisal was originally concerned with the evaluative resources of English, many researchers are interested in providing analyses of the interpersonal relationships being construed by people communicating in languages other than English. Two of the papers in this edition use data that was originally produced by Chinese speakers. One of these uses the appraisal framework to examine the interpersonal relationships being enacted by Chinese couples undergoing televised marriage counselling. The researchers were able to exploit the appraisal framework to investigate the types of evaluative resources used in this highly charged interpersonal context, noting that although languages make different meanings, the framework provides a flexible tool for examining positioning in different cultural contexts. This highlights the utility of appraisal as a discourse semantic analytic tool, rather than a set of concrete grammatical categories, and points to the theoretical underpinnings of SFL which views language as a social semiotic, dependent, for its meaning-making, on the contexts of situation and culture. In this paper, Xu and White show how a collection of attitudinal positions can contribute to profiles of styles of interaction which can distinguish different identities in interaction. Similarly, Li and Dreyfus use authentic data from an online forum in China, but they address the potential for implying relationships and positioning by identifying and problematising the underlying discourse semantic dimensions SFL provides for the discussion of tenor. They point out that the differences in Chinese and English cultural values mean that system networks for investigating interaction in Chinese mean that networks that have previously been used for analysing tenor need to be reconceptualised with reference to the dimension known as involvement.

In Zaidi and White, two news editorials covering the assassination of Osama bin Landen as reported in Pakistan form the texts under investigation. In this paper, the researchers note that the cultural context for these newspaper editorials mean that the Pakistani military cannot be criticised openly, and so their appraisal analysis is focused on showing how these editorials imply a critical stance rather than openly criticising the parties involved. The paper discusses how language is similarly used despite being derived from two ideologically differing sources to make their arguments without attracting legal or political consequences.

We hope that these six articles will be of interest in the wider community of language researchers, and especially that they will inspire others to use the appraisal framework for investigation of the texts that motivate their interest.

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