Evaluation in different types of spoken corpus

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Implicit versus explicit evaluation: A framework for studying evaluative resources in academic discourse.

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Evaluation in report sources: uncovering disciplinary differences in theses

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The source of a reported statement is important in the study of evaluation, since, as Hunston (1993, 2000) points out, the choice of source reflects a shared world of writer and reader, which is constructed with the ultimate aim of persuading the reader to accept the writer's view.

In this paper I investigate reporting clauses in which a finite verb is followed by a that-clause. I focus particularly on evaluation in the source of the reported proposition and show how extensive disciplinary differences can be revealed using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data. The study draws upon two corpora of theses written by native speakers: approximately 200,000 words in politics/international relations and 300,000 words in materials science. Some examples appear below.

1. I argued above that language and other cultural markers were important to Mazzini… (mpommch3)
2. Sakamoto et al (1994) showed that a surfactant layer of bismuth has two effects on SSMBE of Ge/Si heterostructures… (dmabocho5)
3. The UNHCR Handbook suggests that discrimination can be tantamount to persecution… (mpokuch1)
4. It was expected that this student would join EGT… (dmacoch1)

Three clause types are distinguished according to the grammatical subject used: a noun group with human reference (examples 1, 2), a noun group with non-human reference (example 3), and introductory it followed by passive voice (example 4).
Analysing the reporting clauses in this way reveals clear disciplinary differences as well as an interesting apparent similarity. In the politics corpus human subjects predominate. This reflects both the ‘recursive’ and ‘personal’ nature of research in the social sciences (Becher 1989), as well as the specific subject matter of this discipline, which deals primarily with the actions of human beings. By contrast materials shows high figures for both non-human and it subjects, reflecting the construction of ‘impersonal’ and ‘value-free’ accounts of natural phenomena, which are characteristic of work in the natural sciences (Becher 1989). However, the figures for non-human subjects are almost identical in the two corpora, at 124.7 per 100,000 words in politics and 125.0 in materials. This finding is intriguing since these subjects are the sources of the propositions reported.

In order to shed more light on source use in the two disciplines, all examples in each clause type are analysed following Hunston (2000), as either self-sourced (examples 1, 4) or other-sourced (examples 2, 3). However further examination of the data, particularly in politics, shows that a distinction should also be made between ‘other’ sources which play a direct part in the construction of knowledge in the discipline, called here ‘research-world sources’ (example 2), and those which do not, called here ‘real-world sources’ (example 3).

The use of this distinction enables us to see differences between the two corpora that are much less evident if we consider the initial quantitative data in isolation. First, it is clear that the predominance of human subjects in politics is due primarily to the high frequency of real-world sources, a use which may well be highly specific to this discipline. About 60% of the politics examples are of this type, exemplified below.

5. The Secretary-General pointed out that obstructing only one of the hostile forces rendered the impartiality of UNPROFOR difficult to maintain. (mpomqch3)

The analysis of clauses with non-human subjects is, however, even more revealing. The similarity noted between the two corpora in the total occurrence of these clauses masks the very different patterns of use. Politics again primarily uses non-human subjects to refer to real-world sources (85.3 per 100,000 words); however in materials they are predominantly used to make self-sourced statements (87.7). The latter figure reveals the importance of this clause type to materials writers in enabling them to incorporate their comment into the text in a way which does not violate the disciplinary conventions of impersonality and objectivity.

Using a non-human subject allows responsibility for the comment to be delegated to external entities, rather than claimed by the thesis writer. This is shown in example 6, where it is the measurements which are responsible for the following proposition, rather than the researcher who carried them out.

6. The measurements taken in the course of this investigation have also indicated that the SE-signal from both ternary and quaternary material is significantly greater than that of InP. (dmasech5)

A similar pattern of use is found in clauses with it subject; in politics they occur most frequently with real-world sources (41.6 per 100,000 words), in materials with self as source (109.0). These clauses play a key role in allowing the writer to comment while still remaining relatively hidden. Thus their high frequency in materials is probably due to the fact that they offer a solution to the natural scientist’s dilemma of maintaining impersonality, while still making their viewpoint clear. This is shown in example 7.

7. However, with the analysis of this chapter in mind, it is now suggested that a more radical stance be taken… (dmabuch3)

This study of evaluation in the sources of reported statements shows how initially similar quantitative data may obscure more significant disciplinary differences, which can only be revealed by additional detailed examination of the context. The use of both qualitative as well as quantitative data is necessary for an adequate analysis and description of evaluation.

References
