

The operation of value in undergraduate English language essays

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ABSTRACT

The construction of meaning in texts inevitably involves the expression of value judgments (Mirskin, 1995) as well as other types of writer evaluation. This paper explores the expression of value in argumentative English language essays written by first year undergraduates. Hunston's (1989) evaluation of value which essentially involves qualitative judgements along the good-bad cline is used to identify certain categories of value that operate in these essays. The effectiveness of these categories of value in the construction of arguments is also discussed with reference to comments given by a content expert to provide a better understanding of their significance in the given writing task.

Introduction

The notion of value in writing has been investigated from various angles (e.g. Hunston, 1993; Mirskin, 1995; White, 2002) with each approach adopting a slightly differing perspective to the operation of the concept in text. However, all these approaches show the significance of text as being value-laden to the extent that the "ability to construct meaning is relative to [the writer's] ability to negotiate social contexts of value" (Mirskin, 1995, p. 389). According to Mirskin (p. 329), the expression of value determines the significance of information and it is fundamental to meaning-making. The very act of speaking or writing "...is an activity that involves taking a social attitude or valuative stance toward the world" and therefore "the act of making meaning is an act of valuing".

These investigations also demonstrate the complexity of the nature of value operating in texts as the expression of value, though highly important to meaning-making, can be embedded rather than expressed linguistically. Also, they can be made sense of only if one shares the socio-cultural meanings negotiated in the contexts of use (Hunston, 1989). Mirskin (1995, p. 388) uses the phrase 'shared contexts of attitude' synonymously with value. Thus, there is the larger 'group' element in the shaping of acceptable values and this may further complicate the analysis of value as the notion of what constitutes a discernable group or community of writers who hold shared values is in itself being debated upon (Hyland, 2000).

Besides the difficulty in analyzing the operation of value in texts, the other concern is that students' academic writing has been given less attention as they are often dismissed as writing without an authentic audience (O'Brien, 1995).

However, these texts are mostly read and graded by members of the respective academic communities. It is not inconceivable that the quality of students' texts is assessed according to the respective academics' expectations of a conventional quality paper. One aspect of this quality may be the types of and manner in which value is conveyed. It is thus important to understand the kinds of value that operate within students' academic texts as this will provide some insights into how the expression of value meets/ fails to meet the kinds of expectations their assessors have. As such, part of this study involves the perception of academic assessors whose insights were obtained through interviews and from comments along the margin.

Furthermore, the operation of value in texts helps our understanding of why certain arguments are more effective than others. As a text constructor, the writer's indication of his/her attitude towards the validity of his/her or another party's propositions clearly adds to the argumentative quality of the text. The rationale for why certain propositions are more acceptable than others may be made clearer through the writer's attribution of value within the text. As such, this study examines value in the context of an argumentative essay.

The notion of value

Among the many notions of value used to describe its operation in text (see e.g. Halliday, 1994; White, 2000; Boliviar, 2000), the evaluation of value as discussed by Hunston (1989, 1993 and 2000) proves most appropriate for the purposes of this paper. Hunston takes a comprehensive approach to evaluation in text which involves three parameters: status, relevance and value. The status of a proposition reflects the writer's assessment of the relation between proposition and the real world. For instance, a writer may express a proposition as a *fact*, a *hypothesis* or an *assessment*. Every clause in a text has an assigned status. The evaluation of *relevance* uses mainly metadiscourse items to highlight the importance of proposition in the text. The evaluation of value bestows quality and operates along a good-bad scale. For instance, a *fact* may be used as evidence to assign the value of 'supported by evidence' to a prior statement which is an *assessment*. Consequently, the prior statement may be imputed a positive value in terms of validity because it is supported by evidence.

Firstly, the Hunston framework is especially useful for analyzing value because of the distinction made between evaluation on the interactive and autonomous planes of discourse. By comparison, the Appraisal framework, for instance, considers the evaluation of proposition (namely, the option of appreciation) as mainly confined to one amongst many other categories of evaluation of numerous other entities. The distinction between textual and real world entities being evaluated receives less detailed treatment.

As this study concerns the evaluation of textual entities, the distinction of planes made in Hunston's model is most applicable. The distinction is best described by Sinclair's differentiation between "evaluating a part of the discourse" (interactive plane) and "evaluating something else" (autonomous plane) (Hunston, 2000, p. 183). In the former, the writer is a text-constructor informing

the reader of the structure of the text while in the latter, the writer is an informer, providing information on the content of the text. According to Sinclair (1982, p. 71), a text is at one and the same time "a continuous negotiation between participants, and a developing record of experience". This study focuses on writer judgments made with respect to the writer as a text constructor infusing his/her assessment of value on propositions made as the text develops.

Secondly, the ease of using other frameworks such as the Appraisal framework is partially hampered by the obscurity as to how one derives types or classes of value from an analysis of texts. On the other hand, given the amorphous behaviour of evaluation in the texts analysed, Hunston proposes the concept of the writer's goal to identify value judgment. The significance of value is best understood with reference to the situational dynamics that operate within the specific contexts of use. Thus, the concepts of discourse communities, their goals and their particular discourse types are important in the understanding of the notion of value that operates in texts that are shared by members of the communities. For instance, in experimental research articles, only research entities such as the experimental method, the author's results and conclusions and other researchers' results and conclusions are evaluated. So with reference to evaluating a method of experiment in the context of experimental research articles, for instance, the value of +consistency or +accuracy becomes pertinent as it is part of the goal of the community of research scientists to ensure these qualities in their investigations.

However, the writer's goals are not always clearly expressed or easily perceived. In such cases, Hunston interprets the writer's goal as deducible from the concepts of basis and grounds. Hunston (1989, p. 202) provides the following example to illustrate the relation between basis, grounds and the writer's goal.

Example 1

- (i) *It has been proposed that in the 10-nm fiber observed at low salt concentration, the nucleosomal disks are arranged with their diameters nearly parallel to the fiber axis.*
- (ii) *However, this conclusion is not supported by the flow dichroism studies of Tjerneld & Norden (1982).*

In example 1, the proposition in sentence i) is expressed as a hypothesis, as indicated by the items 'it has been proposed'. The assessment of value concerns an aspect of the properties belonging to the item of hypothesis. In this case, the degree of support given to the hypothesis will determine its positive or negative evaluation. In sentence ii), the writer reports the studies of Tjerneld and Norden which do not support the hypothesis in sentence i). The grounds provided attribute negative value to the hypothesis even though the basis (i.e. lack of positive support) on which the negative value was imputed was merely alluded to by the phrases 'did not support' in the text.

The relationship between the writer's goals and the basis used is such that the goals can be interpreted from the basis. In example 1, the basis used to evaluate the proposition in sentence i) is the degree of support given to it. Thus, the writer's goal in positing a hypothesis is to argue for its degree of support. Any portion of

the text that indicates the achievement of the writer's goal attributes positive value. According to Hunston (1989), grounds for the evaluation rather than the actual evaluation can be provided and these grounds are realizations of value. As in example 1, the grounds provided indicate negative evaluation without any explicit statement of value judgment. The phrase 'did not support' hints at the basis used to impute value but there is no clear articulation, linguistically, on the actual value imputed. The sense of negative valuation is derived from an interpretation of writing goals and basis.

Hunston (1989) concedes the circularity in argument as the presence of goals is inferred from the expression of value and the expression of value is dependent on the indication of goals. However, the occasional presence of explicit statements of goals or value confirms the relevance of goals in evaluation. This also brings us to the third reason for the use of the Hunston framework as it allows for the identification of values that are both linguistically and non-linguistically expressed. Hunston's investigation looks at a genre from a purely evaluative viewpoint in that every clause is investigated for its evaluative quality. As she puts it, such an approach is to overcome two very basic difficulties in research in evaluation: "whether evaluation exists as a category and how to distinguish the evaluative from the non-evaluative" (Hunston, 1989, p. 5).

Besides the description of *how* something is evaluated using the concepts of goals, grounds and occasional direct reference to value, there is also the question of *what* is being evaluated in a text. As mentioned earlier, Hunston's analysis of value judgments in experimental research articles concerns *status* types which have been ascribed values by other clauses in the sentence. So, the status type of result may be evaluated for its reasonableness, reliability, consistency, supportiveness, usefulness, importance (Hunston 1993, p. 63; see Hunston, 1989 for a detailed list of status types and the relevant categories of values).

In her study into the evaluation of value in academic research articles by Thetela (1997), she differentiates between Research-Oriented Evaluations (ROEs) such as experimental results and methodology and Topic-Oriented Evaluations (TOEs) and. TOEs and ROEs. This difference is reflected in examples 2a and 2b taken from the current data set.

Example 2a

French was then seen as the language of the enemy. (S9 14¹)

Example 2b

- (i) *In contrast, Keppel Harbour and Tanjong Pagar Terminal, which is purely commercial, is ranked as one of the most global places on the survey.*
- (ii) *This is an anomaly, which has some implication on my initial claim. (S29 22-23)*

Example 2a shows an example of a TOE. What is being evaluated negatively is the French language which is pertinent to the topic being discussed but which has no relation to "the research paper and its purpose" (Thetela, 1997, p. 104). ROEs assess entities that refer to the research process proper including results,

¹ S9 indicates the script number while 14 refers to the clause number in the data set.

evidence, and studies. This involves the “writer observing research” rather than “writer observing the world” (Thetela, 1997, p. 104). Example 2b shows the results of a survey (sentence i) evaluated as an “anomaly” which contradicts the writer’s claim. The pronominal ‘this’ is an example of a research entity which is actually the set of results described in sentence i).

In the current data set, the explicit labeling of a research entity is rather rare. This is because primary research is not required in the task and therefore there is no reference to the research process. What is more pertinent in the current data set is the presence of what I term Argument-Oriented Evaluation (AOEs) or evaluations involving entities which further the development of an argument. Sometimes, these entities are explicitly labeled as in example 3.

Example 3

This is a classic example of how language evolved and changed to suit the environment and social context of that time. (S3 15)

In example 3, the ‘classic example’ provided to exemplify an earlier point is positively evaluated as ‘classic’. In other cases, there may be no reference to the argument entities nor is its usefulness evaluated though the argument entity is provided as in example 4 below.

In this data set, the evaluation of value is often implicit. For instance, evidence to support claims is provided without the explicit labeling of a positive or negative evaluation. This is seen in example 4.

Example 4

- (i) *The pronunciation of the consonants also changed during this period.*
- (ii) *First, the consonant sound/h/ before l, / n and r dropped out of uses. (S9 20-21)*

In example 4, the first statement is an *assessment* of how an aspect of language changed during that period of time. Briefly, the category of assessment is based on Hunston’s (2000, p. 187) definition of assessment as such: “an *assessment* does not make an assertion that is open to verification.” (see Wu, 2004, for an elaborate discussion on the categorization of status types). Sentence ii) provides the evidence or description of change and as such evaluates the *assessment* in sentence i) as being supported by the presence of real language data implicitly. I use the description of *+relevant* to indicate my interpretation of such support with authentic data.

Hunston prioritizes evaluation in her work on research experimental articles as she explains that such a genre is highly persuasive beneath the veneer of objectivity as this is part of the conventional practice within the discourse community. An analysis of the value system operating within professionally written texts provides insights into the nature of effective argumentation and the elements that contribute to its effectiveness. For instance, the quality of *+consistency* bestowed on a *result* statement would indicate the usefulness of citing results that generally agree with other reported results as a well-accepted support in an argument. Such insights, though commonsensical in some ways, provides a concrete platform for systematic description that helps learners understand the construction of effective arguments vividly.

The present study

This paper investigates the concept of value in undergraduates' argumentative essays in the discipline of English language (EL). All the writers have obtained a grade B3 and above in their General Paper examination at 'AO' level. This may roughly translate into a higher intermediate to advanced level of language proficiency amongst them. The data set includes 14 high-rated essays (A grade) drawn from a pile of 225 scripts graded by four English language lecturers. The essays were given letter grades ranging from A to D. The A grade may indicate, among other things, a convergence of value assessment between the script writers and the markers involved. An analysis of the value systems within these high-rated scripts is useful in helping us understand the kind of evaluation of value that may be acceptable to the markers and which therefore translates into scripts scoring better grades.

The task was to write an argumentative essay given the following prompt:

'One compelling reason for change is the need for language to adapt itself to the needs and realities of the speakers'. Discuss the above statement by focusing on changes to the English language in either the Middle English period or the context of the USA.

Using aspects of the Hunston's framework (1989) of evaluation, the paper surfaces categories of values embedded in undergraduate written texts. The significance of these categories of value will be discussed in the light of one content specialist's expectation of what contributes to a good academic essay. The study focuses on two questions:

- What categories of value operate in high-rated novice texts?
- To what extent are these categories of value perceived as relevant and effective amongst selected members of the community grading these scripts?

As discussed earlier, the analysis of status in this paper focuses on the interactive plane where each clause that is given a status is an entity. Each of these entities that are given values can be seen as advancing the cause of the argument in their particular contexts and therefore they are AREs contributing to the development of the argument. The analysis summarizes the kinds of values that are given to each of these status categories as exemplified in the high-rated scripts.

Results

The lists of values identified and their respective description in Table 1 are based on the analysis of all the high-rated EL scripts. Each value reported has been found at least once in the EL scripts. As it is not possible to fully represent the mechanisms of the evaluation of value in all the high-rated scripts on paper, Appendix I provides a sample analysis in one EL script. Aspects of the inferential process used to derive the values are explained with reference to the Hunston framework in the following sections.

The value categories developed here are similar to Hunston's (1989) categories in terms of their presentation: each status category may be given one or more

values and each value is given a mnemonic term and a description (See Table 1). However, the actual mnemonic term and the description are those that are pertinent to this data set. For instance, the value of *+align* is not found in Hunston's categories. However, in students' essays, the need to show alignment between the writer's proposition and those found in authoritative sources seems important. As such, this category of value is included in the list.

Another area of difference between the categories in this research and those in Hunston's is in the values of *+accurate* and *+relevant*. In the genre of experimental

Table 1

Evaluation of Value in the EL scripts

Statement Type	Mnemonic Value	Value Description
fact	+align	Proposition is aligned with views found in authoritative source. It is reconciled with an authoritative view. (S2 5)
interpretation-significance	+relevant	Real language data displays the phenomenon described in the proposition. It is reconciled with the trend shown in data. (S2 25)
interpretation-significance	+reasonable	Proposition is logically explained by background general knowledge. It is reconciled with what the readers generally know of a situation or context. (S2 47)
interpretation-support	+relevant	Real language data displays the phenomenon described in the proposition. It is reconciled with the trend shown in data. (S2 41)
interpretation-mean	+align	Especially for <i>interpretation-mean</i> statements which provide definitions, this value shows the alignment of the proposition to definitions given in authoritative sources. (S8 1)
interpretation-response	+align	Proposition is aligned with views found in an authoritative source. It is reconciled with an authoritative view. (S2 21)
assessment	+relevant	Real language data displays the phenomenon described in the proposition. It is reconciled with the trend shown in data. (S2 8)
hypothesis	+reasonable	Proposition is logically explained by background general knowledge. It is reconciled with what the readers generally know of a situation or context. (S5 23)
hypothesis	+important	Proposition has explanatory power. It helps to explicate the logic of certain issues/ matters. (S9 39)
	+align	Proposition is aligned with views found in an authoritative source. It is reconciled with an authoritative view. (S12 16)
	+relevant	Real language data displays the phenomenon described in the proposition. It is reconciled with the trend shown in data. (S12 16-17)

articles, a statement of *hypothesis* may be evaluated as *+accurate* if it fits with data gathered from experimental work done. However, in the current data set, a statement of hypothesis which fits primary research data is evaluated as *+relevant* as accuracy in primary research at first-year level is not strictly required. What is more important, however, is to ascertain whether relevance of the statement of *hypothesis* corresponds well with the actual phenomenon in the real world. Therefore, the category of *+reasonable* is more appropriate.

The value categories found in all the EL scripts are as follows: *+align*, *+relevant*, *+reasonable*, *+important*. A value can be ascribed to more than one *status* type. For example, both *hypothesis* and *interpretation-significance* can be ascribed the value of *+relevant*. Each of these values will be described with reference to one *status* type unless the same value category has a different description when ascribed to a different *status* type. If so, the different meanings of the same mnemonic term will be presented. Also, the examples discussed will be taken from script S2 or other EL stronger scripts if that value category is not found in S2.

Value Categories in the EL scripts

The value of *+align* is attributed to propositions that are shown to be aligned with views in authoritative sources. Example 5 illustrates the point.

Example 5

As Middle English was largely influenced by French, the Norman Conquest is described as 'an event which had a greater effect on the English Language than any other' (Baugh, 1959, p. 127) due to subsequent massive upheavals it brought upon the English society. (S2 5)

In example 5, the proposition in the main clause on the immense influence of the Norman Conquest and its effect on the English language is attributed to a source. The proposition can be attributed in a number of ways but the assignment of the value of *+align* is reflected when propositions in main clauses are reconciled with those in reference texts to provide some support for their validity. The citation signals the value of *+align*.

The values of *+relevant* and *+reasonable* are illustrated by example 6.

Example 6

- (i) *The case of borrowing foreign words played a major role in the curtailment of Old English derivation processes.*
- (ii) *The Old English prefix with- (meaning against) provided Middle English with words like withdraw and withhold, but most of the words have been replaced by Latin borrowings.*
- (iii) *Today, we say renounce instead of withstay, contradict instead of withspeak, and resist instead of withset.*
- (iv) *When previously the English vocabulary is enlarged using prefixes and suffixes with native elements, there is a visible decline in this tendency following the Conquest as easily acquired foreign words 'weakened English habits of word-formation' (Baugh, 1959, p. 220).*

- (v) *In fact the time when French borrowings reached its peak coincided with the period where derivational processes began to disappear. (S2 41-45)*

The proposition in sentence i) is an example of an *interpretation-significance* statement where the factor for the curtailment of Old English derivation is identified. Sentences ii) and (iii) provide real language data to support the proposition in sentence i). Thus, the proposition in sentence i) is evaluated as *+relevant*. Though there are no words or phrases associated with 'relevance', the contextual meaning suggests the imputation of the value of relevance here.

The same proposition is given further support in sentence iv) as an authoritative source is reported as supporting the proposition. Thus, the proposition in i) is evaluated as *+align*. Finally, sentence v) presents background knowledge on the coincidence in the time frame when French borrowings peaked and when derivational processes disappeared. The use of historical background knowledge to support the proposition in sentence i) evaluates it as *+reasonable*. The issue of what constitutes background knowledge is dependent on the manner in which a point is presented. In example 6, sentence v) constitutes background knowledge as the writer cites a period of time in Middle English when the derivational process disappeared and presents it as common knowledge that needs no verification. The use of "in fact" possibly signifies the writer's perception that this information will not be contested by readers as it is common background knowledge. In other cases, words like "naturally" may indicate that the logicity of using that piece of information is obvious as the writer perceives the information as mostly appropriate in the eyes of the readers with the necessary background knowledge.

The value of *+important* is illustrated by example 7. Sentence i) presents the *hypothesis* of the script in a conditional form.

Example 7

- (i) *If not for the Norman Conquest, the development of English would be much the same course as the other Germanic languages; very different from what it is today—a powerful and colourful language.*
- (ii) *This explains how changes in the worldviews and the modes of experiences of the speakers played a concomitant role in shaping the English language into what it is today. (S9 38-39)*

Essentially, it asserts the writer's claim that the Norman Conquest played a significant role in transforming the English language. Sentence ii) shows that the *hypothesis* "explains" a related consideration in language change, i.e. the role of "world views and the modes of experiences" in language change. Thus, sentence ii) highlights the importance of the *hypothesis* and here, *+important* reflects the quality of the proposition facilitating the explanation of other related issues in the discussion.

Value categories and argumentation

The significance of value categories in explaining the effectiveness of arguments seems to be borne out by one marker's (UT1) comments gathered in

an interview. In the interview, it came across clearly that good argumentation on the relevant topic is an important aspect of essay writing in these assignments. Essentially, good arguments provide a clear thesis which is supported by different types of evidence functioning as grounds.

In the interview with UT1, the need for a clear statement of the writer's position is one of the first criteria of good essays described. In UT1's words, a quality essay "needs to be highly focused and it must pick out the issue that is being referred to, mainly language change and expand on it". UT1 describes grade 'C' essays as "narrative". A reader may ask at the end of reading such a script "so what? How does this relate to the issue?"

Good argumentation can be described from many perspectives but from the evaluation point-of-view, the evaluation of value helps clarify the position that the writer is arguing for. In the interview with UT1, he described one of the most important criteria that differentiates between an 'A' grade and a 'B' or 'C' grade essay as the ability to focus on the right issue. This is usually accomplished in the introductory paragraphs of the scripts. The focus can be achieved through various means. Examples 8a and 8b show two possible means and their significance in terms of the evaluation of value used by the writers to present their positions rhetorically as an argument.

Example 8a

- (i) *'One compelling reason for change is the need for a language to adapt itself to the need and realities of the speakers.'*
- (ii) *This is certainly true in my point of view as a language must be able to allow its speakers to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings as well as communicate with one another.*
- (iii) *Also, in our ever-changing world where new technologies especially in the field of information technology are sprouting almost everyday, an impossibility yesterday may turn into a reality today.*
- (iv) *Moreover, 'it is ultimately [speakers] who decide what language to use and how to use it [language does not have a life of its own' (lecturer's name).*
- (v) *However, there exists a number of people who are uneasy about the concept of change in language.*
- (vi) *If English is used as an example, 'change in language is almost inevitable if it is to remain dynamic and relevant to the speakers of the language' (lecturer's name).*
- (vii) *Therefore, this essay aims to illustrate that changes made to [English language during the Middle English period are necessary in order for it to adapt itself to the needs and realities of the speakers then. (S5 1-7)*

In example 8a, the writer's position is hinted at in the opening line but it is placed within inverted commas to indicate its attribution to the assignment question. In professional genres, this might be unacceptable but in the context of undergraduate essays, an undocumented attribution such as this one is understood as the proposition being attributed to the given assignment prompt. The writer then indicates his/her stance and valuation of that proposition by different means. Firstly, he/she asserts that it is "certainly true" and he/she also

aligns himself/herself with the proposition in the assignment task (“in my point of view”). Secondly, sentence iii) rephrases the proposition in sentence i) and it is attributed to an authoritative source. The attribution is made to the lecturer of the course and understood as an authoritative source, though such documentation is again unacceptable in a professional article. The attribution at the same time values the proposition in sentence i) as *+align*.

Having both stated his/her position and valued it as *+align*, the writer problematizes the issue by presenting a contradictory stance attributed to “a number of people” in sentence v). This contradictory stance is reflected in the use of the contrastive “however”. Sentence vi), which is in contradiction to sentence v), is valued as *+align*. Using a *hypothetical* in sentence vi), the writer affirms that the idea of language change is “inevitable” and attributes it to an authoritative source. Thus, this proposition negates the proposition in sentence v) and affirms the original proposition in sentence i). Finally, in sentence vii), the *focus* statement clearly sets out the aim of the essay which is to develop the writer’s argument identified in sentence i). Thus, the writer makes clear his/ her stance and the evaluation of value of *+align* is one important way of signifying that stance.

Some of the script writers do not problematize the issue but the evaluation of value is just as useful in identifying the writer’s stance clearly. This is shown in example 9.

Example 9

- (i) *The English language is an example of a language, which has undergone prodigious changes as a result of political and social upheavals.*
- (ii) *The most noticeable and momentous changes in the English language occurred during the Middle English period (1100-1500) where ‘changes more extensive and fundamental than those that have taken place at any time before or since.’ (Baugh, 1978, p. 158) (S9 3-4)*

Sentence i) reflects the writer’s position as agreeing with the assignment prompt. Changes in the English language, which the writer describes as “prodigious”, are described as resulting from “political and social upheavals” stemming from the needs and realities of people. Sentence ii) then presents an attributed statement that describes the prodigious changes in Middle English to support the writer’s stance in sentence i). The attribution of this proposition to an authoritative source values sentence i) as *+align*.

From the perspective of value assessment, a good argument also requires some of the status categories to be positively evaluated. In the description of statement types, a *hypothesis* is a statement of claim that relates to the central issue being discussed. The writer’s claim or the statement type of *hypothesis* is one category that needs positive evaluation. A countering claim that contradicts the writer’s *hypothesis* may be presented and negatively evaluated but as explained earlier, this only strengthens the evaluation of value for *hypothesis*. This is because the positive and negative evaluation of two statements (*hypothesis* and its contending proposition) can happen simultaneously.

Hence, if comparing the *hypothesis* and the *assessment* categories, the former needs to be positively evaluated, though the positive evaluation of statements of

assessment throughout the script does help to develop the logical flow of the argument. Categories such as *interpretation* need to be positively evaluated or have their relevance and degree of reasonableness shown.

To establish a good argument, factual statements commonly found in introductory paragraphs are sometimes evaluated for their quality of alignment with authoritative sources although they have the *status* of a *fact*. Factual information is not evaluated in the Hunston framework because if the truth-value of a *fact* is questioned, it could translate into an implication of the writer as “dangerously delusional” (Hunston, 2000, p. 187). In some cases, the *fact* elements in experimental research articles are knowledge claims which are portrayed as established and accepted as *fact* by the article writer. This may be a result of the writers’ contribution to the knowledge base as a result of his/ her experimental work. Thus, to evaluate the truth-value of such statements of *fact* may jeopardize the reader-writer relationship.

In the current data set, when factual information is valued as *+align*, it is seen as a positive evaluation as the accuracy of the information is ensured. In the EL scripts where there is no primary research conducted, the need to establish statement of *fact* as credible is more keen as one could be read as providing wrong factual information if statements are not evaluated for their alignment with authoritative sources. Thus, it is not uncommon to find statements like that in example 10.

Example 10

A language undergoes changes as long as people speak it, and it will only stop changing when it has lost all its speakers, for example, the languages Etruscan and Gothic². (S8 2)²

Good argumentation requires the presence of a clear thesis that is supported by strong grounds. Grounds are realizations of value. It is argued here that different types of evidence provided as grounds reflect different categories of value. Also, the preference for certain types of evidence may also have a parallel in the preference for different sets of values being conveyed. These preferences for certain sets of values may be explained by disciplinary expectations that favor one type of value more than another. This is borne out by some of the comments gathered from interviews with UT1 as presented in the next section of the paper. The use of different types of grounds to substantiate one’s evaluative statement is shown in example 11 and 12 taken from the EL scripts.

Example 11

- (i) *However, there was massive influence of the Scandinavian languages on English, in terms of grammar and vocabulary.*
- (ii) *During this period, over 1800 words were introduced to the English language.*
- (iii) *As English and the Scandinavians were conquered people, this helped the process of fusion between them.*
- (iv) *Furthermore, the English and the Scandinavians had very similar cultures and their language already shared common grammatical features and words.*

² The superscript 2 indicates the use of a reference.

- (v) *All these circumstances led to changes in the Middle English Language. (S1 16-20)*

Example 12

- (i) *Although the Scandinavian influence on English was great but the changes were not particularly dramatic as the words taken were ordinary words.*
 (ii) *Since English was now almost entirely a spoken language, many of the words taken over were homely everyday ones, words belonging to the central core of the vocabulary.*
 (iii) *This led to the use of common nouns like bag, cake and dirt.*
 (iv) *Everyday adjectives included loose, ugly, wrong, and everyday verbs like call; smile and take were incorporated into Middle English. (S1 21-24)*

In example 11, sentence i) is an *assessment* which describes the extent of influence Scandinavian languages had on Middle English in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Sentences ii), iii) and iv) then provide the grounds for that *assessment*. Sentence ii) uses quantitative data to show the extent of change. Sentences iii) and iv) provide details of general historical knowledge of what the Scandinavians and English were like at that time to substantiate the *assessment*. All these pieces of evidence belong to the category of logical appeals and they reflect the value of +*reasonable* imputed on the *assessment*.

Other evaluative statements may be supported by other types of evidence. For instance in example 12, sentence i) describes the change in Middle English as not particularly dramatic. This is another *assessment*. However, the kind of evidence provided in sentences iii) and iv) is quite different from those in example 11. The evidence in this example is taken from language data and according to Table 1, this imputes the value of + *relevant* on the *assessment* in sentence i).

In the case of the EL scripts, the need to be clear about the issue one is debating on is clearly important. Given that the argument is clear, then the need for language data as evidence to support one's position is also crucial. According to UT1, linguistic evidence is especially important in supporting the central claims of a topic like the one in the current data set where a link needs to be made between language change and the factors causing change. UT1 suggests that the need for linguistic examples has "to do with the specific topic but possibly discipline as well because it is Linguistics-English Language. If you don't talk about language it seems a bit strange".

The importance of language data to build persuasive grounds is further reflected in the end-of-essay comments provided by script markers. For example, low-rated scripts often had comments such as this taken from S26:

Although you have provided a very detailed account of the external history of the period under consideration, you haven't provided many examples of the actual language change that took place as a result of this. This makes this essay rather lopsided, leaning heavily on history but with nothing concrete to show for what these changes were and what was the nature of these changes! (emphasis as in the original)

Discussion and pedagogical implications

The operation of value in a text is not always obvious and this opaqueness is probably even more prevalent in student-written texts where the awareness of the need for evaluative comments is not as keen as in professionally written texts. However, novice texts may not be devoid of such value assessments as shown in the above analysis although its operation is difficult to detect. A focus on the embedded values allows us to look at texts specifically so as to understand how it operates in more concrete ways. The analysis involves a certain level of interpretation but as the analysis concerns surfacing mainly implicit judgments, analyst perception is inevitable although such investigations are best supported by interviews with the writers themselves. The differentiation between the autonomous and interactive planes also enables the analysis of a rather nebulous notion in a systematic manner.

It is also not unusual for an academic essay task to stipulate the need for infusing the opinion of the writer while presenting the discussion. Academic readers, for whom the essay is written, have their expectations about the level of writer opinion that should be expressed in a tertiary level argumentative essay. An understanding of how value operates in essays by both teachers and learners of writing may facilitate the negotiation between what academic readers expect and how students perceive and present this element of writer's opinion. However, part of the difficulty teaching value is in using this framework with its numerous terms involved in the evaluation of both status and value. Also, its original use on experimental research data meant that categories of status and values had to be modified for its use on argumentative essays (see Wu, 2004, for a more detailed discussion). However, the teacher's familiarity with the terms may help their own understanding of how this vague notion works and therefore be able to convey the concepts more clearly. The writing teacher, for example, can illustrate more fully how value operates in texts without necessarily using technical items associated with the framework used. For instance, without employing too many technicalities, the teacher can point out certain status types that need to be evaluated for relevance while others for their alignment to authoritative data.

Learners may benefit through such close analysis of texts so that the understanding of the operation of value will present the platform for the use of the same concept at a later stage of writing. The relation between argumentation and value description presents some concrete ways in which the effectiveness of arguments can be described. The categorization of sets of value used in the high-rated essays can help explain how these writers present their arguments effectively. For instance, the analysis seems to demonstrate the need for language data that adds the value of *+relevant* to support or validate assessments and hypothesis. Some other areas that learners can examine closely include instances of appropriate language used to convey a certain value or the way the way basis and writer's goals can be deduced from the argumentation of well-formed texts. This will be useful in the identification of possible sets of value in the texts.

Obviously, these patterns of effective argumentation have to be further verified by the analysis of greater number of texts and interviews with disciplinary members who assess the essays. However, these exploratory observations present

a good start for further investigation and more concerted work into the operation of value in student texts. Though the notion of disciplinary variation and expectation become more pertinent only in the later stages of undergraduate and post-graduate studies, it does play a part in the development of effective arguments in the earlier years, albeit in a less poignant manner. It would benefit the students to be aware of how value can and is expressed in their texts in the early stages of their tertiary experience.

This present investigation involves a very small number of EL essays as the in-depth nature of analysis prevents the study of a bigger sample of scripts. The interviews should also involve more members of the discourse community. However, it represents a step forward in the study of an aspect of writing which is rather difficult to tease out and pin down.

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Appendix I: Explanation of notations used

The notation *C1-Ass +reasonable* placed beside the clause *C2* indicates that *C2* attributes the value of *+reasonable* on *C1*, an *assessment*. An arrow pointing upward indicates retrospective evaluation and an arrow pointing downward reflects prospective evaluation. A horizontal arrow indicates evaluation of value within the same clause. A broken arrow indicates the attribution of value beyond consecutive clauses. These are the abbreviations used to indicate statement types:

- Ass – assessment
- Fac – fact
- Hypo – hypothesis
- I-Mean – interpretation-mean
- I-Sig – interpretation-significance
- I-Supp – interpretation-support
- Quest – state question
- Recommend – recommendation
- Result – state result

Sample analysis of S2

1. The Middle English period (1100-1450) is heralded as the period where the English Language underwent 'momentous changes... more extensive and fundamental than those that have taken place at any time before or since' (Baugh 1959: 189).
2. In this period, all-encompassing changes to Old English were observed—in terms of vocabulary, grammar or literary styles—such that an almost brand-new language emerged.
3. The underlying motivation of this phenomenon can be attributed to the evolution of society: with language being 'a form of human activity' (Baugh 1959: 218), the ever-changing needs and situations of its speakers—politically, culturally and economically—creates modifications to the language.
4. This essay seeks to explore the direct and indirect effects of the Norman Conquest of 1066 and its repercussions respectively upon Middle English.
5. As Middle English was largely influenced by French, the Norman Conquest is described as 'an event which had a greater effect on the English Language than any other' (Baugh 1959: 127) due to subsequent massive upheavals it brought upon the English society.
6. The death of a great majority of English-speaking nobles, either killed at battle of Hastings or persecuted as traitors, left the new nobility exclusively Norman.

7. Knowing no English, it was natural for them to communicate in French.
8. Almost overnight, English was relegated to the language of the lower classes while French was on its way to becoming 'the High language of law, government, administration ... courtly literature and religion' (Leith 1997: 26).
9. It was noted that the earliest adoptions from Norman French, such as *we* (court), *scholar*, *war* and *peace*, were associated with power.
10. Borrowings from higher-ordered fields later emerged: in government (*government, govern, administer*), religion (*sermon, theology*), Law (*justice, crime*), the military (*soldier*), fashion (*gown, garment*), medicine (*medicine, physician*), to name a few.
11. The settlement of the Normans in England brought about contact between speakers of both Old English and Norman French.
12. For certain occupational groups, need of communication between the two classes facilitated bilingualism.
13. The Church, for instance, had to preach to the masses in English (it was, in fact, trilingual with its knowledge of Latin).
14. *Latimers* who mediated between the Normans and the locals were also bilingual.
15. There was no language planning policy on the Normans' part,
16. hence distinction between speakers was not racial but largely dependent on the social and cultural standings.
17. After such contact is established, the stage is set for language changes due to influences.
18. Being the polite language of courtly culture, the tradition of French verse was adopted by English poets who sought to emulate the upper class language.
19. In French verse, the emphasis lies on rhyming rather than the Old English tradition of stress and alliteration.
20. This is exemplified by anonymous poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* written in 1210:
21. Although the verse contains only one French borrowing (*plait*) and uses the English alliterative 'stif an starc an strong', what is more significant is the rhyming of the last words of the first four lines (*dale-hale-tale-n*), and those of the last two (*strong-among*).

