Voices of UK Academics in the Brexit Debate – A Discourse Analysis Perspective Based on Appraisal Theory[*]

Otilia Liana Huțiu[**]

Abstract:

The present paper analyses the language used in three articles written by academics and a journalist's blog on the topic of Brexit and its impact on academic life. The methodology used is that of the apparaisal theory which in its turn draws on findings of the systemic functional linguistics and discourse analysis. This approach focuses on the interpersonal meanings conveyed by the authors, on their feelings and attitudes about a certain topic as well as on the voices, others than that of the author that may be present in the text.

After a brief outline of the approach, the paper examines the way in which linguistic resources such as modalization and projection, as well as key lexical items may introduce stance in discourse, highlighting the differences of engagement found in samples of media discourse versus samples of scientific articles.

Keywords: systemic functional linguistics, appraisal theory, engagement, modality, voice

Introduction – The Analytical Framework

The present paper makes use of the approach and methodology supplied by systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in analyzing discourse belonging to two different genres, an editorial and two scientific articles published in peer reviewed scientific journals and a newspaper blog.

A brief outline of SFL follows with a special focus on the appraisal theory that has its roots in SFL and is extensively and increasingly used in discourse analysis studies.

After the description of the appraisal system and the way discourse analysis including genre analysis of professional discourses can benefit from this theory, the chosen texts are analysed and the paper concludes with the discussion of the findings and their possible applications in courses of ESP and EAP.

The seminal work of the major representative of SFL, Michael Halliday views language primarily as a system of meanings while grammatical categories and items of the lexicon are resources through which speakers and writers choose to convey their messages in a manner

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that suits their communicative intentions and the social contexts in which these discursive products are created. Thus, SFL considers semantics and pragmatics as the basis for explanation of syntactic phenomena. According to G. Leech

> functionalism (in the study of language) is an approach which tries to explain Language not only internally, in terms of its formal properties, but also externally, in terms of what language contributes to a larger subsystem of which it is a part of a subsystem. Whether we call these larger systems "culture", "social system", "belief systems", etc, does not concern me. (Leech, 1987: 76)

Systemic theory stresses the social nature of language seen as a semiotic system, a theory of meaning as choice. The speaker intentions, the social and cultural context determine choice. The application of Halliday's theory has generated a large body of research in the field of discourse analysis, ESP and academic writing as it is a "top-down" analytic model which starts with discourse and works down to lower levels of grammatical structure .SFL holds the idea that the ultimate explanations for linguistic phenomena are to be found in language use, therefore in socially situated contexts. Discourses, wheter seen as product or process, are deeply rooted in social and cultural contexts; they are shaped by and at the same time, generate social reality (Swales, 1990, Fairclough, 1995, Eggings, 2004, Martin and Rose, 2007).

One of the most influential ideas of SFL refers to the components of meaning. According to this view the propositional content of a clause represents the ideational meaning (representing experience), while the same clause also displays interpersonal meaning (speech-function, exchange structure, expression of attitudes) and a textual meaning (how the text is structured, e.g. theme-structure, given/new, rhetorical structure). The interpersonal function of language is defined by Halliday as *"all use of language to express social and personal relations"* (Halliday, 1973: 41).

The three metafunctions- interpersonal, ideational and textual can be analysed at clause and discourse level alike and they perform their functions simultaneously:

> As social discourse unfolds, these three functions are interwoven with each other, so that they can achieve all three social functions simultaneously. In other words, we can look at any piece of discourse from any of these three perspectives, and identify different functions by different patterns of meaning." (Martin and Rose, 2007: 7)

The analysis that is described in this paper captures only the interpersonal function of discourse because this function gives us clues about some important aspects, such as the author's attitude towards the topic discussed, the relationship between writer and targeted audience,

the existence of one or several voices in the respective discoursive sample.This function that focuses on interpersonal relations shapes the generic and register features of the respective discourse.

Appraisal theory was created in the 90s by the discourse analyst J.R. Martin holding a systemic functional approach. It has been further developed by J.R. Martin together with D. Rose (2007) and Peter PR White (2005) and focuses on ways in which evaluation, feeling and other expressions of stance are embodied into discourse, as explained by the representatives of this theory:

> Appraisal is concerned with evaluation- the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned. Appraisals are interpersonal kinds of meanings which realize variation in the tenor of social interactions enacted in a text. (Martin and Rose, 2007: 16)

The appraisal system developed includes grammatical resources for the expression of attitudes and voice in discourse. The attitudes expressed refer to feelings, judgements of characters or things and appreciation of various values. The grammatical resources expressing attitudes are in general adjectives, nouns acting as adjectives or even verbs that express behaviour associated with attitudes and can be amplified or hedged (Hyland, K., 1995) through the development of two complementary ways of graduation, force and focus (Martin, J.R, Rose, D. 2007, Martin and White, 2005).

The force of attitudes can be amplified via the use of intensifiers or comparisons, or even verbs. As shown in Collins Cobuild (1998) many intensifiers like *amazingly, dangerously, breathtakingly* inherently contain attitudinal features in their meaning. Quirk et al (1985) gives examples of adverbs that have the role of '*downtoners' (*almost, nearly, practically, kind of*)* or '*emphasizers' (*always, definitely, certainly, indeed*) that can modify the meaning of the predicating verb by including speaker/writer attitude in the text that contains them ,while Hyland (1995, 1998), Halliday (1995, 2004) or Yule (2004) include also verbs among the class of amplifiers or modalizers (*assume, believe, suspect, reckon, presume, trust, etc.*).

Whereas force is a way of amplifying gradable categories, focus either sharpens or softens those categories that are inherently non-gradable.Martin and Rose (2007: 46) provide examples such as: '*real* policemen', '*a kind of …*', '*about* three years', 'not *quite* my first love'.

Another important aspect of appraisal theory refers to the source of the attitudes expressed. Personal attitudes can be expressed directly by the author, but in many genres and professional discourses, such as the academic or media discourse, authors present directly or indirectly other

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opinions or voices. The concept of multiple voicing has been introduced into discourse analysis by Julia Kristeva who coined the term heteroglossia ('different voices') but the observation about the dialogic nature of almost every text goes back to the works of M.Bachtin. Appraisal theory uses the term *heterogloss* when the source of the attitudes expressed is different from that of the author and *monogloss* when the source of the attitudes and evaluation in a text is the author.

The monogloss or heterogloss character of a discourse can be accomplished through a *system of engagement* that comprises the following grammatical resources: *quoting, reporting, modaliy* and *concession.* Depending on the resource used the voice and the attitude towards a certain topic can be heard directly (e.g. through quoting someone's own words) or indirectly (modality or reporting).

Modality is described by Halliday (1994) quoted in Martin and Rose (2007: 53) as a resource which "*sets up a semantic space between yes and no, a cline between positive and negative poles*". Modality expressed through modal verbs, modal adjuncts or even pseudo-clauses (*I think that…, My oninion is...)* can convey a multitude of attitudes towards the porporition or the propositions in the discourse sample. Modality may express various degrees of obligation when goods or services are negotiated through discourse and various degrees of probability when information is exchanged. Probability or obligation can be expressed either subjectively (e.g. *I'm willing to settle all the misunderstandings*) or objectively (e.g. *It is necessary that you setlle all your debts*), depending on the resoruces used.

These degrees run from low to high and according to Halliday (1994) can express *usuality, probability, obligation, inclination* or *ability.* Modality comprises grammatical resources which allow for the expression of negotiable attitudes or opinions about the topic discussed and therefore these resources allow for *'the tempering'* of what the author of a text says (Eggings, 2004: 176).

The use of different types of engagement in the realization of voices in discourse is highly dependent on the genre aim and mode, as well as on the domain to which the respective genre belongs, as the use of all other grammatical resources. In the case of a personal story, an account of experience or in an opinion essay , the voice of the author and a direct expression of attitudes are expected, while in scientific articles or academic essays that are examples of argumentative discourses, the reader's expectations are different. A more objective perspective or an evaluation that takes into consideration more than one voice, that of the author, is generally the rule. However, even in this genre, differences can be significant between scientific articles belonging to the domain of exact sciences, humanities or social sciences.

Findings and Discussion of the Text Analysis

The analyzed materials contain the following texts: an editorial by Adam P. McCann, lecturer in Law at Exeter University in *European Journal of Comparative Law and Government*; two research articles, one authored by Fiona Hunter and Hans de Wit published in the prestigious journal *International Higher Education (2017) – Brexit and the European Shape of Things to Come* and Ken Mayhew's *UK Higher Education and Brexit* published in *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* (2017) as well as a text published by the journalist Stephen Paduano, on his blog entitled *The Brexit – Fuelled Death of the British Universities* that appeared in 2018.

The samples of academic writing were supplemented with Paduano's text not only because of the common topic they discuss but also because the voices of UK and European academics play a significant role in the text itself as highlighted further on in the present analysis. It also offered an alternative type of article, belonging to the media discourse. The analysis has highlighted similarities and dissimilarities due to different genre constraints. Some of the similarities, however, seem to indicate that the topic chosen and the impact it has in society made authors adopt similar views and metaphoric language.

The term Brexit was coined in 2012 probably on the model of *Grexit* which appeared earlier the same year. According to Fontaine (2017) it is a blend, however, it is not clear if the composing elements were *British* or *Britain* plus *exit,* because at the begining both variants of *Brixit (British exit)* and *Brexit (Britain's exit)* were in use. The word has been extensively used lately, mostly after the Referendum on June 23, 2016 and it is already included in online versions of English dictionaries (e.g. Oxord Learners' Dictionary). Due to its frequency of use, Collinds dictionary selected it as the Word of the Year 2016.

The frequent use of the word is due obviously to the extremely complicated phenomenon it designates, to the unpredictable developments in the Brexit process which is still on its way. However, one of the least discussed problems is that of the impact of Brexit on UK universities. I have chosen a media article written by Stephen Paduano and three scientific articles authored by British and American scholars dealing with the possible impact of Brexit on UK academics and universities. The present article is a short analysis, it reports work on progress and aims to offer a possible analysis of appraisal elements in academic writing as opppsed to media discourse for use within courses of ESF and EAP, as I firmly believe that students with a good command of English need to be taught how to analyse authentic samples of academic genres in order to enable them to produce their own academic papers at the required standards. More reliable results need large corpora

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of academic discourses focusing on the term Brexit, whose findings will be part of my future research work.

The analysis of the three scientific articles has shown that all of them use several key terms reiteretated throughout the text, such as: *crisis, key question, risk, worry, fear, threat.*

All texts display a great number of nominalizations as a type of grammatical metaphor (Halliday, 1994, Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004, Eggings, 2004): *'the emergence of the European Higher Education','the emergence of the knowledge economy', 'a general tightening of immigration policy', 'greater intentionality and integration of internationalization', etc.,* which is in keeping with the features of a highly formal, academic style of writing. However, these texts also contain a great number of lexical metaphors:

> *UK universities are reeling from a state of shock and disbelief...*
> *...strong internal and external forces started to weaking its foundation...*
> *With Europe in the grips of economic and political crisis...*
> *....putting the European House in order...*

These metaphors highlight the persuasiveness of the texts, however they are less characteristic of scientific discourse, at least as far as I have managed to research. They may be linked with the topic chosen , Brexit, which arouses general concern and uneasiness or it may be a trait of the domain to which these papers belog (social sciences, academic management). A large corpus of similar texts is undobtedly necessary for a clarification of this aspect.

An important aspect of appraisal in discourse is given by the lexical items that convey feelings, judgements or evalutations.The chosen articles contain many significant examples of feelings and evaluations , the latter being somehow more appropriate and expected for this genre, whereas the former are less encountered. Expressions of feelings include examples as the following: *'fervent supporters', 'strongly in favour', 'firm believers', 'an ugly campaign', 'worrisome reports', 'great consternation'* etc. If these expressions are to be generally found in the introductory part of the articles where they fulfill the function of describing the state fo the art of the topic which is later analized , a large number of evaluative phrases appear in those parts which offer solutions and bring conclusions: *'disproportionatelly well', 'stronger and more integrated reality', 'a more competitive and attractive destination'.*

The voices of the authors and the additional voices expressed in the text are rendered by various means. As the texts are samples of scientific and argumentative discourses the use of the objective type of modality (Hyland, 1995; Martin and White, 2005) under the form of more impersonal phrases are quite frequent: *'it is likely', 'there is massive uncertainty', 'there has been an increasing reliance on', 'it is not clear'.*

This type of modality indicates a moderate commitment of the author to opinions and positions that are generally taken for granted. Even more instances of 'hedging' (Hyland, 1995) are found that comprise mostly empirical modals or ways of quoting or of reporting other people opinions.

The most numerous instance of modals are those which contain: *might, could* and *would* which express various degrees of commitment of the autor, but not a clear , certain position, as the problem discussed is still an event in progress whose consequences are unpredictable to a certain extent:

> *... could be even more critical...*
> *... how they might set about doing this ...*
> *The lack of imput could be partially mitigated...*
> *... it would go some way towards maintaining...*
> *This would allow freedom of movement...*
> *... our negotiators should be aimed for...*
> *... rather more could be done...*
> *... could be given....*

The tentativeness of the authors is, however, supported by data, mostly statistics available at that time.

But the most frequently used way of hedging in all these articles is the use of reporting combined with modal verbs and expressions (*perhaps, significantly, clearly)*, or modal-like lexical verbs *(suggest, suspect, deny, claim*) and passive constructions:

> *This outome **would** have appeared **unthinkable** at the beginning of the century when Europe **seemed t**o be emerging...*
> *The universities have reassured the EU that they...*
> *Home Secretary Amber Rudd **has issued** a consultation paper which **suggests** the possibility...*
> *The government **seems determined** to restrict freedom...*
> *Times Higher Education **has claimed** that...*
> ***Significantly**, the UK authorities **insist on** including the students...*

Only one quote is given in one of the articles (Ken Mayhew- UK Education and Brexit) , all the other instances are of reporting . Even when they report the sayings of others the sentences also include the author's voice through the choice they make of the reporting verbs *(seem, suggests, has claimed, have reassured, insist on)* which carry a tinge of modality and in fewer instances through the use of a modal adjunct like *significantly* in the example above which expresses the author's opinion about the UK authorities' actions. Many instances of double voicing are present in the analyzed texts, which together with the other elements of appraisal manage to convey the author's opinion about the topic in an indirect but still very clear manner.

The analysis of the media article written by Stephen Paduano reveals some similarities and obviously dissimilarities with the scientific

articles. It contains many lexical metaphors, even the title *The Brexit-Fuelled Death of the British University* is based on a metaphor obtained through personification. The catchy metaphoric title conveys a powerful image of the situation and it also expresses, though indirectly, the autor's opinion about the dramatic situation of the UK university generated by Brexit.

Key words like those found in the scientific articles, i.e. *crisis, fear, panic, threat* though they appear as such, occasionally, they are mostly conveyed indirectly through the use of lexical metaphors:

> *Concerns swept the defense sector…*
> *The universities will be slapped with a hefty price…*
> *The Brexit bill is coming to British universities...*

The text is written in a more informal register , so the number of nominalizations, whether used as grammatical metaphors (inconguently) (Haliday, 1994; Eggings, 2004) or as simple nominalizations are almost absent.

Adjectives conveying affect or evaluation are also very few, while the author, being a journalist, tries to convey the impression that his presentation is an objective one. The objectivity is rendered by numerous instances of quoting followed by impersonal, general statements which, however indirectly, contain, nevertheless, the voice of the author:

> *"The British university system is still extremely attractive to French students", Manuel said,…*
> *"They have announced that in principle", said Anne Corbett…*
> *"Yes, it will bring some more money into the university,…"*

Reporting is infrequently used if compared to quoting combined with accurate description of institutions or of the people and their positions, which brings more vividness to the article and objectivity of course. However, the author's voice appears clearly amost after each quoting and account, under the form of impersonal phrases: '*it is clear that'* or '*so things may change'*.

The use of epistemic modals is also an indication that the author's voice and opinion is rendered , although *may , could, might* are used signalling that the opinions, even if supported by quotes, are not very strong.

The text contains many conditional clauses and rhetorical questions that indirectly communicate the idea that this is an argumentative text which towards the end contains the opinion of the author 'hedged', but clear enough: "*What seems certain to be lost, however, is the hegemony*".

Compared to the scientific articles, the media article contains less evaluative elements, even less hedging, more descriptive and narrative

paragraphs and an informal tone. However, due to the topic it deals with – Brexit – an almost similar metaphoric language with catastrophic images is used, with modality elements expressing uncertainty or moderate commitment on behalf of the author.

Conclusions

Although the analysis carried out in the present paper is a very limited one , a temporary report of a work in progress, it may be useful for those who choose to use authentic texts in the framework of genre-approach when teaching ESP or EAP courses. Authentic texts may reveal different aspects, such as structure, style or ways in which grammar categories are used to convey certain meanings.

The use of appraisal elements and particularly of modality and reporting is an important aspect of academic writing. According to Hyland (1995,1998) these 'hedging' elements are culturally determined and are difficult to master by learners of English , if there is no appropriate training during the ESP or EAP courses. To my knowledge, scientific articles and academic opinion essays written by my (Romanian) students (studying for a degree in English, communication or administration sciences) lack elements of appraisal, mostly modality and attitudinal markers , whereas impersonal and passive constructions are more frequent. This is, perhaps, due to the fact that passive and impersonal constructions are quite frequent in Romanian as well. A large corpus of articles and essays written by Romanian students as well as an analysis made by word processing software would lead to more relevant and reliable findings in this respect.

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