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ESSAY-WRITING MODULE FOR SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS OF HISTORY

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Increasing evidence from corpus, discourse and genre analysis has indicated that there is significant variation between disciplines in the way that they structure their discourses, in particular their written genres. Therefore, discipline-specific approaches in language teaching have gained much support in recent years. However, few studies have thus far given a systematic account of relationships between disciplinary purposes and writing conventions, or have used such information as input for course design. This article analyses the purposes of historical writing, and relates these to the salient concepts, genres and modes found in historical discourse.

In particular, the discursive and lexicogrammatical choices that are available to the historian for the construal of time, cause and effect, and judgement or evaluation are explored. One particular aspect of evaluation, viz. ENGAGEMENT, *is teased out in more detail to demonstrate the pedagogical value of corpus-based genre analysis. The findings underscore the assumption that disciplinary purposes shape texts in a discipline, and show that there is a clear relationship between the main purposes of a subject-field and its writing conventions – at least as far as History is concerned. A genre-based syllabus for a writing course aimed at second-year students of history is subsequently proposed, and a preview is given of the follow-up research that is envisaged to evaluate the effect of the intervention as well as to compare it with the effect of a generic intervention.*

Keywords: engagement; historical discourse; genre-based syllabus; corpus-based genre analysis; discipline-specific approaches; history writing conventions

INTRODUCTION

In the mid 1980s Faigley and Hansen (1985:149) expressed the opinion that

> [i]f teachers of English are to offer courses that truly prepare students to write in other disciplines, they will have to explore why those disciplines study certain subjects, why certain methods of enquiry are sanctioned, how the conventions of a discipline shape a text in that discipline, how individual writers represent themselves in the text, how a text is read and disseminated, and how one text influences subsequent texts.

In the past twenty years discipline-specific approaches in teaching English as a second language have gained support in various parts of the world. Increasing evidence from corpus,

discourse and genre analysis has indicated that there is significant variation between disciplines in the way that they structure their discourses, in particular their written genres (Biber, 1988, 2006; Dudley-Evans, 2002:225; Hyland, 2006:51). Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995:1) argue that genres are not merely formally linked to disciplines, they are intimately linked to a discipline's methodology, and they package information in ways that conform to a discipline's norms, values and ideology. A number of studies conducted by genre analysts have emphasised the systematic relationship between disciplinary purposes, genre and register (compare Hyland, 2000; Bhatia, 2004; Jones, 2004; Hewings, 2004; Hyland & Bondi, 2007). However, few studies have thus far given a systematic account of form function relationships in specific disciplines, or have used such information as input for course design.

The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate the value of an in-depth study of the purposes and conventions of academic disciplines as a first step in the process of designing a syllabus and course materials for a subject-specific academic writing intervention. The academic essay was chosen as the focal genre, since in a survey of writing tasks at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, it was found that essays are the most frequently required genre in the humanities and social sciences. History was chosen as the disciplinary focus since as essays were found to be the most prolific in study materials of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies (Carstens, 2008a). Approximately 88% of all the undergraduate assignments included in study guides of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies belong to the essay genre. Furthermore, history is a subject-field that exists by virtue of language, as confirmed by Schleppegrell, Achugar and Oteiza (2004:88): 'History provides a particularly good example of discipline-specific literacy because it is constructed through texts that cannot easily be experienced hands-on.' It was decided to focus the investigation on second year students, since they should have acquired a measure of metacognitive awareness by then, and have recognised their need for writing assistance.

In the next main section of the article I attempt to capture the most salient reasons why people have written about history since the 19th century, followed by an in-depth exploration of how these foci are lexicalised and grammaticalised in historical and historiographical texts. Using this information as input, a genre-based syllabus for a writing course aimed at second-year students of history is proposed. A brief preview is given of the implementation of the syllabus in a pilot intervention that forms part of a quasi-experiment in which the relative effectiveness of subject-specific versus generic courses on essay-writing for second year students will be explored.

RESEARCH ON THE PURPOSES OF HISTORICAL WRITING

Contextualisation

Genre-focused approaches to writing encourage the early identification of the main purposes of a subject-field on the grounds that there is a dialectic relationship between the purposes of a discourse community and its communicative practices, including its writing conventions. According to Vijay Bhatia (1993:24), one of the leading genre analysts working in the ESP tradition, much of the information on the purposes of discourse communities are published in guide books, manuals, and practitioner advice of the discourse community. Following Bhatia's suggestion, four recently published manuals on writing about history were studied in depth, *viz*. Marius and Page (2005), Rael (2004), Rampolla (2004) and Storey (2004). The

researcher then summarised her understanding of the purposes of historical writing and how these relate to writing conventions favoured by historians.

It was decided to introduce expert reviews as a quality assurance measure early in the context analysis phase of the research, since involving practising members of the disciplinary culture is one of the most effective ways of bringing an insider perspective to the analysis (Hyland, 2000:143). Although experts may be unaware of the effects of their practices, their understandings are important, since these may confirm the researcher's findings, validate his/her insights and add psychological reality to the analyses made. In this case four senior staff members from the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies were approached to perform an expert review: one lecturer with ten years' experience, one associate professor and two full professors. The responses, included as comments on the electronic copy as well as additional suggestions, pointed to a number of weaknesses in the researcher's overview. It became clear that style guides and writing manuals – even those written by historians themselves – tend to present the conventions of the discourse community in a rather simplistic and often prescriptive way. One of the experts included a list of scholarly sources on historical writing to assist the researcher in gaining a more balanced perspective. The recommended sources included scholarly overviews of trends in historical writing from different ideological perspectives and historical periods.

Below I present an overview of my current understanding of the purposes of historical writing along a timeline stretching between the 19th century and the present. The overview is intended to show that although the purposes of a subject-field such as history do not present themselves in watertight categories, these purposes precipitate as distinguishable concepts, which translate into fairly distinct and teachable subject-specific writing conventions.

The purposes of historical writing

Similar to most other scientific disciplines, historians have delimited their field of practice and scholarly inquiry in vastly different ways throughout the ages. Not only have the awareness about history and the purported 'uses' of history undergone major changes since the early 19th century, but different theoretical and thematic emphases have occurred in different parts of the world. Although the boundaries between different paradigms have become blurred in postmodern times, a bird's eye view will shed light on the main 'ingredients' of historical writing in the broadest sense.

The 19th century

In the early 19th century history became professionalised. Almost all leading historians were professionals (Burke, 2001a:5-6). During this time European history was primarily associated with Romanticism (Burke, 2001a:1-2), which was the dominant paradigm in European thought and art around 1800. Romanticists believed that the past had to be valued for its own sake, and should be detached from present-day concerns. The intellectual movement that advocated this view is known as 'historicism,' and historicism represented the academic wing of the Romantic obsession with the past (Tosh, 2005:6-8). The leading figure was Leopold von Ranke, a professor at Berlin University from 1824 to 1872 (Tosh, 2006:7). Rankean historians thought of history as essentially a narrative of events (Burke, 2001a:4; 19; 2001b:283). The thematic emphasis was national and international, rather than local; particularly the politics of the nation state as viewed through the deeds of 'great men' (Burke, 2001a:5; 31). Therefore, the sources had to be official records, emanating from governments

and preserved in archives. This thematic focus is referred to in the historical literature as 'a view from above.'

The New History

The 1950s and 1960s saw the upcoming of the so-called New History (*nouvelle histoire*), which originated in France (Burke, 2001a:2). Much of the New History has been written in deliberate reaction against the traditional paradigm, particularly in reaction to the belief that there is only one truth, which has to be uncovered by the historian. New historians have deliberately moved away from 'the voice of history' to heteroglossia or varied and constructed opposing voices (Shafer, 1980:18), and to cultural relativism (the belief that humans perceive the world through a grid of conventions, schemata and stereotypes) (Burke, 2001a:5-6). In line with a more relativistic approach, New Historians advocate the examination of a greater variety of evidence, such as oral, visual, and statistical. In addition, they no longer focus only on the grand narratives of the past (Burke, 2001a:4; 15; 20), but begin to look toward other new branches of historical enquiry as well, such as economic history, social history, and cultural history (Evans, 1997:21). Hence the slogan 'total history.' This concern with the whole range of human activity has encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration with social anthropologists, economists, literary critics, psychologists, and sociologists. However, the rapprochement with the social sciences introduced a passive, anonymous written style in the work of New Historians (Evans, 1997:38), which may have reinforced the trend in style guides for writing about history to prohibit all reference to the author as an individual, particularly the word 'I' (compare Rael, 2004:18). 'Social science history' reached its most extreme form in the US during the late 1960s and 1970s. The influence of the social sciences is particularly pronounced in the area of methodology (Shafer, 1980:34): the search for regularities and generalisations in order to predict (and even prescribe) goals for conduct, and the tendency to be concerned more with analysis than narrative (Shafer 1980: 11; Burke, 2001:282). During the 1970s and 1980s a number of the New Historians started concerning themselves with 'history from below', which reflects a determinism to take ordinary people's views and their experience of social change more seriously (Burke, 2001a:3). This trend was furthered in the Marxist and Postmodern traditions.

Marxism

Marxism is underpinned by the belief that the driving force of history is the struggle by human societies to meet their material needs, which is why the Marxist theory is known as 'historical materialism.' The highest form was believed to be industrial capitalism, which was destined to give way to socialism, at which point human need would be satisfied. However, after the fall of international Communism, belief in historical materialism has sharply declined. Because it is a schematic interpretation of the course of human development – a progression from lower to higher forms of production – Marxist history is widely regarded as metahistory (Tosh, 2005: 29).

From the perspective of its rhetorical emphasis, Marxism is structural or analytic history, as opposed to narrative history. One of the important contributions of Marxist history is its focus on questions of cause and consequence, and its explanation of the origins of the economic and political transformations of the day (Tosh, 2005:149).

Postmodernism

Despite the changes that took place in historians' outlook, the foundational way that historians 'know' the past – *viz*. that in essence empiricism and rational analysis (inference) determine the content and the form of the historian's narrative – had seemingly remained largely unchanged until Postmodernism, or the 'narrative-linguistic turn' during the 1970s (compare Munslow, 2001). One of the main characteristics of Postmodernism is the emphasis on language (Munslow, 2001). In the Postmodern view, identity is constructed by language, which is fractured and unstable, and therefore all knowledge of the past becomes part of discursive constructions (Tosh, 2005:194). According to Postmodernists there are no grounds to be found in historical records themselves for preferring one way of construing its meaning rather than another. Therefore, they argue, the past cannot be uncovered, it can only be invented (Tosh, 2005:202-203). Postmodernists are particularly concerned with narrative. However, for them the function of story-telling is to make sense of one's own experiences, and not to reconstruct an objective past. They are generally sceptical about the 'grand narratives' or 'metanarratives' of traditional historians, contending that the past can merely be arranged into a multiplicity of stories that are open to a vast number of interpretations, which are all equally valid (or invalid) (Tosh, 2005:198).

Postmodernists have experimented with narrative in various ways. Burke (2001b:290-297) describes a number of these. One option for the historian is to tell his/her story from more than one point of view. Another strategy is to relate a series of events, and at the same time to analyse these events from the position of a later, better-informed observer. Yet another possibility is described as 'micronarrative,' and stands in opposition to 'grand narrative.' A micronarrative is a kind of microhistory, which is the telling of a story about ordinary people in their local setting (in other words social history), but at the same time using narrative to illuminate structures. An example of this kind of history is the social history of the renowned South African historian Charles van Onselen, who uses illustrative stories, like the story about the 18th century sharecropper Kas Maine, to convey how the social structures, life cycles, and political and economic conditions were experienced by actual people (Tosh, 2005:157).

Table 1 summarises the most important traditions in historical writing in terms of their conceptual and rhetorical foci.

Table 1: Overview of the most important Western traditions in historical writing

Paradigm	**Conceptual foci**	**Rhetorical foci**
Rankean history (19th century)	• Political history (history from above) • Truth-centred • Official records the only 'legitimate' evidence	• Narration – as retelling • Chronology
New history (mid 20th century)	• Social history (history from below) • Interdisciplinary influences • More rigorous research methodologies • Variety of evidence-types	• Analysis • Cause and effect
Marxist history (1960-)	• Historical materialism (interprets and evaluates human development in various forms of development) • Class-centred	• Analysis • Cause and effect • Explanation
Postmodern history (1970-)	• Anti-positivist • Language is central in the formation of historical knowledge • Socially reflective • Recognition of a 'multiplicity of voices'	• Narration – as (re)construction • Critical reflection

When considering these foci, three prominent notions or concepts emerge: time, which is an essential element of narratives; causality, which is part and parcel of analysis; and evaluation, which is integral to critical analysis. These notions are captured in the following explications of the purposes of historical writing from writing manuals:

- To tell the story in the present of something that happened in the past (Munslow, 2001);
- To explain why certain things in the past happened as they did (Rampolla, 2004:1);
- To become aware of, appreciate and judge perspectives other than one's own, both through historical data, and through interpretation of what other historians have said (Marius & Page, 2005:1-4).

Thus, despite the various emphases in the historical writing of different periods, three concepts stand out, and are pivotal to understanding why historians write as they write or prefer to write. Eggins, Wignell and Martin (1993:75) have captured the centrality of these concepts in their summary of what students of history should learn:

> a sense of time, a sense of cause-effect relationship, an understanding of the interaction of past and present, and an understanding that history is a dynamic relationship of people, place, and time in which some events can be judged to be more significant than others.

A number of scholars working in the tradition of Systemic Functional Grammar have attempted to explicate the systematic relationships between historical purposes, the main concepts related to them, and the preferred genres and modes of writing (Coffin, 2003; 2006; Martin, 2003; Martin & White, 2005; Scheppegrell & Achugar, 2003; Schleppegrell *et al.*, 2004). Table 2 summarises the essence of the complex relationships described by these authors:

Table 2: Relationships between the concepts of history and writing conventions of historians

Purpose	**Concepts**	**Genres**	**Salient rhetorical modes**
(Re)tell a story	Time	Autobiography Biography Historical recount Historical account	*Record* Narrate Describe
Understand and explain why things happened as they did	Cause and effect	Explanation (factorial or consequential)	*Explain* Cause and effect Compare and contrast
Appreciate and judge events, structures, other historians	Judgement and evaluation	Exposition Discussion Challenge	*Argue* Reflect Discuss Critically analyse

If time, cause/effect and judgement are the central conceptual dimensions of historical discourse (although judgement differs from the other two, in that it belongs to the interpersonal rather than the conceptual or ideational dimension of discourse), and if these

concepts are systematically encoded in historical text and language, salient patternings should be explored for pedagogical application. The next section explores these notions within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar, and offers some suggestions on how they can be taught and learned in an academic writing course for second-year students of history.

EXPLORATION OF TIME, CAUSALITY AND JUDGEMENT IN HISTORICAL WRITING

Time

Time is particularly relevant to writing autobiographies, biographies, historical recounts and historical accounts, where the specific purpose of the writing is to (re)tell in the present a story about the past. In such cases the historian or the student of history primarily assumes the role of a 'recorder' of past events. Therefore the modes of writing or text types that feature prominently are narration and description.

According to Lomas (1993:20), 'without chronology there can be no real understanding of change, development, continuity, progression and regression'. Coffin (2006:97) considers linear and cyclical time, and their interconnection with historical notions of continuity and change as overarching concepts. Linear time can be described as 'an abstract, spatial quantity that is divisible into single units; as a two dimensional linear, directional flow or succession of equal rate that extends from the past to the future or vice versa' (Adams, 1995:33). It is further characterised by irreversibility and inevitability, increasing complexity, and often implies progress and 'a grand plan' (Carr, 1986:29). Linear time ties in with chronology, calendar time, and narratives or recounts, since calendar time makes it possible to develop time lines and chronologies, which in turn makes it possible to tease out primary sources in the form of historical narratives, and build in causal links. Cyclical time, on the other hand, is based on the metaphor of natural processes such as being born, to live and to die. The emphasis is on sameness and repetition (Adams, 1995:33), as found in cycles of war and peace; economic boom, recession and depression; the rise and fall of civilizations and empires, etc. The vocabulary of natural life-cycles – birth, growth, death – is often used to describe historical cycles.

Systemic Functional Grammar offers a number of lexical and grammatical resources for construing time, such as temporal circumstances (*in the 1930s*); processes (*preceded by*), systems of tense (*past, present*), temporal conjunction + dependent clauses (*when the Romans came*), conjunctive adjuncts (ordinatives) (*first, second*), mood adjuncts (*still, yet*). However, Coffin (2006:101-102) favours a set of semantic categories that cuts across grammatical classifications:

- **Sequencing time**, using temporal conjunctions, such as *when, after, before*
- **Setting in time**, using prepositional phrases, such as *at the beginning of the 20th century*
- **duration in time**, using a prepositional phrase starting with *for*, as in *for nearly half a century*
- **Phasing time**, using different constructions to indicate beginning, duration and end, such as *at the onset of the Smallpox Epidemic; towards the end of the Great Trek.*

- **Segmenting time**, using nominalisations that have become part of the special lexis of the subject-field, such as *the apartheid era*, *The First British Occupation, The Great Depression*, etc.
- **Organising through time**, as in the temporal organisation of textual items; for example, *The first reason was opposition to the war.*

As in most other subjects, the learning of time-related concepts proceeds from the concrete and literal to the abstract and metaphorical. Sequencing in time is probably one of the first temporal devices mastered by learners, followed by setting in time, duration in time, segmenting time and organising through time. Segmenting time and organising through time are important resources for construing causality. Segmenting time is referred to by Martin (2003:27) as 'packaging time'. This entails that activities and periods are construed as things, which are often related to one another in a causal relationship (Martin, 2003:28-29). Examples are nominal expressions such as *The Transvaal Location Commission (1881-1899), the Anglo-Transvaal War (1880-81),* and *the period of British administration (1877-1881)*, etc.

A dimension of time that is not dealt with by Coffin or Martin is tense; presumably because tense does not fit in neatly with either calendar-related linear time or cyclical time. However, for second language speakers in particular, tense is an important issue, and is dealt with by the majority of style guides on writing about history. Two out of the four writing manuals consulted, Rael (2004:69) and Storey (2004:88), advise that the past tense should always be used in historical writing. The other two, Rampolla (2004:66-67) and Marius and Page (2005: 152), state that it is only necessary to use the past tense when writing about events that took place in the past. These authors maintain that the present tense should be used when describing a document, referring to a document or something an author of a published source has said, because these documents or sources are assumed to be always present to the person who reads or observes it (Rampolla, 2004:66-67; Marius & Page, 2005:152).

My contention is that information on the semantic categories of time may serve as useful background information to students of history, but may not necessarily improve their ability to construe time. I would, however, suggest that the use of tense in history essays be taught directly, for one, because a corpus analysis of peer reviewed articles by mostly South African scholars of history revealed inconsistent use. In the absence of currently available empirical evidence two simple guidelines should suffice:

- Use past tense to retell or refer to events that took place in the past.
- Use present tense or present perfect tense to refer to primary sources that still exist, and to secondary sources.

Causality

Cause and effect, which is the primary concept in understanding and explaining why things happened as they did, is pivotal to explanatory essays which give an account of the factors or causes that contributed to a particular state of affairs or the consequences that occurred as a result of a certain event or series of events. In explanatory essays the writer assumes the role of an 'interpreter' of events.

Similar to mastering time, learning causality seems to progress from the more concrete to the more abstract. Three ways of construing cause and effect manifest in historical writing:

(a) Indicating sequential causal relations between external events

In its simplest form, the notion of cause is realised through conjunctions and process verbs that represent the connections between events in a relatively straightforward way, since they link events as they unfold in time. This is sometimes referred to as the 'billiard ball model' (compare Coffin, 2006:116), using conjunctions such as *because*, *therefore* and *thus*, as in

> The state hoped to win more support for these policies from the country's black population *because* Luthuli was highly respected in these communities (Sithole & Mkhize, 2000).

(b) Indicating simultaneous causes or effects

Tawney (1978:54) points out that sometimes it is necessary for the historian to indicate significance by mentioning a number of causes and effects simultaneously. In such cases causality is packaged as nouns that occur in sentence- and clause-initial positions, as in *there are a number of factors …; the main reason…; a second reason …*

The causal relationship becomes more abstract because a single cause and its effect are no longer linked together by a relational element. Compare the following examples:

> The Great Trek had *the following consequences*: The first ….

> There are *several reasons* why the development of the history of women in South Africa might well be expected to follow a different pattern from that of the rest of the continent (Hetherington, 1993).

One motivation for packaging cause nominally in this way is to manage information flow: cause, nominalised as a thing, can act as a departure point or 'Theme.' In explanation genres, in particular, such nouns are frequently placed in Theme position, which then foregrounds and emphasises the analytical nature of the genre. It enables the writer to stage the explanation and lend cohesion and texture to the text. It also enables the writer to enumerate cause and effect.

(c) Linking a proposition and evidence

At an even higher level of abstractness, cause and effect conjunctions are used to argue historical significance, using conjunctions such as *because, therefore,* and *thus*; and process verbs such as *prove, show, explain, illustrate, indicate, suggest, attest, be explained by,* and *confirm*. Attributing significance to historical events or 'internal reasoning' is particularly important in explaining and arguing genres. Compare the following examples from scholarly articles:

> Unlike the American legislation which excluded mainly Chinese labourers, the Cape act went all out and dealt with 'all classes' of Chinese and was *therefore* made applicable from the outset to the 'whole of the Chinese race' (Harris, 2006).

> As such, official tallies of gross population mortality are undoubtedly incomplete, which *explains* why Jordan's initial compilations, which were

> based on these official numbers, are widely considered inaccurate today (Heaton & Falola, 2006).

Successful students learn to control these uses of cause and effect as they progress. They learn that while the recording genres are largely concerned with people and events, explaining genres are concerned with more abstract trends and structures, and arguing genres with judging and negotiating their explanatory power. It could do no harm to focus the attention of second-year students on these conventionalised ways of construing causality.

Judgement and evaluation

At more advanced levels the student of history is expected to exercise judgement and evaluation with regard to past events, social and political structures, and also the writings of other historians. The *Study Manual* of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria explicitly sets the following requirements for written material at third-year level:

- Critical analysis and evaluation of facts
- Identification and explanation of different viewpoints

Research studies such as Wineburg (1991:510), Lee and Ashby (2000), and Perfetti *et al*. (1994) have highlighted students' difficulty in identifying sub-texts and hidden agendas in the sources they have to read. Reading historical texts critically may be partially ascribed to the way in which school history textbooks and older scholarly works have been written. In many secondary sources the authorial voice is completely backgrounded, and events are construed as objective truths, creating the impression that history writes itself (Barthes, 1970:148). Their writing shows a similar lack of evaluative skills. They are hesitant to express their own judgement of historical figures and historical events overtly, and to explicitly endorse or differ from the views of others. This claim is supported by the researcher's analysis of 12 examination essays by third-year University of Pretoria students in June 2008 on the topic of *How Lenin and his Bolshevik government managed to remain in power from 1917 to 1924 despite numerous setbacks*.

There may be more than one reason for the lack of overt appraisal in students' work. They may perceive the instructions they receive from their lecturers as mixed messages: They are required to convey their personal opinions in genres such as the academic essay, yet objectivity is often an absolute norm (Mitchell & Andrews, 1994:92). Certain style guides on writing about history still preach this false objectivity as gospel. Rael (2004:18), for instance, prohibits all reference to the author as an individual, particularly the word 'I.' It is then almost ironical that essays by students who make more use of strategies to explicate authorial stance are typically rated higher than those who use less (Coffin, 2006: 149-150). The objectivist bias may also hark back to the 'Social Science Turn' in historical writing during the 1950s and 1960s (Evans, 1997:37), which induced a 'passive, anonymous written style' (Evans, 1997:38). Another reason may be students' lack of command of the formal systems of JUDGEMENT and ENGAGEMENT.

Twentieth century research on the construal of objectivity was largely focused on the omission of the authorial 'I', and ignored the array of linguistic techniques that communicate values, instil bias and persuade the reader of the truth of the message. Only recently has a new development in Systemic Functional Linguistics started to address the ways in which

language gives value to historical phenomena and to propositions made by the author. This new development is known as APPRAISAL, which refers to the subjective presence of writers (or speakers) in texts 'as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate' (Martin & White, 2005:1). It relates to the interpersonal metafunction in SFL, which is concerned with the exchange of attitudes. In particular, it is concerned with how writers construe for themselves particular authorial identities, how they align themselves with actual or potential respondents, and how they construct a real or an intended audience.

APPRAISAL theory was introduced in SFL at a time when historians themselves had started realising that objectivity in historical writing is a myth, particularly under the influence of postmodernism. Warren (1998: 27) asserts that historical writing is subject to 'evasions, biases, silences, relationships of power and the type of knowledge legitimized by authority.' Historians, for instance, make use of linguistic resources to naturalise points of view, resist alternative readings and agree or disagree from others' viewpoints in relative measures. The following examples illustrate these evaluative devices:

- Naturalise points of view:
  Chief Mangosutho Buthelezi, for instance, also skilfully exploited the subtleties of apartheid to increase his own power, wealth, and social standing (Waddy, 2003-2004).
- Resist alternative readings:
  We all know that the usual 'script' for South African history, and *indeed* for all of African history is (*quite understandably*) the oppression of blacks by whites (Sithole & Mkhize, 2000).
- Agree or disagree from others' viewpoints in relative rather than absolute measures:
  Much can be read into Leue's choice of metaphors, much that *might not be substantiated* (Kriel, 2007).

The APPRAISAL framework in applied linguistics is divided along three main axes, *viz.* ATTITUDE, ENGAGEMENT, and GRADUATION (Coffin & Hewings, 2004:159-166). ATTITUDE subsumes three main sets of resources: AFFECT, JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION**.** AFFECT is appraising experience in affectual or emotive terms. Terms of affect are likely to be used in autobiographies and other types of recount. Coffin (2006:141) offers the following example:

> These people looked like gods with white skin and clothes in different colours [...]. *I was scared very scared.*

However, in academic writing overt affect is not encouraged. Like AFFECT, JUDGEMENT also appraises past behaviour of human beings, but does so with reference to a set of institutionalised norms or an ethical framework about how people should and should not behave (Coffin, 2006:141), as in the following example:

> Unintentionally, it seems, historians have absolved [the reverend] Colin Rae of all the *scandal* and reservations that have *shrouded* his career (Kriel, 2002).

The judgement subcategory is further divided into SOCIAL ESTEEM, and SOCIAL SANCTION, with further sub-classifications. APPRECIATION (particularly the subcategory SOCIAL VALUATION), comprises a set of norms for valuing processes and products rather than behaviour (Coffin, 2006:141-142). In history both judgement of past behaviours and evaluation of processes and institutions are important. It is therefore suggested that writing

tasks that invite students to use appropriate terms of judgement and appreciation be designed. Table 3 gives an indication of the available options in each of these subsystems.

Table 3: Examples of JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION (compiled from Coffin, 2003; 2006; Martin 2003; Martin & White, 2005)

Main systems	Primary categories	Examples	
		Positive	**Negative**
Judgement (attitudes to people and the way they behave)	**Competence** ('capacity')	able, astute, charismatic, effective, enterprising, intelligent, powerful, pragmatic, shrewd, skilled, strong, successful, tactical, talented	failure, foolish, flawed, incompetent, lacking judgement, short-sighted, weak
	Strength ('tenacity')	committed, courageous, daring, dedicated, determined, disciplined, fearless, formidable, hard working, heroic, passionate, risk taking, self-reliant, tenacious, vigorous, willing	arrogant, badly organised, cowardly, despondent, inflexible, low morale, rigid, stubborn
	Truthfulness ('veracity')	credible, genuine, honest, truthful	complicit, deceitful, deceptive, dishonest, hypocritical
	Ethics ('propriety')	fair, just, respectable, responsible, self-sacrificing	abusive, brutal, corrupt, cruel, heartless, immoral, oppressive, ruthless, unfair, unjust
Appreciation (evaluations of objects, institutions and structures)		appealing, appropriate, authentic, balanced, consistent, detailed, effective, efficient, elegant, exceptional, harmonious, helpful, innovative, intricate, logical, long awaited, lucid, original, precise, profound, unified, unique, valuable, welcome, worthwhile	amorphous, common, contradictory, conventional, dated, discordant, distorted, everyday, fake, flawed, grotesque, ineffective, insignificant, monolithic, prosaic, reductive, simplistic, unclear, unbalanced

GRADUATION comprises a set of resources for grading evaluations. These may increase or decrease FORCE or FOCUS. For increasing force, intensifiers are often used, such as *very, really, slightly, somewhat*. Focus may be sharpened by using words such as *typical*, and blurred by using phrases such as *some sort of*. Although students occasionally use hedges like these, it would do no harm to focus their attention on the strategies used in language to narrow and broaden categories, and the linguistic choices available for doing this.

ENGAGEMENT comprises resources for engaging with and negotiating the alternative positions activated by an utterance. In the APPRAISAL framework 'bare assertions' that appear to express uncontested truths, are termed MONOGLOSS, for example

> In the first four decades after the permanent settlement of white emigrants from the Cape Colony north of the Vaal River, little progress was made with the allocation of land to African communities (Bergh, 2005a).

HETEROGLOSS, on the other hand, refers to the various ways an author construes for the text a backdrop of prior utterances, alternative viewpoints and anticipated responses (Martin & White, 2005:97), using hedges such as *probably*, *seemingly*, *it is likely that*; reporting verbs

such as *claim, assert, contend, argue, etc.*; and terms that indicate disagreement or difference, such as *I disagree with X /reject X's claim,* etc.

As alluded to above, mastering the tools of engagement is one of the most important skills the student of history has to learn. However, the ENGAGEMENT system comprises a complex network of categories that are often difficult to keep apart, even for the versed genre analyst. In order to determine how engagement is lexicalised in historical discourse, a corpus analysis of restricted scope was undertaken. Twenty scholarly articles on aspects of African history, published in accredited journals, were scanned and converted to text, using optical character recognition. The entire corpus, comprising 60 000 words of running text, was tagged using the UAM Corpus Tool, a computerised corpus analysis program, designed for appraisal analysis. With a view to the pedagogical focus of the project of which the analysis forms part, I decided not to use the program's default engagement framework, but a simplified version of a framework proposed by Martin and White (2005:97-98). The result is a typology comprising the following four main categories:

1. DISCLAIM: The authorial voice positions itself as at odds or rejecting some contrary position
2. ATTRIBUTE: The authorial voice invites other voices to speak
3. ENTERTAIN/PROBABILISE: The authorial voice does not fully endorse a position expressed by him-/herself or by another voice invoked in the text
4. PROCLAIM: The authorial voice represents its position as plausible or generally agreed, thereby suppressing or ruling out alternative positions

After tagging the corpus, search queries were done on all four categories, which in turn became the input for generating word frequency lists and concordances in Wordsmith Tools. The word frequency lists were searched for frequently occurring lexical items; and the concordances were studied to verify that the search term was indeed used to express ENGAGEMENT, and not some other rhetorical value. In the PROBABLILISE subcorpus concordances were built for *seem, appear, apparent, perhaps, may, might, could probably, possibly/possible*; in the ATTRIBUTE corpus for *argue, claim, say/said, according to, explain, state, note, write, see, reveal, describe, refer,* and *conclude*; and in the PROCLAIM corpus the search terms included *clear, indeed, (in) fact, important, significant, obvious(ly), of course, certain, natural, must, surely, likely, should* and *remember*. The DISCLAIM corpus was found to be rather small. It does not contain any of the terms that are typically used to signal the speech act of disagreeing. For instance, the words *disagree*, *reject*, *refute*, and *contest* do not even occur once in the entire subcorpus. The only relevant items with a frequency of three and more, are *not, speculative, neither, rather* and *hardly*. Upon scrutiny of the UAM search query for DISCLAIM, it transpired that authors are reluctant to confront other positions head-on. When differing from alternative positions a range of more subtle expressions are used, such as *We doubt that; X has underestimated the importance of; It is more likely/correct that; X's claims are exaggerated.* Rhetorical questions are also sporadically used in a disclaiming function, for instance: *But are labels like these really justified?* (implying that they are not).

Table 4 summarises the results of the corpus analysis.

Table 4: Summary of results – corpus of history articles

PROCLAIM		DISCLAIM		ATTRIBUTE		PROBABILISE	
certain/certainly	44	Overt negation (no, not, etc.)	14	say	92	seem	97
indeed	43	hardly justified	6	argue	86	might	61
it is a fact that / in fact	29	More likely/correct	4	claim	58	appear	52
of course	24	X's claims are speculative	2	according to	55	apparent(ly)	49
undoubtedly/no doubt	16			state	52	perhaps	49
it is/becomes clear	14			write	40	probably	30
it must be remembered/ understood/noted	12			explain	37	possible/ possibly	13
it is/seems likely	9			note	29		
obviously	8			see/saw as	25		
it should be seen/ remembered/noted	4			describe as	23		
				refer	19		
				conclude	15		

In my opinion, it is important that second-year students should be made aware of the ways in which judgement about historical figures, processes and institutions is expressed in historical discourse, and of the resources that are available for engaging with other authors. One way of creating such awareness is to include critical language awareness exercises during the 'exploration' phase of the curriculum, when historical texts are deconstructed (compare Study Unit 1 of the syllabus expounded in Table 5 below).

It should be noted that designing classroom activities to cultivate critical language awareness is not new. Ten years ago Luckett and Chick (1998) reported on the success of a research-based curriculum development project of this nature in a history department at another South African university.

In addition to deconstruction exercises the lexicogrammatical choices available to historians could be explicitly taught later on in the course, when students jointly and independently construct history essays (compare Study Unit 4 of the syllabus in Table 5).

THE SYLLABUS

The syllabus that was designed on the basis of the contextual research reported on in this article is expounded in Table 5.

Table 5: Proposed syllabus for a module on essay-writing for students of history

Study unit theme	Syllabus themes
STUDY UNIT 1 Introduction to historical discourse	1. Why study history and why write about it? 2. Different perspectives to writing history (critical exploration of texts from the main traditions: Rankean History, New History, Marxism, Post-modernism)
STUDY UNIT 2 Exploring preferred modes of writing in historical discourse	Identifying parts of texts with different functions: a. Giving an overview/summarising b. Telling a story/describing an event c. Describing an object or an experience d. Comparing and contrasting e. Indicating and describing causes and effects f. Arguing a case
STUDY UNIT 3 Using rhetorical modes in historical writing	1. Analysing and interpreting writing prompts 2. Selecting appropriate modes for assignments 3. Writing short texts using a particular mode
STUDY UNIT 4 Getting acquainted with history essays	1. The three-part structure of academic essays 2. (Optional) subsections 3. Three main essay genres in history, and their prototypical structures: recording, explaining, judging and interpreting 4. Important stylistic, lexical and grammatical dimensions: time, causality, evaluation, and abstractness
STUDY UNIT 5 Joint composition of history essays	1. Jointly analysing writing prompts in terms of required content, structure and language 2. Brainstorming and planning content 3. Jointly composing subsections of essays 4. Revising 5. Critiquing the essay and reflecting on the process
STUDY UNIT 6 Writing your own history essay	Independent composition of a first and second draft, with peer and teacher feedback as well as personal reflection.

A critical genre approach, which includes aspects of process-writing, has been selected as the pedagogical framework for the course. The foundations of such an approach can be summarised briefly as (1) the belief that genres embody the purposes of the discourse communities they serve (Swales 1990); (2) the introduction and gradual removal of 'scaffolding,'derived from the Vygotskyan notion of a Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978); and (3) a Teaching and Learning Cycle (as proposed by the Australian genre school), starting with the exploration of texts (deconstruction), followed by joint construction of texts by the teacher and the class, independent construction of texts, and critical reflection on the basis of self-, peer and teacher evaluation (compare Cope & Kalantzis, 1993:2000). A central notion of critical genre approaches is that explicit instruction affords easy access to discourses that have accrued social and cultural capital in society, and that learners benefit because they do not have to rely only on lesson-inductive methods, such as the growing experience of repetition, or teacher feedback on essays (Hyland, 2003). In Carstens (2008b) a model for genre-focused teaching of academic literacy is proposed and theoretically justified.

The syllabus outlined above forms the basis of a fourteen week module in essay-writing (two contact sessions per week), which is currently (the second semester of 2008) being presented to 15 second-year students with history as a major subject. The participants self-selected when the course was announced in history classes earlier in 2008. A part-time lecturer in the Unit of Academic Literacy, who majored in English and holds a master's degree in History from the University of Edinburgh, was recruited to teach the course. Course materials consist of a 50 page study guide, jointly compiled by the researcher and the course presenter, a reader comprising a selection of scholarly articles and chapters from books on historical subjects, the *Study Manual* of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies, and a number of model essays or parts of essays.

The effectiveness of the course will be measured through comparing students' scores on pre- and post-intervention essays. These results will in turn be compared with the pre- and post-intervention results from a generic intervention similar to the subject-specific programme, but which will make use of texts from various academic disciplines, and will be a credit-bearing module (20 credits) available to all second-year students within the Faculty of Humanities as from the first semester of 2009.

CONCLUSION

The research that is reported in this article supports the assumption (cf. Faigley & Hansen, 1985:149; Swales 1990; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995:1; Hyland 2004:5-6) that disciplinary purposes shape texts in a discipline, and demonstrates that there is a clear relationship between the main purposes a subject-field and its writing conventions – at least as far as History is concerned. It seems fair to assume that an explicit knowledge of the interaction between disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary writing conventions assists students in mastering critical academic reading and writing in their disciplines of choice; and that these conventions be taught in academic literacy courses beyond the first year of study.

On the basis of these assumptions, the findings of the present research were used as input for a genre-based course on academic writing for second-year students of history. Empirical research needs to be done to show that an intervention that employs a visible pedagogy to teach students subject-specific writing conventions is indeed effective. Empirical research also needs to be done to test whether a subject-specific intervention is more advantageous to students than a generic intervention that accommodates all the disciplines in the humanities in a single programme. It is envisaged that this research will be done in 2009.

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