Enunciative Strategies and Expertise Levels in Academic Writing: How Do Writers Manage Point of View and Sources?

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Introduction

In research writing and the writing that is part of university research training, students have great difficulty adopting the specific image, figure or stance of the author that is expected in these genres. In line with the many studies conducted on the writer’s investment in the text, or the notions of attitude, ethos, position and authority (Campbell, 1975; Delcambre & Laborde-Milaa, 2002; Delcambre & Reuter, 2002; Donahue, 2002a; Hyland, 2002; Ivanić, 1998; Rinck, 2006a), we intend to show the writing strategies through which this authorial stance can be approached in texts. We adopt a developmental view: how does this stance develop with the degree of expertise of the writer, from initiation to research for undergraduate students to the research writing of experienced researchers? Our approach is a textual one that can provide linguistic resources to help students to write. However, it deals also with enculturation issues. The aim of teaching research writing is not simply to expect students to adopt the ‘author-researcher stance’ that the researchers adopt in their texts. A developmental view can provide critical perspective on the teachers-researchers’ expectations in our context of French higher education, as seen also in the question of the academic and scientific texts and communities posed by Russell and Cortes (Chapter 1, this volume) and the question of the nature of the academic enculturation posed by Prior and Bilbro (Chapter 6, this volume).

We will present here a summary of our research on stance in research writing. This research has been conducted for several years on the basis of written corpora of
novice students, doctoral students and researchers, as well as interviews with students. Detailed data are provided in Part 3.2. Research on stance represents an ongoing trend in discourse analysis; our approach to stance is based on both ‘genre theory’ and ‘enunciatice linguistics’. As detailed in Rinck (2006a), we define stance as a genre-specific reader expectation and we hypothesise that the enunciatice features are relevant to describing how stance is manifested in the texts. We will focus here on two aspects of stance in research writing: how do writers manage point of view in a text that should be ‘objective’? And how do they refer to what has already been thought and written? For each aspect, we will outline expert strategies and student difficulties. Our work therefore allows us to examine students’ enculturation to research writing and to question training in, and through, research writing. What needs should be targeted and what should be the teachers’ expectations regarding stance in students’ research writing?

Context

Our research group, LIDILEM (Linguistique et Didactique des Langues Étrangères et Maternelles) was created in 1987, at l’Université Stendhal, a university with domains in literature, languages, linguistics and communication science. Situated in the French Alps in Grenoble, its 150 researchers make it one of the largest linguistics and didactics research groups in France. It is within the context of this group that our research team has worked on research writing and writing in university research training for over 10 years. By research writing, we mean the writing produced by researchers with the aim of constructing and disseminating academic knowledge, as explained in Chapter 1 by Russell and Cortes (this volume), in France we refer to écrits scientifiques, which encompass not only physical and natural sciences but also the Social Sciences and the Humanities. By writing in research training, we mean the very diverse pieces of writing that accompany students’ paths through university. At university, teaching is based upon research and sometimes requires students to undertake research work. In France, and particularly in the Humanities, initiation into research is an important part of a university career. This initiation occurs progressively from the first or second year of the Licence (undergraduate degree) to the doctorate, and the university offers the students pedagogical support to supervise them as they undertake this work.

The students are guided by a tutor, but the aim for them is to follow an individual process: they choose a research question and determine an issue for investigation. They must read existing literature and undertake analysis within various methodological frameworks depending on the discipline (corpus analysis in Linguistics, archive analysis in History, field work in Sociology and Educational Science, experimental situations in Psychology, etc.).

Writing is key in this initiation to research: the students must produce research or research-based writing. As discussed in the present volume by Russell and Cortes, in some cases, it is research writing — namely for the more advanced students heading towards professional research (the genre of the thesis, but also the