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Interaction in Academic Writing: Learning to Argue with the Reader

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The view of written texts as embodying interaction between the writer and reader is now well established, and underlies many aspects that may be focused on in the training of novice writers of academic text. In this paper, I argue that interaction can draw on both interactive and interactional resources: interactive resources help to guide the reader through the text, while interactional resources involve the reader collaboratively in the development of the text. I use the concept of the 'reader-in-the-text' (Thompson and Thetela 1995) to explore a central form of interactional resource: the inclusion in the text of a voice that is intended to be attributable to the reader. I identify a particular set of discourse contexts in which this happens—where the writer brings in the reader's view in order to contradict it—and outline the lexico-grammatical features which signal the other voice in those contexts; and I place these in a broader perspective on written text as a stage-managed form of dialogue. The impetus for the study comes from working with novice writers; and I discuss a number of examples where written drafts were improved by exploiting the interactional resources described, and argue for the value of raising students' awareness of these resources.

It has long been accepted that developing the skill of effective writing involves, amongst other things, developing an awareness of the audience and an ability to reflect and exploit that awareness in the way the text is written (see e.g. Nystrand 1986; Kirsch and Roen 1990; Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Johns 1997). One area directly affected by audience awareness is the way in which the text is organized and the organization is signalled. Any text can in principle be seen as a record of a dialogue between writer and reader in which, as Widdowson (1984: 59) argues, 'the writer has to conduct his interaction by enacting the roles of both participants'. That is, proficient writers attempt to second-guess the kind of information that readers might want or expect to find at each point in the unfolding text, and proceed by anticipating their questions about, or reactions to, what is written. The text is built up as a series of writer responses to these anticipated reactions. Hoey (e.g. 1988) highlights the various kinds of textual clues that writers give to readers as to the way each move in the interaction fits in—that is, clues as to the reaction that the co-operative reader is assumed to have had. Amongst these clues at the sentence-to-sentence level are conjuncts and conjunctions, such as 'therefore' and 'so' (both of which can be seen as assuming a question on the lines: 'What is the consequence of what you have just told me?'). On a

larger scale, writers also exploit predictable text patterns that their readers will find easy to identify, such as Problem–Solution, with their associated lexical signals, as a way of guiding the readers' expectations of how the text is going to develop.

However, to explore interaction only in terms of writers' implicit assumptions about the reactions of readers gives an incomplete picture. In this paper I wish to explore a different though complementary perspective that highlights the ways in which writers can bring the underlying dialogue to the surface. This involves them in interacting overtly with their readers (or, more accurately, the 'readers' that they themselves enact), by including their questions and reactions in the text and thus assigning to them roles in a stage-managed form of exchange.

The initial impetus for the study came from working with novice writers: it was through trying to pinpoint the source of particular problems in their drafts and to suggest ways of improving their handling of argumentation that I was led to examine the forms of interaction focused on here. In the next part of the paper, therefore, I present examples to illustrate the kinds of problems that arose, to outline the steps in the redrafting process, and to show how making the textual interaction overt resulted in more satisfying versions. On the basis of this, I argue that students training to improve their proficiency as writers can benefit from explicit attention to the ways in which interaction can be performed in text.

PERFORMING INTERACTION IN WRITTEN TEXT

In Thompson and Thetela (1995), we distinguish two main types of interaction in written text. The aspects mentioned in the opening paragraph above, which are related to awareness of the audience's likely reactions and needs, may be termed interactive: these primarily involve the management of the flow of information and thus serve to guide readers through the content of the text (in using the term 'interactive' in this way, we are following Widdowson 1984 and Hoey 1988).

The other type may be termed interactional: these are aspects which aim to involve readers in the argument or ethos of the text. The resources drawn on for this purpose are those which allow writers to conduct more or less overt interaction with their audience, by appearing in the text to comment on and evaluate the content through the use of modality and evaluation (see Hunston and Thompson 2000), and by assigning speech roles to themselves and the readers. For example, an interrogative mood choice typically constructs the role of questioner. This role may be assigned to the reader—the question is projected as being asked by the reader—in which case the writer is most likely to be assigned the complementary role of answerer. In the following extract from an advertisement (taken from Thompson and Thetela 1995: 114), this distribution of roles is signalled explicitly:

[1] After all, are not all these things exactly what makes a car worth driving?
To which we answer: yes

In many cases, the assignment of roles is less obviously performed; but in approaching a text from the interactional perspective we constantly focus on whether the source of each statement, question, command, etc. is intended to be the writer or the reader.

We also focus on how the complementary role (answering, obeying, etc.) is accommodated in the text. Questions and commands are usually communicatively unsuccessful if they do not elicit the response that they demand; and yet in written text it is clearly not a straightforward matter to include a response from the reader. One way of getting round this problem is to continue the text as if the required response has been given. In the following extract from another advertisement, the question and statement are both addressed by the writer to the reader, but the text is fully coherent only on the assumption that the question is followed by a positive response from the reader:

[2] Do you want strength in times of crisis?

A reinforced passenger safety cell with a ring of steel and front and rear crumple zones will help.

The normal assumption in writing is that the expected response occurs: a 'dispreferred second' (Pomerantz 1984) or 'discretionary alternative' (Halliday 1994)—such as answering 'no' to the question in [2]—is not a live option. In other words, when the initiation comes from the writer, the reader is construed as having provided the expected response. A recipe, for instance, can be read without carrying out the instructions (much less giving a verbal response undertaking to do so), but the text itself is constructed as if each of the commands were successfully obeyed: reference to 'the mixture' projects a situation in which the preceding instructions for mixing ingredients have been followed.

I have talked in terms of speech roles being assigned to the reader. However, I have indicated above that this is the reader as enacted by the writer: there is clearly no guarantee that the real-world readers will in fact provide the response that the text constructs for them. It is therefore more accurate and more useful to talk of the 'reader-in-the-text' (Thompson and Thetela 1995). This term is preferred to other possible labels such as 'ideal reader', because it highlights the central importance of evidence from the text. For example, the second advertisement extract above construes a reader-in-the-text who provides the required response, irrespective of how any real-world reader responds, by the way in which the text constructs a 'gap' where the response must come. Examination of actual readers' responses to the text can be put to one side, at least provisionally, in the kind of analysis presented in this paper. In principle, it can be taken that writers assume a match, or aim to promote convergence, between reader and

reader-in-the-text—that at some level readers fit or accept the roles assigned to them by proxy. Whether this is in fact the case depends on a range of factors beyond the text.

It is worth noting that the two aspects of interaction, the interactive and the interactional, are essentially the two sides of the same coin. For example, a question 'from the reader', which would be categorized as having primarily an interactional purpose, frequently serves to signal where the text is going next (Tadros 1985), and thus also has an interactive function. Indeed, one way of viewing the relationship, following Widdowson (1984: 61), is that the interactional represents the overt performance in the text of the interactive. Rather than simply moulding the text interactively to fit the readers, writers may choose at any point to bring their management of the unfolding of the text to the surface and to engage themselves and the readers explicitly in the process: in these cases, the text acts out the organizing interactionally instead of just embodying it. Since writers make assumptions about the questions that might plausibly be asked by the reader and construct the text to provide answers, there is obviously the option of expressing the questions explicitly in the voice of the reader-in-the-text. The reasons why this option might be selected are very varied but typically reflect an attempt to involve the reader in some way. This attempt can be seen from two complementary angles. On the one hand, the writer offers a token of solidarity by overtly demonstrating understanding of, and concern for, the reader's processing of the text. On the other hand, more manipulatively, the writer spells out the question that the co-operative reader ought to be expecting to be answered at that point and thus encourages the reader to accept the direction the text is taking. For instance, in one of his essays discussing interaction in writing, Widdowson (1984: 71) writes:

[3] I have mentioned Halliday's ideational and interpersonal functions. He postulates a third function: the textual. According to Halliday this provides the means whereby language makes links with itself so that individual sentences are fused into texts.

This reads perfectly smoothly: it is clear that the third sentence is interactively designed to answer a reader question along the lines 'What is the textual function?'. In fact, however, [3] is a version from which I have omitted one sentence: in the original, Widdowson takes the interactional option and includes an explicit question:

[3′] I have mentioned Halliday's ideational and interpersonal functions. He postulates a third function: the textual. *Where does this come from?* According to Halliday it provides the means whereby language makes links with itself so that individual sentences are fused into texts.

One of the main reasons why the writer chooses to enact the interaction overtly here is perhaps indicated by the surprised, even faintly querulous, wording of the question. This projects a reader-in-the-text who is already

dubious about the concept, and prepares the way for a critical evaluation of Halliday's view of the textual function in what follows. The interactional wording thus functions to involve the reader more persuasively in the developing argument.

The importance of the interactional perspective is that it highlights the possibility of seeing the text not just as constructed with the readers' needs in mind, but as jointly constructed, with communicative space being left for the readers to contribute to the achievement of the text's goals. The readers' views are politely and collaboratively taken into account; but collaboration is a two-way process, and the readers are therefore encouraged to take part in the interaction and to collaborate back, by accepting, even if only provisionally, the roles, stances and arguments that are attributed to them. Achieving involvement, through a convergence of the reader with the reader-in-the text, is a crucial step in most types of argumentative, persuasive text, including academic papers and assignments;[1] and collaboration is a central form of involvement. This perspective clearly accords well with Bakhtin's (1986) emphasis on the dialogic nature of language use: the insight that writers, just as much as speakers, are constantly responding to actual or imagined utterances from others, and that every utterance has 'dialogic overtones' (1986: 93). One way in which these overtones can become more overt is by the incorporation of the other utterance in some way in the text. For example, certain genres, such as instructional leaflets (Al-Sharief 1996) and direct sales letters (Frank 1989), exploit this option fairly frequently in the form of questions 'from the reader' which the writer then answers. In academic written text, interactional resources are less salient, but they still play an essential role, as is increasingly recognized in discourse studies (see, e.g., Webber 1994, on questions; and Swales *et al*. 1998, on imperatives). In the present paper, I wish to explore one particular way of incorporating the other utterance which has so far received little attention and which appears to be an important resource in academic text as well as other registers: introducing a declarative proposition that is assignable to the reader-in-the-text, in order to argue against it.

ARGUING AGAINST THE READER

A sample text

It will be useful to start by analysing an example of a text that can be taken as successfully deploying this resource. The following extract is from the introduction to Bex (1996: 1–2), a book on variety in written English. The choice of the introduction is deliberate, since, as noted above, interactional choices tend to be associated with argumentation: in academic texts this is likely to be salient in the introduction, discussion, and conclusions sections.

[4] In this book, then, I am attempting partly to show why this variety [of types of texts] exists, and why it is that readers and writers

> characteristically group certain texts together as being of the 'same kind' and, by extension, different from other 'kinds'.
>
> At first sight, this may seem a simple task. Most of us acknowledge that there is a difference between such writings as shopping lists, diaries, letters to friends, job applications, the presentation of CVs, etc. However, we are often inclined to believe that such differences arise naturally: that it is the situation which calls for a particular type of text. I shall be arguing that the interrelationship between *texts* and *contexts* is much more complex than this. Of course, it is true that particular situations call for different types of texts, but this is because in any given situation we want our linguistic contribution to have specific effects.

The second paragraph here has a Hypothetical–Real pattern (see Winter 1994; Hoey 1983). The Hypothetical—i.e. the idea that is presented as not to be taken as true—is that the writer's goal is 'a simple task'. Its hypothetical status is signalled by 'at first sight' and 'seem'. The Real—i.e. the point that is to be taken as true for the writer—is that the interrelationship is 'much more complex'; the main signal of the status of this point is 'I shall be arguing'. Within the Real, there is also a concessive relation ('it is true that . . . but'). With both the Hypothetical-Real and the concession, the writer takes the option of performing the argument interactionally. In the Hypothetical member, 'may' signals that the Senser to whose 'first sight' this 'seems' simple includes the reader rather than referring only to the impressions of the writer or a third person.[2] The reason for the presence of 'may' is, I would argue, that the writer needs to avoid making categorical assertions about the reader's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Al-Sharief 1996). If the Senser is assumed to be the writer himself or a third person, the writer would not be seen as imposing on the reader and could state baldly that this is how the task 'seems'; if on the other hand the Senser includes the readers, it would constitute a face-threatening act, or FTA (Brown and Levinson 1987), to claim to know categorically what they think, especially when the writer is about to say that what they think is wrong. The sense of interaction is reinforced by the use of inclusive 'most of us' and 'we' in the following sentences (which are part of the Hypothetical), both as Sensers in mental processes ('acknowledge', 'believe'): the writer is simultaneously projecting and sharing a position for the reader. Including oneself in the belief is an alternative strategy for mitigating the FTA—this comes out clearly if we compare the effect of replacing 'us/we' with 'you' without adding any modalization. In the concessive relation also, the use of 'Of course, it is true' signals that the writer assumes that the conceded proposition is one which the reader might want to express (Thompson and Zhou 2000).

I said above that the writer has chosen to present the clause relations in interactional terms. It may help to bring this out if we consider a version with the signals commented on above removed:

[4′] ____ This seems a simple task. Most people acknowledge that there is a difference between such writings as shopping lists, [. . .] etc. However, they are often inclined to believe that such differences arise naturally: that it is the situation which calls for a particular type of text. I shall be arguing that the interrelationship between *texts* and *contexts* is much more complex than this. ____ Particular situations call for different types of texts, but this is because in any given situation we want our linguistic contribution to have specific effects.

It is particularly noticeable that the dialogic overtones in the concession–assertion pair in the last sentence have all but disappeared. In Thompson and Zhou (2000) we argue that a number of kinds of argumentation can be presented either logically or interpersonally. In the case of concession, the logical presentation (as in [4′]) construes the argument as: 'A and B are both true; A is not entirely compatible with B; A does not invalidate B (and B has greater validity)', whereas the interpersonal presentation (as in [4]) construes it as: 'You may think A; I accept that A is true; for me, A does not rule out B (and B is the point I want to make)'. Similarly, although the possibility of the reader identifying with 'most people' who hold the Hypothetical belief still remains, it is much weaker than in the original. This suggests that we can express the effect of 'may' and 'Of course, it is true' (and, allowing for some differences, of 'most of us acknowledge' and 'we . . . believe') in slightly different terms from how it has been put above: these signals can be seen as assigning propositions to the reader-in-the-text.

Not all Hypothetical members, by any means, are attributable to the reader-in-the-text; but it is an inherent part of the pattern that they need a source—someone who is projected as (potentially or actually) entertaining the belief which the Real member then contradicts, qualifies, or confirms. This someone may be the writer, the reader, other people, or any combination of the three. The source is usually signalled in some way; and, in academic discourse, a modalized unattributed verbal or mental process introducing a Hypothetical member (the single most frequent exponent in my data is 'it might be argued') will normally be taken as signalling that we are hearing the voice of the reader-in-the-text—in other words, that the source could plausibly be the reader. This is something that the writer has to judge fairly skilfully: individual readers need not accept the Hypothetical idea as representing their own views, but must agree with the writer that some at least of their peers might well accept it. One aspect of the field that novice writers have to become familiar with is the kinds of ideas that are likely to be seen as plausible in this sense, even if they have not been explicitly advanced. In the case of concession, the signals are of a different kind (see below) but the same points about source and plausibility are also true.

Contexts and signals of dialogic text

From the discussion of example [4] above, and from other analyses of similar data, it is clear that two of the main discourse contexts in which the reader-in-the-text is given a voice in academic text are Hypothetical–Real, and concession.[3] These are closely related, in that both have a first member that is normally qualified or contradicted in the second member, and a second member that is normally taken to be the one to which the writer attributes greater validity.[4] Both raise the question of who is the source of the hypothesis or the conceded proposition. Both also raise the question of why the writer feels it necessary to mention the first member at all. If the source is assumed to be the reader-in-the-text, the reasons for mentioning it relate to the factors discussed earlier, of collaboration, involvement, and persuasion. By stating overtly in the text an idea that is projected onto the reader, the writer is publicly performing awareness of the reader, and, at the same time, inviting the reader to share in the construction of the argument and, ideally, to accept more readily that the first member—the reader's own potential opinion—needs to be qualified or rejected (or explicitly confirmed).

As noted above, not all cases of Hypothetical–Real and concession involve the voice of the reader-in-the-text. The lexico-grammatical signals which, in certain configurations, trigger this reading of the two types of relations appear to be the following:

- low-value subjective modalization (modal verbs expressing possibility). These raise the question of why the writer is uncertain—in particular, whether the uncertainty relates to the proposition itself or to the attribution of the proposition to a particular source. One context in which it is rhetorically politic to display uncertainty about attribution is when the source is the reader-in-the-text: what are in effect the writer's claims about the reader's opinions clearly need to be presented with care. This use of modalization is typically associated with unattributed mental and verbal processes such as 'the argument *may* be advanced' or 'it *might* be expected that . . . '—in most such cases, the presence of modalization indicates that the proposition is to be attributed to the reader-in-the-text. It therefore occurs mainly in Hypothetical–Real contexts (though see also example [5] below).[5]
- high-value objective modalization (expressions of certainty: modal disjuncts such as 'of course', 'certainly'; modal comment clauses such as 'it is true/certain that'). This raises the question of why the writer feels it necessary to comment on the validity of the proposition—as Halliday (1994: 89) points out, 'you only say you are certain when you are not'. One potential reason is that the proposition is projected as coming from the reader-in-the-text and thus needs to be accepted/conceded before a counter-assertion is made, in order to mitigate the FTA. Modalization of this kind is used when it is the writer's qualified acceptance of an idea that is highlighted, rather than the attribution of that idea to the reader-in-the-text; there is therefore no need

to express cautious uncertainty. This tactic is associated with concession—as in the last sentence of [4]—rather than Hypothetical–Real.

- unattributed mental and verbal processes (normally with modalization—e.g.: 'it might be thought/argued' [by whom?], 'it may appear' [to whom?]). These raise the question of who the Sayer or Senser is—that is, the source of the ideas or impressions. One reason for leaving the attribution open is again to mitigate the potential FTA of attributing an idea to the reader via the reader-in-the-text. Such processes are mainly associated with Hypothetical–Real (as in 'this may seem' in [4]).

Hypothetical and conceded propositions whose source is the reader-in-the text, as exemplified in [4], are, of course, not the only interactional resource available to writers of academic text. How do they fit in with other more familiar patterns such as question and answer? I have discussed those patterns above in terms of exchanges, with the writer and reader-in-the-text each being assigned complementary roles in the exchange. One way of looking at the kinds of Hypothetical–Real and concession relations investigated in this paper is to see them in terms of statements initiated by the reader-in-the-text in order for them to be responded to by the writer. Statements in written text are normally initiated by the writer, and the expected response is acceptance by the reader; but in these cases the roles are reversed and the response is contradiction or qualification. This is therefore a case in which the discretionary alternative or dispreferred second is still live—indeed, obligatory.

Overall, it can be argued that there are three main options conventionally open to academic writers to perform overt dialogic interaction with their readers. One is commands initiated by the writer, which the reader-in-the-text obeys. These might be thought to be of marginal importance, but Swales *et al*. (1998), in an investigation of imperatives in academic articles, show them to be comparatively frequent and used in complex ways. They argue that the phenomenon deserves more attention both in text analysis and in the training of novice writers—an argument which chimes in with the views advanced in the present paper.[6] Another interactional resource is questions. These are occasionally projected unequivocally onto the reader, as in the following extract from Widdowson (1984: 238)—note the use of 'might' in assigning these utterances to the reader:

[5] Now what, you might ask, has all this to do with course design?

However, in the texts I have analysed this kind of question occurs very infrequently. More often questions are best seen as assignable to the reader-in-the-text, 'held up' for consideration by the writer on the reader's behalf, as in example [3] above (see S. Thompson 1997: 162–3, and Thompson and Thetela 1995: 124, for further discussion). The other main interactional choice in academic writing appears to be the one focused on in this paper: statements from the reader-in-the-text brought in to be contradicted.[7]

LEARNING TO BRING IN THE READER'S VOICE

The preceding section has provided an overview of some of the main resources by which the underlying dialogic nature of argumentation can be brought to the surface in written academic discourse. As mentioned in the opening paragraphs, the impetus for this study came from working with postgraduate students on improving their drafts of written work; and I want at this point to turn to the practical application of the ideas, in particular the interactional use of Hypothetical–Real and concession relations. In the following, I shall present a number of representative examples taken from students' work. I shall discuss the problematic areas, and outline a possible procedure for sensitising students to aspects of interaction in their texts.

Examples of student drafts

In helping students to improve their drafts of assignments and theses, much attention is inevitably focused on content and organization. However, I have found that it is often necessary to deal with the way in which interaction with the reader is performed: occasions regularly occur when transitions can be more effectively handled and the text can be made smoother to read by a judicious use of interactional resources. The following extracts illustrate this in the essays of student writers, both native speakers and non-native speakers, at various levels of interactional proficiency.

In a few cases, the drafts show little or no sign that the writers are aware that such resources can be drawn on. Example [6] shows the student still at the stage of trying to construct an argument that could accommodate evidence of her reading. The extract comes from the introduction to an essay on vocabulary teaching in an ESP context:

[6] The aim of this work is to examine ways of improving methods for teaching vocabulary to students of ESP on the Tourism course at the University of [NSD]. The reason for my interest in this topic is that as in any ESP field the future professionals are going to need some specialized words of vocabulary of their field which will be relevant to their future work. I want to make reference to what Taylor (1990: 1) says:

> In order to live in the world, we must name it. Names are essential for the construction of reality . . .

There is clear signalling of where the text is going in the first two sentences, but the introduction of the quotation from Taylor is extremely clumsy: in interactive terms, it does not seem to answer any plausible question that the reader might want to ask after reading the second sentence. Leaving aside the issue of whether the quote is particularly apposite here or not, there were a number of ways in which its introduction into the text could be improved; but in discussing the draft it became clear that the writer saw it as justifying her focus on vocabulary, and we built on that. Justification has a strong inherent

element of dialogue: you justify your decisions in response to potential criticisms. The revision made this interactional aspect explicit:

[6′] The aim of this work is [. . .] The reason for my interest in this topic is [. . .] It might be argued that there has typically been too great a focus on vocabulary in ESP at the expense of other aspects of language; but, as Taylor (1990: 1) says:

> In order to live in the world, we must name it. Names are essential for the construction of reality . . .

The basic pattern introduced here is Hypothetical–Real: the objection is construed simultaneously as both a possible opinion and a mistaken one; and the quotation now serves to express the Real. The original version presented one side of an embryonic internal dialogue: the writer was in effect working with a speech-based model, in which she was responsible only for producing her own utterances ('I want'); the revision reflects a change towards a writing-based model in which she performs both roles in the interaction.

However, as well as such one-sided drafts, it is equally common to find that student writers have a sense of the importance of interacting with the reader but are unsure how to do so in a conventionally accepted way.[8] Example [7] is a simple one which shows the writer attempting to allow explicitly for his readers' expected reactions:

[7] Literally translated 'Landeskunde' means 'knowledge about the country'. This is misleading in that geographical notions are expected.

The reason for the unease I felt on reading this draft was the unattributed mental process 'expected'. It was clear that the writer, a native speaker of German, was thinking of his English readership; but he was making a categorical statement about their presumed state of knowledge, which I felt needed to be softened through modalization.

[7′] Literally translated 'Landeskunde' means 'knowledge about the country'. This is misleading in that geographical notions might be expected.

Example [8] shows the writers of a joint assignment, on the implications of using the Communicative Approach in different cultures, aiming to construct a sense of dialogic interaction, in this case through the use of questions:

[8] The next section of this paper will focus on the main question of this assignment: Why have Hong Kong and Vietnam, with their very distinctive Asian cultures, adopted the CA? Is this approach widely and willingly accepted by the teachers and students? Did they feel culture shock when this approach was first introduced to their educational systems in the 1980s?

This does its job fairly well; but the reasons why it was worth asking these questions—which had figured largely in initial discussions at which the topic

was agreed on—were left unstated. Bringing them to the surface took two steps. The first addressed interactive concerns, spelling out the basic grounds for questioning the adoption of the CA:

[8′] Why have Hong Kong and Vietnam, with their very distinctive Asian cultures, adopted a teaching approach, the CA, which is so strongly rooted in BANA (British, Australian, North American) culture?

The second step addressed interactional concerns, projecting the first question as a problem potentially voiced by the reader:

[8″] The next section of this paper will focus on the main question of this assignment, which relates to the cultural implications of the CA. It might be expected that Hong Kong and Vietnam, with their very distinctive Asian cultures, would find it difficult to adopt a teaching approach, the CA, which is so strongly rooted in BANA (British, Australian, North American) culture. Is this approach in fact widely and willingly accepted by the teachers and students? Did they feel culture shock when this approach was first introduced to their educational systems in the 1980s?

The remaining questions are projected as ways of deciding whether the problem raised by the reader-in-the-text is a real one. The essay is now organized in terms of a Hypothetical for which the writers will move towards providing the Real in the Conclusion; and the reader is drawn into the exploration by being invited to accept that the Hypothetical represents a plausible opinion to hold. This second step is certainly less essential than the first in clarifying the context of the discussion; but it makes the text rhetorically more effective.

The same is true of example [9], the conclusion to the evaluation of an EFL textbook in terms of how far it uses a task-based approach. This was already successful in constructing a fairly complex argument and in deploying interactive resources well. In this case, the discussion of possible revisions was designed to help an already proficient writer to move a step further in her command of argumentation.

[9] This task is goal-orientated, having a clear purpose and endpoint, and it involves a real outcome—the satisfaction of solving the puzzle. [. . .] Given that the learners' attention is wholly on the resolution of the puzzle, the task is meaning-focused and it seems very likely to motivate the learners. However, the balance of each unit is too clearly weighted in favour of structural exercises. Furthermore, not all of the form-focused exercises have any relationship with the task. Thus, in unit 4, only the structures connected to the function of 'stating location' have a bearing on the task.

Since this was a key point in the summing-up—the writer's overall conclusion was that the tasks in the EFL textbooks she examined were mainly window-dressing—I felt that it would be useful both to prepare the reader more fully

for the switch at 'However' and to recapitulate the main issues. One way of doing this was to use the voice of the reader who, having read the analysis up to that point, might plausibly be assumed to have formed a hypothesis about the extent to which the materials are task-based—the hypothesis that was about to be contradicted:

[9′] This task could be said to be goal-orientated, having a clear purpose and endpoint, and it involves a real outcome—the satisfaction of solving the puzzle. [. . .] Given that the learners' attention is wholly on the resolution of the puzzle, the task is meaning-focused and it seems very likely to motivate the learners. All in all, the task itself would seem to be very effective. It might appear then that [TSD] has successfully incorporated tasks into the course, using the controlling exercises as pre-communicative preparation for the task. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The balance of each unit is too clearly weighted in favour of structural exercises. Furthermore, . . .

One reason why this revision is an improvement, I believe, is that it projects onto the reader the process of discovery and reasoning that the writer herself went through. One fairly strong constraint in academic text is that writers are not usually permitted to write in 'real time': they are expected to write as if they already had the complete text in front of them at every point, and to remove traces of the process they go through in deciding what to include, what line of reasoning to follow, and so on. However, it is permissible to project the reader-in-the-text as going through the process of discovery, as moving from relative ignorance or error to enlightenment. This allows the writer to create a sense of an unfolding process without losing the overall sense of the text being fully mapped out in advance.

So far, I have illustrated the revising of drafts with writers at different levels of proficiency, but each case has involved mainly a process of bringing underlying interaction to the surface at a specific point in the text. The final example that I wish to discuss presented a rather more complex problem; and it also allows me to exemplify briefly a method of training students in performing interaction in writing beyond working with them individually on isolated parts of their drafts.

Example [10] is problematic in a number of ways, but the key difficulty is that the writer gives unclear signals as to who is to be seen as responsible for which propositions: in interactional terms, the text is more like a hubbub than a dialogue. The sentences are numbered for ease of reference, and I have underlined the signals which are related to the issue of voice.

[10] [S1] It is true that different texts in different genres have a distinctive discourse organization which matches the purpose for which they are read and the requirements of their writing. [S2] I offer the following examples of different kinds of texts and their respective (supposed) purpose of reading:

text	*purpose*
catalogues [. . .]	get information/to buy [. . .]

[S3] The assumption might seem to be that a certain kind of general organization of the text suits better its direct purpose in being read. [S4] By general organization I mean the linguistic features that commonly characterize that particular genre, and by direct reading purpose I mean what the text was supposed to be written for.

[S5] On the one hand, the analysis of the organization of a 'written discourse' is rather emphasized in the ways in which the surface of the discourse contains sufficient clues for the reader to perceive its organization. [S6] On the other hand, the reading purpose of the 'audience' or the 'readers' may appear to vary.

One major difficulty with this text is confusion over which viewpoint the writer is arguing for and which arguments are intended to be seen as coming from the reader-in-the-text or from elsewhere. In discussion, it emerged that the writer mainly had the module tutor in mind as his reader. The ideas about text and reading purpose were those which had been introduced in the module, and the writer felt that he should avoid a possible charge of simply repeating the input by showing critical distance—even though he essentially agreed with the ideas. We went through the text together sentence by sentence, and I asked him to decide whether each proposition (and in some cases an individual term) was meant to be seen as him speaking, and which could be assigned to the reader, or a third person. The results are shown in Table 1, and indicate that most of the signals of another voice in the original version are misleading: it is only in the last sentence that the writer wishes to distance himself as a preparation for re-affirming the validity of the general link between text organization and reading purpose.

On the basis of this, we agreed on the following revised version:

[10′] Different texts in different genres have a distinctive discourse organization which matches the purpose for which they are read and the requirements of their writing. I offer the following examples of different kinds of texts and the possible purposes for reading them:

text	*purpose*
catalogues [. . .]	get information/to buy [. . .]

The assumption is that a certain kind of general organization of the text suits better its direct purpose in being read. By general organization I mean the linguistic features that commonly characterize that particular genre, and by direct reading purpose I mean what the text was written for.

Thus the analysis of the organization of a written discourse can highlight the ways in which the surface of the discourse contains sufficient clues for the reader to perceive its organization. It is certainly possible that the reading purpose of the audience or the readers may vary. However, . . .

Table 1: Sources of propositions in example [10]

	actual reading			intended reading	
S	writer	reader	other	writer	reader
1 Who believes that different texts have a distinctive discourse organization?		✓		✓	
2 Who supposes these purposes of reading?			?	✓	
3 Who assumes that text organization suits the purpose of reading?		✓		✓	
4 Who supposed the purpose for writing the text?			✓	✓	
5 Who is saying 'written discourse'?			?	✓	
5 Who is emphasizing the analysis (or the organization)?	?		?	✓	
6 Who is saying 'audience' and 'readers'?			?	✓	
6 Who is under the impression that the reading purpose varies?		?			✓

Although problems still remain, some of the other areas of confusion became easier to deal with in the process, and have also been revised in this version.

It is worth noting that this draft, and others like it that I have collected, lend themselves well to discussion using the type of grid shown in Table 1, and can be exploited as the basis for awareness training with groups working on academic writing. One useful activity is to ask students to produce texts which correspond to different versions of the grid. Producing these versions highlights the fact that the linguistic signals involved in constructing a reader-in-the-text are actually fairly restricted and easily learnt (this is especially useful for students whose mother tongue is not English). It makes them aware of the subconscious argumentation that may be going on in their minds as they write, of which they are often expressing only their own side. It can also lead on to discussion of when it might be appropriate to draw on these resources, and when it might not—whether it is more effective at a particular point in the argument to leave the other side submerged or to bring it to the surface.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING

In terms of the distinction that I am using, the main emphasis in the training of academic writing skills is normally on interactive signals (see, e.g., Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Waters and Waters 1995). This bias towards interactive aspects can be justified, in that interactional signals are typically less frequent and less overt in academic text. Nevertheless, pedagogically-inspired research into metadiscourse (e.g. Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore *et al.* 1993; Stainton 1996), has consistently shown that both aspects need to be taken into account. The view of what constitutes metadiscourse varies from study to study, but it generally includes categories which have an 'interpersonal function' (Crismore and Farnsworth 1990: 122). The most salient amongst these categories tend to be those involving markers of modality and attitude—that is, of the writer intervening to comment on the content of the text. This overlaps with the extensive literature on hedging and evaluation (e.g. Myers 1989; Hunston 1994; Hyland 1998), and this aspect of interactional signalling has therefore become increasingly well covered in recent academic writing courses (e.g. Swales and Feak 1994). However, Crismore *et al.* (1993), looking specifically at persuasive writing by students, have a category of 'commentary', which 'allow[s] authors to draw readers into an implicit dialogue' (Crismore and Farnsworth 1990: 124), and which includes the most overtly interactional resources of imperatives and questions.

Awareness-raising of interactional choices

It would therefore seem useful in training novice writers to complement attention to interactive aspects with exploration of interactional aspects, and in particular of the issue of dialogic interaction in writing. Admittedly, the problems discussed above imply a fairly high level of sophistication on the part of the writers, and it could even be argued that the suggested revisions represent relatively optional icing on the cake (though this would certainly not be true of example [10]). However, there are a number of reasons why I believe that it is valuable to focus on sensitizing students to the dialogic perspective on academic written text.

As noted earlier, the skill of judging the most appropriate way of conducting interaction with the audience is one that can be seen very clearly in operation in proficient writers: the choice between performing argumentation interpersonally or logically at each stage is an important decision which can have a marked effect on the overall tone of the text. However, the skill does not come automatically, and conscious attention to the skill does seem to help novice writers acquire it more rapidly. In addition, at advanced levels, particularly with students, such as those on postgraduate courses, who are being expected to act at least temporarily as members of the academic discourse community, it can be difficult to give concrete advice on how to improve their writing that does not appear to largely reiterate what they have been told before.

Discussing text in terms of whose voice is being heard (and how we know) offers a fresh slant on writing and gives students a sense of a new area that they can aim to incorporate into their developing mastery of academic conventions. The general notion of explicitly allowing for the reader's views to be incorporated, and deciding whether a proposition is intended to be your own or the reader's (or someone else's) seems to appeal to students and to be readily understood. In practical terms, the procedures mentioned above—picking up on individual points in drafts, or using the grid of sources for propositions as a way of examining more extensive stretches of text—are simple but effective in prompting investigation of the voices in the text. It should also be borne in mind that there is no reason why these issues cannot be raised with students whose command of writing and/or English is not as advanced: they would fit in very well, for example, with the genre-based approach to the teaching of writing in schools pioneered by Martin (e.g. 1985) and his colleagues.

At the same time, there are of course notes of caution that need to be sounded. The writing of assignments and dissertations is in some respects a special case because the main reader is actually known: the student writer is likely to have a fairly clear idea of the views of the tutor who will read the work to assess it. The writer may feel understandably uncomfortable about challenging those views openly (as noted above, this was an important source of the problems in example [10]). However, this can also be turned to advantage if the tutor is explicitly seen as representing the wider academic community: the personal interaction of supervisions and comments on drafts, in which possible reactions are expressed or alternatives raised, can become the stimulus for constructing interaction in the text. This does mean, though, that students may need to be made aware that the dialogue in formal written text is not natural but stage-managed, and that there are relatively firmly established conventions for constructing the dialogue. These conventions are different from those in face-to-face interaction; and for non-native speakers the conventions might be different from those that they may have internalized in writing in their mother tongue. For instance, informal evidence—such as example [8] above—suggests that Chinese writers writing in English make more frequent use of questions than British writers, and tend not to exploit other interactional options (cf. Connor 1996). In addition, even within argumentation, performing interaction is only one possible way of handling the communicative problem of taking your reader convincingly through your text: it aims to draw the reader into the process of constructing the argument, but this may not always be desirable—for example, repeated use within an essay will almost certainly become counterproductive. It seems likely that effective writing strikes a balance between more monologic 'logical' argumentation and the more dialogic collaborative kind (see also Thompson and Zhou 2000); and students respond well to exploration of how this balance can be achieved.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have set out to describe a relatively unexplored area in the way writers of academic texts interact with their readers. In Thompson and Thetela (1995) we drew on the concept of the reader-in-the-text and the distinction between interactive and interactional resources in exploring how interaction works in advertisements—openly persuasive texts which typically exploit many of the features of spoken registers. What I have set out to demonstrate here is that the same approach is equally illuminating when applied to written text types which are much less overtly dialogic. It provides a robust framework which brings together a number of features, all related to a perspective on written text as a series of exchanges in an interaction conducted half by proxy, which have tended to be looked at separately, if at all. I have focused on the way in which clause relations of Hypothetical–Real and concession are deployed in this interaction because, in comparison with questions and commands, they represent a less obvious form of exchange which has so far had little attention and yet which my research suggests is one of the more commonly used interactional resources in academic writing. I have restricted the study to writing in Applied Linguistics; one obvious way of extending the research, therefore, is to look at the frequency, distribution, and realization of this resource across different disciplines—as, for example, Swales *et al.* (1998) have done for imperatives. On a broader scale, Widdowson (1984: 62) argues that genres could be characterized 'by reference to the degree to which the discourse is textualized' (or, in the terms employed here, the extent to which writers draw on interactional resources). It would therefore also be worth exploring how statements from the reader-in-the-text are deployed in different genres, both academic and non-academic.

The paper also reflects an explicit attempt to combine discourse analysis with consideration of the training of writing skills, and to show that the second is inextricably linked with the first. The original impetus for the study was working on drafts of written work produced by my students; and the findings have fed directly back into helping them with the revising process and from there into techniques for more general training. There is no space here to report on the implementation of these techniques; but the approach reaffirms the basic principle underlying much recent work in English for Academic Purposes (and language teaching in general), that novice writers benefit not just from process-oriented practice in producing texts but from guided scrutiny of how texts work (see, e.g., Swales 1990, Martin 1985). Sustained exposure to texts and discovery through trial and error clearly have a crucial role to play in building up a sense of what sounds appropriate and what works; but rather than simply leaving this to emerge by a kind of osmosis, it is widely accepted that intervention in the form of language awareness activities—conscious examination of what may be called the 'discourse value' of particular lexico-grammatical choices—can strengthen

and speed up the acquisition of proficiency. This involves encouraging students to take on the role of discourse analysts; but in order to do this efficiently, teachers themselves need a clearer picture of the areas which repay investigation. The perspective on written text as partly enacted dialogue illuminates specific features that would otherwise risk being overlooked. In addition, it provides a novel 'handle' on text which can be easily understood and applied, and which contributes in a stimulating way to the deconstruction of the mystique of effective writing that is an essential step in progressing from novice to initiate.

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NOTES

1 On academic discourse as essentially persuasive, see e.g. Hunston (1994).

2 The terminology used here to discuss processes and the participants involved, such as 'Senser', is that developed by Halliday in his account of transitivity (1994, ch. 5).

3 A different phenomenon which can bring in the voice of the reader-in-the-text is negation. It is generally accepted that negatives typically deny a positive proposition that is somehow 'on the table'—often because it is assumed that someone else, potentially the reader, believes it (Jordan 1998). Unfortunately, there is no space here to explore this area of interaction.

4 The main difference is that in concession the validity of the conceded proposition is not in question (as Winter (1994), points out, it is the consequences that might be expected which are implicitly denied by the asserted proposition). In Hypothetical–Real, on the other hand, it is the validity of the Hypothetical which is presented as open to question—even if the Real actually confirms its validity ('It might be thought . . . And indeed this is so'). In the particular cases I am focusing on, this is typically reflected in the type of signal: concessions are tagged as accepted by the writer, whereas hypotheses are often attributed to the reader-in-the-text through reporting structures—compare:
Of course, it is true that particular situations call for different types of texts, but . . . (concession)
It might be argued that particular situations call for different types of texts, but . . . (Hypothetical–Real)

5 There are cases where 'may' in the first member of a concession–assertion pair functions by itself as a signal of attribution to the reader-in-the-text. This typically occurs in more informal texts, though I have come across a few examples in academic writing such as the following from a student essay: The TOEFL test may claim efficiency and scoring reliability; however, in terms of validity, according to my investigation, it is doubtful whether it reflects one's real linguistic competence.

6 Swales *et al*. (1998) focus only on imperatives. For a full picture of commands in academic text it would be necessary to take account also of modulated statements functioning as writer commands ('It should be borne in mind that . . . ').

7 To give an approximate sense of the relative frequency of these interactional options, a survey of 3,752 sentences from the introduction, discussion, and conclusions sections of a range of academic articles and books in Applied Linguistics showed the following distribution patterns: statements attributable

to the reader-in-the text occurred on average every 29 sentences; questions 'held up' by the writer every 38 sentences; and commands from the writer every 94 sentences. Questions clearly assigned to the reader-in-the-text occurred only every 375 sentences. This survey was merely exploratory, and a number of problematic cases were left out of the calculations to simplify matters; but, rough as they are, the results suggest, in line with the findings of Swales *et al*. (1998), that interactional performance is frequent enough to be worth including as a topic in the training of novice writers. (Interestingly, the figures reported in Chang and Swales (1999: 72), for three academic disciplines show a much higher frequency of imperatives than of questions; this is true even if the results for the Applied Linguistics texts are looked at in isolation. However, they also support the point that these two interactional features are fairly widely used.)

8 It has been convincingly argued that we need to be wary of simply demanding that novice writers conform to the dominant conventions (see e.g. Pennycook 1995; Zamel and Spack 1998). At the same time, we have to take into account the fact that written work of the type that I am focusing on is typically judged according to these conventions. For a balanced discussion of the issues that comes down on the side of awareness raising rather than prescription or rejection of the conventions, see Johns (1997: 51–70).

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