

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I describe the research problem central to the present study. I then briefly sketch some pedagogical and linguistic views relating to the research problem. The aims of the study are outlined and the research questions relating to these aims are then presented. The hypotheses flowing from the research questions are formulated, and the chapter concludes with a summary of the study.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The South African Government's Education White Paper 3 (Republic of South Africa, 1995) refers to the transformation of the higher education system in South Africa, which can be directly associated with societal transformation in a post-apartheid South Africa. Implicit in the transformation of the educational scene in South Africa is also the adoption of a new teaching policy, which advocates a shift from an objectivistic, content-centred teaching approach towards an outcomes-based, student- or learner-centred approach. My focus in the present study is on the notion of student- or learner-centredness referred to here. The South African Government Gazette (Republic of South Africa, 1997:22) expands on this notion by saying that a student-centred approach to teaching 'goes beyond ensuring that all learners achieve the set outcomes. It involves them as participants in curriculum and learning, responds to their learning styles and cultures, and builds on their life experiences and needs'.

My interest in student-centred teaching partly results from the fact that the change in educational policy in South Africa has also impacted on higher education institutions. The result was that lecturers at the University of South Africa (Unisa), the largest distance education institution in the country, had to align their print-based teaching strategies with the principles underlying a student-centred approach to teaching. This response was based on the assumption that the discourse of their study guides (tutorials in print) had previously been of a content-centred nature and that a move had to occur towards student-centredness.

Since Unisa moved towards a student-centred approach to teaching, the implications of such

a move have been explained and workshopped at Unisa by national as well as international scholars. Staff members at the Unisa Institute for Curriculum and Learning Development have also been trained to assist academic departments to develop outcomes-based, student-centred study guides. It could therefore be presumed that an analysis and comparison of the discourse of such guides will reveal how the notion of student-centredness is actualised in print-based texts at Unisa.

In commenting on the outcome of Unisa lecturers' alignment of their teaching strategies with the learning paradigm advocated by the South African government, Hubbard (2001:232) observes the following:

[...] Unisa has come to see itself more and more as an institution that provides student centred, open distance learning as opposed to lecturer- or content-centred correspondence materials, and open distance learning can now be said to be official policy at this university, with all the implications this holds for the kind of discourse its learning packages embody.

However, while student-centred learning is acknowledged to be the official policy at Unisa, few academics can give a clear answer to the question of what the characteristics of print-based student-centred texts are. As a result, few mechanisms exist to determine to what extent Unisa lecturers in general have aligned their teaching strategies with the Government's proposed student-centred approach to teaching.

This problem should be viewed against the reality that, while there is a drive within Unisa to promote student-centred learning through multimedia packages which include online learning, CDs, videos, and digital video drives, the majority of Unisa students come from disadvantaged communities with no or little access to multimedia facilities. The result is that the printed teaching text or study guide is still the most influential and often the only medium through which teaching takes place at the university.

Therefore, the research problem central to the present study is to investigate how the notion of student-centredness is actualised at a distance education institution where the prime mode of teaching is print-based texts. Put differently, it could be said that the main research problem of the study is to determine what the linguistic characteristics of student-centred distance education texts are.

The research problem is addressed by analysing and comparing the discourse of study guides developed before the change to student-centredness was instituted at Unisa with the discourse of study guides developed after the adoption of this approach. Because of the central importance to the present study of the notion of student-centredness, that is, an acknowledgement of the involvement of students in the learning process, I give below a brief account of some key pedagogical perspectives on student-centredness.

1.2 SOME PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In this section I present some views underlying the notion of student-centredness and briefly explore the association between student-centredness and the principles advanced in transformative learning theory, constructivism and whole-person learning. These matters are reported upon in more detail in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.1).

The notion of student-centredness derives from an educational shift in focus from the central importance of teaching towards the central importance of learning. In this regard, Rogers (1961, 1970) suggests that teaching is a vastly overrated function and that independence in the process of seeking information is a more stable base for learning than the transfer of 'static' knowledge. He therefore advocates a move away from didactic teaching methods, and towards active student participation in teaching and learning processes. His opinion is that student-centred teaching takes place when:

[...] a leader or person who is perceived as an authority figure in the situation, is sufficiently secure within herself (himself) and in her (his) relationship to others that she (he) experiences an essential trust in the capacity of others to think for themselves, to learn for themselves. (Rogers, 1970:188)

Pedagogical principles supporting a student-centred approach to teaching and learning are captured in transformative learning theory (e.g. Cranton, 1994, 1997, 2000; Mezirow, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000) and tenets such as: constructivism (e.g. Bruner, 1960, 1966, 1973, 1986, 1990, 1996; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) and whole-person learning (e.g. Dirkx, 2001; Heron, 1992, 1996; Taylor, 2001; Yorks and Kasl, 2002).

Mezirow (1991, 1995) discusses the concept of transformative learning by pointing to three main instigators of transformation: disorienting experiences, reflection, and affect. Mezirow's

views on transformative learning are deliberated upon later (cf. 2.1.1). It suffices here to say that in considering disorienting experiences, Mezirow (1991:94) points out that transformation 'begins when we encounter experiences, often in an emotionally charged situation, that fail to fit our expectations'. On the other hand, reflection leads to transformation as it 'is involved in problem solving, problem posing and transformation of meaning schemes and perspectives' (Mezirow, 1991:117). He maintains that the transformative power of affect is demonstrated by psychological assumptions arising 'from anxiety generated by parental prohibitions learned under traumatic circumstances in childhood' (Mezirow, 1991:144). Mezirow (1996:162–166) also contends that transformative learning is based on action-orientated experience, which is developed in a communicative way through negotiated meaning making.

Transformative principles of learning also underpin a constructivist approach to learning. In considering some of the views advanced in constructivism, Bruner (1960, 1966, 1973, 1986, 1990, 1996) stresses that learning is an active process in which students construct new ideas or concepts, which result from their current and past knowledge and worldview. When taken from the point of view of the teacher or instructor, constructivism implies that the instructor should guide students to discover principles by themselves within the context of a given situation. The instructor and student should interactively engage in dialogue and the task of the instructor is to appreciatively present information to be learned in a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding. As a result, the curriculum should be organised in such a fashion that the student continually builds upon previous experiences in a negotiated fashion (Bruner, 1996).

The theory underlying whole-person learning advocates that cognition derives from the reality that emotion forms the foundation upon which all learning rests (Dirkx, 2001; Heron, 1992, 1996; Taylor, 2001; Yorks and Kasl, 2002). Heron (1992) explains that the human psyche or mind has four primary modes of functioning that are all simultaneously alert during the process of learning. For effective learning to occur, all four modes of functioning (also called modes of psyche), namely the affective, imaginal, conceptual and practical are essential. Each mode includes two processes:

The affective mode embraces feeling and emotion [...] The imaginal mode comprises intuition and imagery [...] The conceptual mode includes reflection and discrimination. And the practical mode involves intention and action. (Heron, 1992: 14-15)

Learning is thus optimally facilitated when students are involved in an emotional, imaginal and practical way in the learning process. These notions are expanded upon in more detail in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.1.1.3).

Common themes flowing from transformative theory, constructivism and whole-person learning involve: the development of experience by being emotionally and practically involved in certain tasks (e.g. Bruner, 1960, 1966, 1973, 1986, 1990, 1996; Honebein, 1996; Taylor, 1998, 2001); the idea of self-development through involvement in action research (e.g. Grabov, 1997; Habermas, 1972; Scott, 1997); the notion of critical reflection through guided dialogue (e.g. Taylor, 1998; 2001) and an emphasis on the interrelationship between emotion (attitude) and cognition (e.g. Dirkx, 2001; Heron, 1992; Yorks and Kasl, 2002).

Of particular interest to the present study is that notions such as 'involvement', 'interaction', 'emotion' (attitude) and the negotiation of emotion play such a central role in pedagogical views on student-centredness. In fact, these notions receive so much attention that it can be accepted that for a text to be student centred it should be involved, interactive and attitudinal. In this regard, involvement refers to collaborative inquiries (Bruner, 1996; Freire, 1968; Honebein, 1996; McCutcheon and Jurg, 1990; Taylor, 2000), that is, to participation and cooperation of interacting parties. Interaction refers to dialogue (Bruner, 1996), conversations (Baumgartner, 2001; Holmberg, 1999), discussions (Daloz, 1999; Freire, 1968:53) and communication (Habermas, 1972). Attitude refers to emotion or affect (Heron, 1992, 1996), the expression of positive or negative feelings (Heron, 1992) and passion (Dirkx, 2001).

As a result of the centrality of these notions to the theories underlying a student-centred approach to teaching, I consider involvement, interaction, attitude and the negotiation of attitude to be of paramount importance in the facilitation of learning. As a result, I have argued that a move towards student-centredness in study guides will be noticeable through discourse that is involved, interactive, attitudinal and sensitive to the negotiation of attitude. As all of these concepts relate to an acknowledgement of the social presence of interactants in a discourse situation, I make an association between involvement, interaction, attitude and the negotiation of attitude, and the signification of the social presence of learners in print-based distance education texts.

In this regard I have considered the views of scholars who explore how the social presence of discourse participants, who are not in direct contact with each other, can be simulated.

Gunawardena and Zittle (1997:9) believe that such a simulation depends on 'the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication'. Rafaeli (1988:117) is of the opinion that it depends on 'a compendium of impressions regarding warmth, sensitivity, sociability, familiarity, and privacy', while Walther (1992:54) is of the opinion that it depends on 'the feeling that other actors are jointly involved in communicative interaction'.

Thus, in exploring the linguistic characteristics of student-centred texts I explore how the social presence of students is acknowledged in distance education texts by focussing on involvement, interaction, attitude and the negotiation of attitude. Below I present some linguistic perspectives on these notions.

1.3 LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In this section I consider the notions of involvement, interaction, attitude and the negotiation of attitude from a linguistic point of view. In seeking a linguistic interpretation of these concepts, I consider the findings of linguists who have analysed involved, interactive and attitudinal discourses.

In exploring how the social presence of discourse participants is signalled linguistically, scholars such as Chafe (1982, 1985, 1986), Poynton (1985), Stubbs (1982) and Tannen (1982, 1985) compared spoken and written language. In this regard, Chafe observes the following differences:

[...] speakers are usually in face-to-face interaction with their interlocutors, whereas writers are usually isolated from their audiences, both spatially and temporally. The result is an opposition that I have referred to as the involvement of spoken language versus the detachment of written. (Chafe, 1985:116)

Chafe (1985:116) thus uses the term *involvement* to refer to the 'humanised' nature of conversations. According to Chafe, this *involvement* is manifested in three ways: 'involvement of the speaker with himself, that is, ego involvement; involvement of the speaker with the hearer, that is, concern for the dynamics of interaction with another person; and involvement of the speaker with the subject matter, that is, an ongoing personal commitment to what is being talked about' (Chafe, 1985:116). It is his opinion that ego involvement is demonstrated by the use of first person pronouns; involvement of the speaker with the hearer is demonstrated

through the use of second person pronouns; and involvement of the speaker with the subject matter is shown by the use of linguistic markers such as expressive vocabulary, exclamations and exaggerations. Chafe concludes that because written texts lack these manifestations, they show signs of *detachment* rather than *involvement*.

Chafe also stresses that there is a difference between speaker and writer *attitudes* toward the knowledge being communicated. An association is hereby drawn between the social presence of discourse participants in a discourse situation and the attitude being expressed. Chafe (1985) observes that in judging the reliability of their knowledge, speakers restrict themselves to indications of the likelihood of something being categorically true or not, whereas writers have the leisure for hypothesis formation and deduction. Speakers, for instance, use a vague expression like *We kept thinking maybe they'd be stationed at ...* whereas writers have a concern for a kind of statistical reliability and would use phrases like *players on the field chatter primarily in formulas*. Speakers also sometimes throw in markers of sensory hearsay evidence (e.g. *I hear that she takes a shower everyday*). Writers, however, only admit hearsay in the form of citations. Speakers also often hedge their categorisations in vague terms (e.g. *He started sort of circling*) while writers are much more precise in defining time and intent. However, he concedes that '[t]hese generalizations apply best to the extremes of spoken and written language and must be qualified for more formal styles of speaking as well as for more casual styles of writing' (Chafe, 1985:120-122).

Poynton (1985) explores the difference between spoken and written language from a slightly different perspective. Her focus is on the relationship between power, social distance or intimacy and speakers' attitude and emotion, which she terms *affect* (Poynton 1985:76). She comes to the conclusion that: equal access to grammatical resources reflects equal power or status relations; the greater the degree of interaction or contact between interactants, the greater the array of linguistic choices available; and the greater the degree of social interaction or contact between interactants the more likely that reduced, shortened and elliptical expression forms will be used.

Of significance to the concerns of the present study is that Poynton's (1985) findings support conclusions by a scholar such as Chafe (1985) that there are particular language features whereby speakers acknowledge the social presence of their discourse participants in the discourse. Such features result in the establishment of identities for discourse participants in terms of their relative power. Linguists are in agreement that such language features include

reference to the self and the other, expressions of emotion as well as personal opinions and attitudes. Labov (1972:378), for instance, observes that in discourse the social presence of discourse participants is signified through intensifiers (e.g. *all, completely, everything*), negatives (e.g. *I do not agree*), modals (e.g. *you might be right*), questions (e.g. *do you agree?*), attributive adjectives (e.g. *it is true*) and clauses introduced by subordinators (e.g. *if it is true ...*).

Stubbs (1986:1) refers to such features as language which is used 'to express personal beliefs and adopt positions, to express agreement and disagreement with others, to make personal and social allegiances, contracts and commitments, or alternatively, to disassociate the speaker from points of view and to remain vague or uncommitted'. He classifies such language features as *modal grammar* or *point of view*, and observes that they include the meanings depicted by *vague language*, ways to be *explicit*, the modal meaning of *private* verbs and by questions.

In her comparison of spoken and written language, Tannen (1985) comes to the important conclusion that their differences are not so much the result of a difference in mode of delivery (articulated as opposed to written discourse). Instead, she attributes the difference to the relatively strong focus on interpersonal 'involvement' in spoken as opposed to written language. She points out that, depending on the genre analysed, the notion of 'involvement' is also a distinguishing factor between different written texts and that it should not be associated with spoken discourse alone. Tannen (1985:137) states that:

[...] if one thinks at first that written language and spoken language are very different, one may think as well that written literary discourse – short stories, poems, novels – are the most different from casual conversation. On the contrary, imaginative literature has more in common with spontaneous conversation than with the typical written genre, expository prose.

Tannen expands on this remark by pointing out that in expository prose theses are formulated and supported, readers are informed and points of view persuasively argued. During these processes advanced conceptual skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and formulation are utilised and claims are supported with adequate evidence. However, literary prose, very much like conversation, 'is dependent for its effect on interpersonal involvement. It fosters and builds on involvement between speaker and hearer rather than focusing on information or message. It also depends for its impact on the emotional involvement of the hearer' (Tannen,

1985:139–140).

By drawing a correlation between speaking and certain written genres, Tannen highlights a point that is of significance to the present study, namely that some written genres are more 'involved' than others. By implication, Tannen's findings suggest that the 'involvement' or notion of social presence associated with conversations could also be associated with written texts, and that the signification of 'involvement' is more a generic feature than a feature of a particular mode of delivery. Tannen formulates this argument in the following way:

The relative focus on involvement is not an arbitrary or trivial notion, nor is it limited to issues of orality and literacy. One of the reasons it is appealing as an explanatory hypothesis is that it accounts for variation in all forms of discourse, including conversation. (Tannen, 1985:124)

Tannen hereby emphasises that the relative 'involvement' of a text has implications for interpersonal communication through written as well as spoken language.

Instead of looking at how conversations differ from written texts, scholars such as Brown and Levinson (1987), Bybee and Fleischmann (1995), Chafe and Nichols (1986), Drubig (2001), Halliday (1970) and Palmer (1986), look at the way in which the 'involvement' of interlocutors is signified in spoken as well as written discourse from a semantic point of view. The quoted scholars indicate that speakers or writers signal their own, as well as their addressees' social presence (or 'involvement') in a discourse also by indicating to their addressees the truth value of their propositions. This notion will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.2.2). It suffices here to point out that the language features they associate with truth evaluation include expressive vocabulary (e.g. *really, indeed, not at all*), exaggerations (e.g. *totally, completely, extremely*), modal grammar (e.g. *may, might, perhaps*), and vague language (e.g. *sort of, almost, more or less*).

In considering the views of the scholars referred to above, Biber (1988) explores the notion of 'involvement' by analysing spoken and written discourses of many functional types. By using a corpus-based method of analysis, Biber (1988) identified 67 language features that can be associated with textual variation and used these features to categorise 23 English texts from different genres in different groupings on the basis of their linguistic characteristics. A major value of Biber's (1988) findings to the present study is that he identifies six main dimensions

in terms of which English texts can be characterised. He bases his argument on the way in which particular language features group together in particular kinds of texts. He also demonstrates that it is possible to identify which linguistic features consistently group together to perform a particular communicative function. Biber (1988) thus confirms Tannen's observations that the relative 'involvement' of a text has implications for interpersonal communication in speech as well as writing. He also concludes that all discourses, spoken as well as written, can be grouped into different generic categories based on their linguistic features.

This observation of Biber (1988) is similar to the views expressed by Halliday (1978) and Halliday and Hasan (1985) that the features of a discourse are determined by the context in which it takes place. As a result of the interrelatedness between context and discourse, spoken as well as written discourses can be formal or detached and also informal or 'involved', depending on the situation or context of use. Thus, different discursal registers can be thought of as comprising a particular semantic potential, 'a particular recurrent, conventionalised contextual configuration', based on their context of use (Hasan, 1985:101).

Of special interest to the present study are the 23 features Biber (1988) found to group together in texts that he describes as *verbal*, *interactive*, *affective*, *fragmented*, *reduced in form*, and *generalized in content*. Biber observes of such texts that they are *involved* in nature (Biber, 1988:105). In expanding on the notion of 'involvement', Biber remarks:

Involvement refers to those linguistic features which reflect the fact that speaker and listener typically interact with one another, while writer and reader typically do not. Due to this interaction, speakers often make direct reference to the listener (by use of second person pronouns, questions, imperatives, etc.), and they are typically concerned with the expression of their own thoughts and feelings (e.g., marked by use of first person pronouns, affective forms such as emphatics and amplifiers, and cognitive verbs such as think and feel) [...].
(Biber, 1988:43)

As can be seen from this remark, Biber's findings confirm the association that is drawn in the present study between 'involvement' and 'social presence'. As a result, my point of departure is that a linguistic exploration of student-centredness implicitly comprises an exploration of the features associated with textual 'involvement'. In this regard, the features that Biber (1988)

associates with 'involvement' serve as a benchmark.

While scholars such as those mentioned above focus largely on 'involvement' from a lexical perspective, scholars such as Channell (2000), Hunston and Sinclair (2000) and Thompson and Hunston (2000) explore notions associated with 'involvement' semantically. They suggest that speakers or writers signal their own as well as their addressees' social presence or 'involvement' in a discourse by using evaluative or attitudinal language. Such attitudinal language relates not only to the continual evaluation of the truth value of their statements, but also to the indication of how things affect them emotionally. Such emotions relate to the feelings they express (e.g. *I fear, I hope*), how appealing or unappealing they find things (e.g. *a beautiful flower, a terrible mistake*), and how moral or immoral they regard people to be (e.g. *he is a criminal, she is a real saint*).

Scholars such as Christie and Martin (1997), Coffin (1997, 2000), Iedema, Feez, and White (1994), Martin (1995, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2004) and White (1998, 2000, 2002, 2003) also explore some 'involvement' notions semantically. They associate attitudinal significations of the social presence of discourse participants in a discourse situation with the notion of interpersonal negotiation. Their point of departure is that 'emotions, judgements, and values, are sites around which negotiation might take place' (Martin, 2000:145). In expanding on what he means by negotiation, Martin (2000) observes that interpersonal relationships are established between discourse participants through the sharing of attitudes and feelings. However, by using attitudinal language, speakers or writers face the risk that their listeners or readers might either accept or reject the stand that is being taken. Agreement between a writer and a reader, for instance, draws discourse participants together and results in a personal relationship, or relationship of solidarity or harmony. However, should a reader differ from the attitudinal stand being taken, alienation or detachment sets in.

If the fundamental premise of transformative theory, that learning is the product of shifts occurring in a student's world-view when challenged emotionally through interactive discourse, (Mezirow, 1996) is taken into consideration, then the establishment of interpersonal relations must be very significant in the development of student-centred texts. Interpreted in the context of the present study, the views expressed above can be summarised in the following way:

- (a) a student-centred approach to teaching implies the social presence of teachers and learners in the discourse situation;

- (b) such social presence is linguistically signified through features associated with 'involvement';
- (c) features associated with 'involvement' were initially identified by comparing spoken and written language, but have subsequently come to be associated with attitudinal language;
- (d) attitudinal language has interpersonal implications and should be used with due consideration for the relationship between interlocutors; and
- (e) to explore student-centredness linguistically implies analysing the 'involvement' features of texts, with a focus on attitudinal language and thus on interpersonal relationships.

The summary provided above implies that to explore student-centredness in linguistic terms demands a consideration of Biber's perspectives on 'involvement' and of the views presented in Appraisal theory. In considering Appraisal Theory, I argue that Biber provides a practical mechanism to compare texts in terms of 'involvement', while Appraisal theory allows for the analysis of 'involvement' in interpersonal terms. Due to the importance of Appraisal theory to the present study, brief preliminary remarks about it are made below.

Linguists concerned with Appraisal theory have established a framework of language resources whereby speakers and writers engage with socially-determined value positions (expressions of affect, judgement and appreciation) and whereby they align and disalign themselves with such positions. In Appraisal theory the focus is on attitudinal meaning (or language of appraisal) and systematic semantic shifts in texts with relation to such meanings. The aim of the framework is to allow for an analysis of how the expression of attitude in a text discloses the resultant relationship that will exist between writer and reader. It also allows for a consideration of the personae that speakers and writers create for themselves and for their addressees.

Within Appraisal, a text's attitudinal positioning options are accounted for in terms of different semantic categories of attitudinal meaning, the grading thereof, and in terms of a speaker's or writer's commitment to or engagement with the attitude expressed. The result is that attitudinal language is analysed in Appraisal theory in terms of three subsystems: ATTITUDE, GRADUATION and ENGAGEMENT (it has become the norm to write the terminology used to refer to the semantic systems of this theory in small capitals and I will follow the convention in this study). The subsystem of ATTITUDE involves meanings associated with attitudinal responses; GRADUATION

involves those values which scale other meanings along two possible parameters by either locating them on a scale from low to high intensity, or on a scale of marginal membership of a category; ENGAGEMENT involves meanings which either acknowledge or ignore the diversity of viewpoints that are put at risk by expressing a particular opinion.

The details of these systems of Appraisal theory are discussed in 2.2.4. What needs to be highlighted here is the point of departure in this theory that: (a) affective or attitudinal language consists of a variety of semantic sub-systems; (b) the use of affective or attitudinal language can have either a bonding or a schismatic power in terms of social relations; (c) the expression of attitude and the way in which speakers and writers align or disalign themselves with the attitude expressed, result in the constructing of particular personae or identities for discourse participants.

In referring to the bonding and schismatic power of attitude, Martin (2000:166) observes that '[s]hould listeners or readers choose to accept the attitude expressed, a kind of bonding occurs'. In such instances, there is solidarity between discourse participants, with the result that a relationship of contact and trust gets established between discourse participants. However, should the feelings expressed be rejected, 'alienation occurs and detachment sets in' (Martin, 2000:166). Martin thus proposes that:

From an interpersonal perspective then, appraisal positions us to feel – and through shared feelings to belong. In this respect appraisal is a resource for solidarity negotiation.' (Martin, 2004:326)

The idea that speakers or authors discursively establish personae for themselves and their interlocutors relates to views such as those of Brookes, who emphasises that 'a person's identity is not an 'inviolable core ... [or] fixed consciousness that never changes', but a social construct dependent on surrounding circumstances as well as the social relationships in those circumstances' (Brooke, 1991:15). Interpreted in Appraisal terms, the implication of Brookes' proposal is that speakers or writers create identities for themselves and for their interlocutors through the values of ATTITUDE they express. As the expression of ATTITUDE impacts on the solidarity between discourse participants, the way in which speakers and writers align or disalign themselves with such values, that is, the extent to which they protect solidarity with their audience, also impacts on their textual identities. This matter is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.2.5.3).

These views are very significant to the present study. Parallels between the notions of involvement, interaction, attitude and the negotiation of attitude have been referred to above (cf. 1.2). In this regard it is significant that: (a) scholars such as Heron (1992), Kilgore (2001) and Yorks and Kasl (2002) point to the reality that the affective mode of the human psyche provides the basis upon which all learning rests; and (b) scholars such as Martin (2000, 2002) and White (2000, 2002, 2003) point out that affective or attitudinal language consists of a variety of semantic sub-systems of affective language and that the establishment of personal relations is founded upon the use of such language and upon the way in which speakers or writers align or disalign themselves with the attitude expressed. In view of this, it can be assumed that in student-centred texts, affective or attitudinal language should be used more often than in content-centred ones, but in such a way that the addressee is not alienated from the writer.

Interpreted in terms of distance education it could be said that in the process of advancing effective learning, the social presence and 'involvement' of discourse participants in the discourse situation should be acknowledged. This should be done by addressing the affective mode of students' minds with the aim to engage the student emotionally in the learning process and establish a relationship of solidarity or harmony between lecturer and student.

The aims I strive to achieve in the present study are intricately related to the views advanced above. In presenting the aims, the term 'involvement' is considered to relate to significations in discourse of the 'social presence' of discourse participants in the discourse situation as signalled through personal address, conversation-like features of language, and the expression of attitudes (feelings). In this regard, the term attitude is used to refer to the expression of positive or negative feelings, while the negotiation of attitude is viewed as the way in which writers align or disalign them with the attitude expressed. The label Appraisal is used in the same sense as it is used by Martin (1997, 2000, 2002, 2004) and White (1998, 2000, 2002, 2003) to refer to a set of subsystems comprising different semantic categories of attitudinal meaning, the grading thereof, and the signification of a speaker's or writer's commitment to or engagement with the attitude expressed. In other words, the act of appraisal is interpreted as a process of interpersonal solidarity negotiation, that is, as a process whereby attitude is expressed with a consideration of the agreement or discord it can give rise to between discourse participants. In other words, appraisal is seen as part of a broader definition of 'involvement' – it encompasses not only the use of conversation-like, interactive, attitudinal language, but also the impact such features will, from a pragmatic point of view, have on

interpersonal relationships.

1.4 AIMS

The aims of this study can be understood as operating along three dimensions: theoretical, descriptive, and applied. The first dimension is theoretical in the sense that it concerns the contribution a study is intended to make to existing theory, methodology or analysis in the relevant domain. In this study I integrate and adapt aspects of two different theoretical and analytic approaches to develop a framework for analysing how a change in pedagogic approach impacts on the discourse of distance education study guides. In the process of doing so I aim to extend Biber's (1988) account of 'involvement' by interpreting some 'involvement' features in terms of Appraisal theory as explicated by Martin (1997, 2000, 2002, 2004) and White (1998, 2000, 2002, 2003). The theoretical aim, therefore, is:

To develop an analytical framework that would enhance our current understanding of the linguistic basis of the notion, 'student-centredness', in the context of distance learning texts.

At the descriptive level, which concerns the contribution a study makes to the description and analysis of a particular situation, I consider the linguistic characteristics of print-based student-centred texts by comparing two groups of Unisa study guides: those developed before a student-centred approach to teaching was adopted at the university, and those developed after the adoption of such an approach. These guides are compared in relation to their relative 'involvement' and their values of Appraisal.

The descriptive aim can be stated as follows:

To compare, in terms of 'involvement' and appraisal, Unisa study guides developed before and after a student-centred approach to teaching was adopted.

The applied aim of the study is a secondary, more implicit one, deriving from the theoretical and descriptive aims:

To inform future development of student-centred texts for distance learning by shedding light on key linguistic characteristics of such texts.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions flow directly from the aims of the study. At the theoretical level, I ask the following:

What sort of analytical framework would enhance our current understanding of the linguistic basis of the notion, 'student-centredness', in the context of distance learning texts?

At the descriptive level, I ask the following:

How do Unisa study guides developed before and after a student-centred approach to teaching was adopted at the university compare with regard to 'involvement' and appraisal?

At the applied level, I ask the following:

How can the future development of student-centred texts for distance learning be informed by shedding light on key linguistic characteristics of such texts?

1.6 DATA CORPUS

The data for this study comprise six study guides from three different academic departments at Unisa. Two guides from each of the following departments are analysed and compared. Based on their copyright dates, a differentiation will be made between the guides of a particular department by referring to the 'old' as opposed to the 'new' guide. In this regard the 'old' guide is the one developed before a student-centred approach to teaching was adopted at Unisa while the 'new' guide is the guide developed after the adoption of such an approach. Accordingly, the old guide is assumed to be more content centred than the new one, which is assumed to be more student centred. Further justification for this assumption is provided later (cf. 3.2).

The details of the guides analysed are provided below:

Departments of Industrial Psychology

- (a) *Organisational and Career Psychology*. Only study guide for IPS202-D. Copyright: 1984, revised edition: 1991 (old Industrial Psychology study guide).
- (b) *Career Psychology*. Only study guide for IOP303-V. Copyright: 2002 (new Industrial Psychology study guide).

For convenience, I abbreviate the course codes of these two guides in my discussions. The old guide (IPS202-D) is referred to as the IPS guide and the new guide (IOP303-V) as the IOP guide.

Department of Anthropology, archaeology, geography and environmental studies

- (a) *Socio-Cultural Anthropology*. Only study guide for SKA202-4. Copyright 1992 (old Anthropology study guide).
- (b) *Socio-Cultural Solutions to Problems of Human Adaptation*. Only Study Guide for APY202-J. Copyright: 2003 (new Anthropology study guide).

When necessary I refer to the old guide (SKA202-4) as the SKA guide and to the new guide (APY202-Y) as the APY guide.

Department of Psychology

- (a) *Social Psychology*. Only study guide for PSY313-D. Copyright: 1995 (old Psychology study guide).
- (b) *Re-Imagining Community*. Only study guide for PYC205-A. Copyright: 2001 (new Psychology study guide).

The course codes of these two guides are abbreviated to PSY for the old guide (PSY313-D) and PYC (PYC205-A) in tables and discussions.

The choice of these particular study guides is justified later (cf. 3.2). It suffices here to say that the following reasons influenced the choice: (a) the topics under discussion in the old and new guides are more or less similar; (b) members of the particular departments believe that they have made a relatively significant shift towards a student-centred approach to teaching; (c) members of the departments reported increased student interest and, in some instances, higher pass rates after the adoption of the new guides; and (d) permission was given by the departmental heads of these departments that their guides could be used for the purposes of

this study.

1.7 HYPOTHESES

I pose two hypotheses in this study. The first concerns the relationship between student-centredness and 'involvement':

Hypothesis 1: Distance education study guides developed with a student-centred approach to teaching are more 'involved' than study guides developed with a content-centred approach.

The second hypothesis concerns the relationship between student-centredness and Appraisal:

Hypothesis 2: Distance education study guides developed with a student-centred approach to teaching use more and different values of Appraisal than study guides developed with a content-centred approach.

These main hypotheses generate a number of sub-hypotheses, which will be explained in Chapter 3 (cf. 3.4).

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

I have structured this study into five chapters. In the present chapter I have contextualised the study by describing the central research problem and by briefly sketching some pedagogical and linguistic views relating to it. In order to focus the research I outlined the aims of the study and presented the research questions relating to these aims. I also formulated the two main hypotheses of the present study.

In Chapter 2 I survey the literature in the two areas that most significantly influenced my development of an analytical framework for the testing of the hypotheses. As the research questions relate to the field of education and, more specifically, to the principles underlying a particular teaching approach, namely student-centredness, I give a brief account of pedagogical views underlying the notion of student-centredness. In my discussions I focus on the principles advanced in transformative learning theory and constructivism and present some views on whole-person learning. Because of the association I draw between student-centredness and

the acknowledgement of the social presence of students in distance education settings, I also briefly present some views relating to the social presence theory. I then examine how the social presence of discourse participants in a discourse situation is explored linguistically.

As I analyse language from a social perspective in the present study, many of the analytic principles I adopt are based on those advanced in systemic functional linguistics (SFL), and so I give a brief overview of SFL theory. I then discuss the work of other linguists who also explore how speakers or authors mark their own social presence, and also that of their listeners or readers, in their discourses. In the process of doing so I discuss the work of scholars who see social presence in terms of 'involvement', truth function, evidentiality, politeness, evaluation and appraisal. Because of the central importance to the present study of the views expressed about 'involvement' and appraisal, I elaborate particularly on these notions.

In Chapter 3 I explain my research method and analytical framework. As my study is of a quantitative nature, I explain in detail how I analysed my data. I also give an account of the statistical approach that was followed to interpret the significance of my research results. Matters relating to my data corpus are discussed and, most importantly, I give a detailed account of the procedures I followed in testing the two hypotheses of the study. As was mentioned, these hypotheses focus on the relative 'involvement' of distance education study guides and on the use of Appraisal values in such texts.

In testing Hypothesis 1 my focus is on 'involvement'. In this regard, I describe how I used some of the features Biber associates with 'involvement' to measure the relative 'involvement' of the study guides I analysed. In testing Hypothesis 2 an association is drawn between 'involvement' and aspects of Appraisal theory. I thus explain my association of these notions in detail and also give a detailed account of how I analysed my research data in terms of the Appraisal subsystems of ATTITUDE, GRADUATION and ENGAGEMENT.

Chapter 4 consists of a report of the results I obtained in testing the two hypotheses that were posed. In the testing of Hypothesis 1, I first present and describe the overall count for features of 'involvement' in the old and new study guides under analysis. I then present, describe, compare and interpret the most significant research results for each of the study guides individually. First I discuss the implications of the overall 'involvement' results for the old and new study guides and then I discuss and explain implications of the research results for each of the study guides individually. In drawing conclusions about the validity of the hypothesis, I

associate the relative 'involvement' of the guides with student-centredness.

In the testing of Hypothesis 2, I analyse and compare the most significant 'involvement' features of each of the individual study guides in terms of the Appraisal subsystems of ATTITUDE, GRADUATION and ENGAGEMENT. In drawing conclusions about the validity of the hypothesis, I associate values of Appraisal with student-centredness.

In Chapter 5 I show how my research results and the conclusions reached in Chapter 4 relate to my research questions. I first address the theoretical aim of the study and highlight the value of integrating aspects of 'involvement' analysis with aspects of Appraisal analysis. I then address the descriptive aim of the study and focus on how student-centred study guides differ from content-centred ones with regard to 'involvement' and appraisal. Special attention is paid to differences in the projection of social presence with regard to students, the development of interpersonal relationships, the negotiation of solidarity and the identities developed for students and lecturers. Lastly, I address the applied aim of the study and highlight the potential value of the theoretical framework and the findings of the present study with regard to the development of student-centred texts.