ANALYSING 'INVOLVEMENT' IN DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDY GUIDES: AN APPRAISAL-BASED APPROACH

by

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to extend our current understanding of the linguistic characteristics of student-centred distance education texts. This aim links directly with the shift in South Africa from an objectivistic, content-centred teaching approach towards an outcomes-based, student-centred one. Partly because few guidelines exist as to what the linguistic characteristics of student-centred texts are, developers of such texts in a distance education environment face many challenges and thus, a secondary, more indirect aim of this study is to benefit developers of distance education study materials.

In view of the educational context in which the study is situated, a brief overview of some of the most relevant pedagogic perspectives underlying the notion of student-centredness is provided. Student-centredness is then interpreted in terms of Biber's (1988) construal of 'involvement' and also in terms of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): more particularly, the interpersonal discourse semantic metafunction of SFL and on insights developed in Appraisal Theory. The focus of the study is thus on 'involvement' and the expression of evaluative stance, and consequently on attitudinal language through 'involvement' features. Of particular interest to the present study is how learning is advanced through the use of attitudinal language.

The data for the study include six print-based distance education teaching texts (study guides) from three different academic departments at the University of South Africa. Two guides from each department are analysed and compared: one developed by way of a content-centred approach to teaching and the other by way of a student-centred approach. The linguistic construal of evaluative stance in these guides is analysed and interpreted in interpersonal terms. The thesis develops a theoretically motivated explanation of the linguistic characteristics of student-centred distance education texts, and in the process provides evidence of the interpersonal and pedagogic relevance of evaluative stance in the context of distance education.

Some of the main conclusions reached are that student-centred texts differ from content-centred ones with regard to: the extent to which the social presence of discourse participants is signalled in such texts; the extent to which solidarity is negotiated with students; the participation of students in the knowledge construction process; the relationship that prevails between lecturers and students; and the identity developed for both students as well as lecturers.

Key terms: ‘involvement’, attitude, affect, judgement, appreciation, graduation, engagement, appraisal, evaluation, student-centred, content-centred, solidarity negotiation.

I declare that *Analysing 'involvement' in distance education study guides: an Appraisal-based approach* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

_____ _____

SIGNATURE DATE

(Gerda Mischke)

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