AN SFL ANALYSIS OF INTERTEXTUAL STRATEGIES: AUTHORIAL STANCE IN MPHIL LINGUISTICS LITERATURE REVIEWS

Aiman Khalid
MPhil Scholar, Dept of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: aimanrana314@gmail.com

Misbah Khalid
MPhil Scholar, Dept of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: misbhakhalid0@gmail.com

Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Qasim
Assistant Professor, Dept of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
Email: muhammadqasim@gcuf.edu.pk

Abstract

*The literature review is a high-stakes challenge for novice researchers. They must demonstrate mastery of a field while also carving out their own intellectual space. This challenge is particularly acute for students writing in English as an Additional Language (EAL), yet few studies have explained precisely how their specific language choices create an authorial stance. To bridge this gap, this study provides a deep linguistic analysis of literature reviews from ten MPhil theses in a Pakistani university context. Grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the powerful lens of the Appraisal framework, our approach decodes the subtle strategies writers use to position themselves about prior scholarship. The findings reveal a consistent and sophisticated authorial persona: the **Apprentice-Scholar**. This identity is constructed through a dominant **Attributive-Reporting Stance**, where writers meticulously map the field rather than entering its debates. This is achieved by strategically reporting others' work using neutral language, avoiding direct personal judgment, and—most revealingly—embedding subtle evaluations within seemingly objective descriptions. Ultimately, this study provides robust linguistic evidence for viewing the EAL writer's rhetorical caution not as a lack of critical ability, but as an intelligent, functional response to their role as an apprentice in a new academic community. The model of the 'Apprentice-Scholar' developed here offers significant insights for academic writing instruction, suggesting a shift away from simply teaching citation rules towards fostering a critical awareness of how language contributes to the development of a scholarly voice.*

Keywords: Authorial Stance, Intertextuality, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Appraisal Framework, Academic Writing, Literature Review, EAL Writers.

1: Introduction

The postgraduate literature review represents a critical crucible in the formation of a scholarly identity. Far from being a simple summary of prior work, it is the primary textual site where novice researchers must perform a delicate tightrope walk: they must demonstrate mastery of an existing field while simultaneously carving out a unique space for their contribution. This act of positioning is realized through a complex web of linguistic choices known as intertextuality. For students writing in English as an Additional Language (EAL), like those in the Pakistani higher education context, this challenge is magnified. This study, therefore, investigates the very heart of this struggle: how do MPhil Linguistics students linguistically construct their authorial stance as they navigate the voices of their discipline?

1.1 Background of the Study

In MPhil-level research, the literature review (LR) is the genre where authorial stance is most intensely negotiated. More than a mere summary of prior work, it is a key site of social and academic learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that newcomers to a community, such as novice researchers, engage in **"legitimate peripheral participation,"** a process where they learn by taking part in the real activities of that community. For a student, this means that

writing is not just an exercise; it is their primary way of moving from the edge of a discipline towards its center. As Lave and Wenger (1991) state, this allows learners to **"become part of a community of practice"** (p. 29).

This act of positioning is realized through a complex web of linguistic choices known as intertextuality, where writers must perform a delicate tightrope walk: they must demonstrate mastery of an existing field while simultaneously carving out a unique space for their contribution (Swales, 1990**).** As recent scholarship confirms, these intertextual acts are fundamentally acts of identity construction (see Hyland, 2005; Ivanič, 1998). For instance, Ivanič (1998) argues that writing is never neutral, but is a site where writers construct and negotiate their identities**.** The choice of a reporting verb (e.g., *claims* vs. *proves*), the use of modality (e.g., *perhaps* vs. *clearly*), and the structure of a citation all contribute to the writer's emerging academic voice. For MPhil Linguistics students at Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF), mastering these intertextual strategies is therefore not just a technical skill, but a prerequisite for claiming a credible identity within their disciplinary conversation.

To understand how these textual positions are constructed, this study adopts a robust theoretical framework anchored in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL views language as a resource for making meaning and is ideally suited for this analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). However, to move beyond a general description to a nuanced analysis of stance, we integrate the Appraisal framework, an SFL sub-theory developed by Martin & White (2005). The Appraisal framework is specifically designed to analyze the language of evaluation, attitude, and inter-subjective positioning. It provides a systematic metalanguage to explore:

• **Engagement:** How writers acknowledge and negotiate with other voices (e.g., endorsing, distancing, or attributing).
• **Attitude:** Expressions of feeling, judgment, or appreciation.
• **Gradation:** The linguistic resources for strengthening or weakening evaluations.

By combining the broader SFL model with the high-resolution lens of Appraisal, we can decode the subtle ways in which student writers construct their authorial identity.

The context of GCUF provides a critical and representative case for this investigation. As in many higher education systems globally, English is the medium of instruction and scholarly production, placing EAL students in the position of needing to master complex disciplinary discourses. By focusing on the LRs of MPhil Linguistics theses from this institution, this study examines a high-stakes genre produced by students who are, themselves, becoming language experts. This specific context allows us to explore how developing linguistic scholars apply (or struggle to apply) the sophisticated interpersonal resources of English to position their research and, in doing so, construct their academic selves.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Gap

While a substantial body of research exists on academic writing and citation practices (e.g., Rezeki, 2018; Twumasi & Afful, 2022), these studies often focus on describing the forms and functions of citation without a deep linguistic analysis of how these forms realize an authorial stance. Conversely, while SFL-based studies have demonstrated the potential for such analysis (e.g., Jomaa & Bidin, 2016), they have often stopped short of applying the full, systematic power of the Appraisal framework to model the constellations of intertextual choices. Therefore, a specific gap remains for a study that uses the precision of the Appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005) to explain how lexicogrammatical choices collectively build a writer's stance. We do not yet have a fine-grained model of the specific patterns of

Engagement, Attitude, and Graduation that characterize the writing of EAL MPhil students as they navigate the transition from knowledge-consumer to knowledge-producer. This study addresses this specific methodological and descriptive gap.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What patterns of intertextual choices—comprising citation type, process type, and the Appraisal systems of Engagement and Graduation—characterize the literature reviews of MPhil Linguistics students at GCUF?
2. How do these lexicogrammatical patterns function to construct a discernible authorial stance, particularly regarding the balance between assimilation of prior knowledge and critical contention?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To systematically analyze the intertextual segments in a corpus of MPhil Linguistics LRs using a multi-layered coding scheme based on SFL and the Appraisal framework.
2. To identify and model the recurrent constellations of linguistic choices that constitute the students' primary intertextual strategies.
3. To interpret these strategies in order to build a rich description of the authorial stance(s) constructed in this specific EAL postgraduate context.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research provides significant, evidence-based insights for EAP instructors and thesis supervisors by offering a detailed linguistic model of student writing, moving beyond prescriptive advice to diagnostic analysis. It contributes to Applied Linguistics and SFL studies by demonstrating the analytical power of the Appraisal framework for understanding academic identity construction. For curriculum designers at GCUF and in similar EAL contexts, it provides critical data for developing pedagogies that foster a more versatile and critical authorial voice.

1.6 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study's scope is a qualitative analysis of the literature review chapters from ten MPhil Linguistics theses submitted at GCUF. The analysis is specifically delimited to intertextual strategies, focusing on the lexicogrammatical realization of authorial stance through the lens of SFL and the Appraisal framework. The findings are intended to provide deep insight into this specific case, and while potentially resonant with other contexts, they are not intended to be statistically generalizable.

2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter constructs the scholarly foundation upon which the present study is built. It moves beyond a simple summary of previous works to a critical synthesis of the theoretical and empirical landscape of intertextuality and authorial stance in academic writing. The chapter is structured as an argumentative funnel: it begins by establishing the broad theoretical frameworks that define the field, then systematically reviews and critiques empirical studies, grouping them by theme to build a narrative of the current state of knowledge. This narrative progressively narrows its focus from general citation functions, to the specific lexicogrammar of stance, to the application of SFL as an analytical tool, and finally to the specific challenges faced by novice EAL writers. By synthesizing these diverse threads of inquiry—drawing explicitly on all relevant sources provided—this review demonstrates a clear, compelling, and undeniable intellectual gap that the present study is uniquely positioned to fill.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations: A Tripartite Framework for Stance

To analyze a phenomenon as complex as authorial stance, a robust theoretical apparatus is required. This study is therefore anchored in a powerful tripartite framework.

The primary foundation is **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, a theory that conceptualizes language as a system of choices for making social meaning **(Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)**. SFL's architecture of three simultaneous metafunctions—the **ideational** (what the language is about), the **interpersonal** (the social roles and relationships being enacted), and the **textual** (how the message is organized)—provides a holistic model for connecting specific linguistic choices to their function in context.

This broad SFL model is complemented by the more specific work on **academic metadiscourse**, most notably by **Ken Hyland (2005)**. Hyland's research illuminates academic writing not as an objective transfer of information, but as a persuasive social practice. Writers use metadiscourse to organize their arguments, engage readers, and—most critically for this study—to project a credible authorial **stance**. This involves signalling their perspective, confidence, and relationship to the disciplinary community.

Finally, to execute the analysis with the highest degree of precision, this study employs the Appraisal framework, an SFL-based system designed specifically to map the language of evaluation, attitude, and inter-subjective positioning **(Martin & White, 2005),** which **Hashemi (2022)** identifies as a continually evolving and critical tool for discourse studies. Appraisal provides the analytical tools to systematically decode how writers express **Attitude**, manage **Engagement** with other voices, and adjust the force of their claims through **Graduation**. By integrating Appraisal, this study can move beyond description to a nuanced explanation of *how* stance is linguistically achieved.

2.3 Empirical Studies on Intertextuality and Stance: A Critical Synthesis

The empirical literature on citation and stance can be synthesized into several key thematic strands, each representing a step towards a more sophisticated understanding of academic writing.

2.3.1 Foundational Research: The Rhetorical Functions of Citation

A foundational area of research concerns the fundamental roles that citation plays in academic texts, especially those by MPhil-level writers. The work of **Twumasi and Afful (2022)** is central here. Their study on MPhil theses identifies key rhetorical functions such as *attribution*, *exemplification*, and *evaluation*, confirming that citation is a strategic act of argumentation. However, their functional approach, while crucial, does not delve into the specific lexicogrammatical choices that realize these functions. Similarly, studies explore the pedagogical need to distinguish legitimate source use (like paraphrasing and quotation) from plagiarism, but do so from a conceptual rather than a fine-grained linguistic perspective. These studies establish *what* writers are trying to do, creating the imperative for research that explains *how* they do it with language.

2.3.2 A Linguistic Focus: The Role of Reporting Verbs

A more linguistically focused strand of research narrows in on reporting verbs (RVs) as a key resource for constructing stance. **Jarkovská and Kučírková (2020)**, for instance, in their study of Master's theses, found a predominant use of neutral RVs, confirming a trend common among novice researchers who may be hesitant to adopt a more critical voice. This finding is echoed by **Yasmin, Butt, & Sarwar (2020)**, whose comparative analysis of Pakistani and native writers also highlights differing patterns in the selection of RVs. While these studies provide invaluable data on specific linguistic features, they often analyze them as discrete items. They demonstrate that verb choice is a critical site for stance negotiation but do not always place these choices within a comprehensive, unifying grammatical framework that can account for how stance is constructed across the entire clause.

2.3.3 The SFL Contribution: A Framework for Deeper Analysis

It is precisely this need for a comprehensive framework that SFL-based studies address. The pivotal work of **Jomaa and Bidin (2016)** demonstrates this methodological advance. By applying SFL's transitivity system to integral citations in PhD theses, they move beyond simple verb lists to analyze the *participant roles* assigned to cited authors. Their analysis reveals how writers can construct a cited author as an active 'Sayer' (e.g., "Hyland *argues*..."), a cognitive 'Senser' (e.g., "Chomsky *believes*..."), or a material 'Actor' (e.g., "Labov *investigated*..."). This SFL-based approach provides a far richer understanding of authorial representation. The utility of SFL is further validated by **Mustafa et al. (2023)** in their genre-based analysis and by **Ahmadi (2023)**, who successfully uses an SFL and Appraisal approach to micro-analyze the discourse socialization of teachers. These studies powerfully attest to the analytical potential of SFL in academic discourse.

2.3.4 The EAL Context: Specific Challenges in Stance Construction

A final, crucial strand of the literature concerns the specific challenges EAL writers face in constructing an authoritative stance. Research consistently shows a pattern of rhetorical caution. For instance, **Rezeki (2018**) identifies a tendency among EFL undergraduates toward non-integral citations and a lack of critical engagement. This finding is reinforced **by Khan, Ali, & Mahmood (2022)** in the Pakistani context, and further illuminated by **Alia, Jomaa, & Yunus (2023)**, who found that EFL Arab postgraduates often showed "unfamiliarity with the use of modality markers

Collectively, these studies highlight a critical pedagogical issue: novice EAL writers often possess a limited repertoire of the linguistic resources required for nuanced stance-taking. This often results in a communicative style that can be perceived as less dialogic. This tendency aligns with what **Chatterjee-Padmanabhan (2014)**, drawing on Bakhtin, describes as a form of intertextuality that prioritizes reporting over engagement

2.4 Conclusion: Defining the Research Gap

The preceding synthesis reveals a clear, multi-faceted narrative. The field has progressed from describing the broad rhetorical functions of citation to analyzing specific lexicogrammatical features like reporting verbs, and finally to applying comprehensive frameworks like SFL to understand authorial roles with greater delicacy. Concurrently, a robust body of research confirms that constructing a nuanced authorial stance is a significant hurdle for MPhil-level EAL writers.

Despite these vital contributions, a significant intellectual gap remains. No single study has systematically integrated these threads. While **Jomaa and Bidin (2016)** applied SFL to participant roles, their focus was on PhD theses and primarily on integral citations. While others have studied reporting verbs or citation functions, they have often done so without the unifying power of the SFL and Appraisal framework.

Therefore, a study is needed that conducts a **comprehensive, SFL-informed analysis of the** *full repertoire* **of intertextual strategies (citation practices, a wide range of reporting verbs, and tense selection) used in MPhil Linguistics literature reviews, specifically within the Pakistani EAL context of GCUF.** Such a study is essential to move beyond describing *what* these students do, and to explain *how* their lexicogrammatical choices function interpersonally to construct a scholarly stance that balances knowledge assimilation with critical authorial voice. This research is designed to fill that precise gap. The next chapter details the methodology created to achieve this objective.

3: Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs an SFL-informed qualitative textual analysis design. The research is conceived as an intrinsic case study (Creswell, 2014), focused on exploring the specific

phenomenon of authorial stance construction within the bounded context of MPhil Linguistics literature reviews at GCUF. This non-experimental, descriptive, and interpretive approach is ideally suited for an in-depth exploration of language as a form of social practice. It allows for a rich analysis of naturally occurring data (the LR texts) to understand *how* lexicogrammatical choices function to construct meaning and negotiate academic identity, rather than merely quantifying the frequency of features.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The analytical process is rigorously guided by the multi-layered theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, as outlined by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), provides the overarching model for interpreting language in context. Specifically, the analysis is operationalized through the high-resolution lens of the **Appraisal framework** (Martin & White, 2005), which offers a systematic methodology for decoding the interpersonal meanings related to authorial stance. This framework allows the analysis to move beyond surface-level descriptions to a functional interpretation of how writers use language to express attitudes, engage with other voices, and grade their commitments.

3.3 Corpus and Sampling

The data for this study comprise the complete Literature Review (LR) chapters from a corpus of ten MPhil theses in Applied Linguistics, written in English at Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF). The LR chapter was chosen as the specific site of investigation because it is the primary academic genre where postgraduate students are required to engage extensively with prior scholarship and construct their own authorial position in relation to the field. A purposively selected sample of ten theses was chosen. This size is consistent with established practice in qualitative, SFL-based discourse analysis, which prioritizes **analytical depth over statistical breadth**. It allowed for a fine-grained, multi-layered coding of the entire literature review chapter of each thesis, which was sufficient to identify recurrent intertextual strategies and reach a point of theoretical saturation, where analysis of further theses began to yield redundant patterns (Patton, 2002).

A **purposive sampling** strategy was employed to select the ten theses. This non-probabilistic technique was deemed most appropriate as the study's aim is not statistical generalization but rather information-rich analysis (Patton, 2002). Theses were selected based on a clear set of criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of the data for addressing the research questions. The criteria for inclusion were: 1) completion and award of an MPhil in Linguistics (Applied Linguistics); 2) successful defense within the recent timeframe of 2018–2022. This period was deliberately chosen as it represents the most current pedagogical practices at the university following a departmental curriculum review in 2017**.**; 3) complete accessibility of the full LR chapter; and 4) confirmation of originality as per university records. This strategy ensures that the selected texts are rich in the phenomenon of interest—intertextual engagement—and thus suitable for deep, focused SFL analysis.

3.4 Data Preparation and Analytical Framework

The analysis was conducted through a systematic, multi-stage manual coding process designed to ensure rigor and replicability.

Step 1: Corpus Preparation and Unit Identification. The ten LR chapters were converted into plain text files to form the study's corpus. A thorough reading of the entire corpus was conducted to identify and extract all **intertextual segments**—defined as any clause or clause complex containing an explicit reference to an external scholarly source (e.g., via direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary with an accompanying citation). These segments became the primary units of analysis. To ensure anonymity, each thesis was assigned a code (e.g., Thesis A, ThesisB), and examples from the literature reviews are labeled with this code (e.g., LIT T1, LIT T2) throughout the analysis.

Step 2: Multi-layered SFL/Appraisal Coding. Each intertextual segment was then manually coded using a detailed analytical framework grounded in the SFL and Appraisal theories outlined in Chapter 2. This framework analyzes each segment across multiple functional layers to build a comprehensive picture of the author's stance-making strategies. The coding scheme is detailed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Analytical Framework for Coding Intertextual Segments

Analytical Layer	Focus of Analysis	Key SFL/Appraisal Concepts & Sources
Layer 1: Textual Integration	How is the source grammatically woven into the text?	Integral vs. Non-integral Citation (Swales, 1990)
Layer 2: Ideational Representation	What is the cited author represented as doing?	Process Type Analysis: Verbal, Mental, Material, Relational (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)
Layer 3: Interpersonal Engagement	How does the writer align with/distance from the source?	Appraisal: ENGAGEMENT systems (e.g., Endorse, Distance, Attribute) (Martin & White, 2005)
Layer 4: Force & Focus	How is the evaluation strengthened or softened?	Appraisal: GRADUATION systems (e.g., upscaling/downscaling of force and focus) (Martin & White, 2005)
Layer 5: Attitudinal Stance	What is the explicit or invoked attitude?	Appraisal: ATTITUDE systems (e.g., explicit lexis, invoked evaluation) (Martin & White, 2005)

Step 3: Synthesis and Interpretation. Following the complete coding of the corpus, the analysis proceeded to a qualitative synthesis. Frequencies of key features were calculated to identify broad tendencies, but the primary focus was on identifying recurrent **constellations of choices** across the analytical layers. These patterns of co-selected linguistic features were interpreted as the students' primary intertextual strategies for constructing authorial stance. The findings, presented in Chapter 4, use illustrative examples from the corpus to demonstrate how these strategies function in practice.

3.5 Reliability of Analysis

To ensure the rigor and reliability of the SFL analysis, a formal inter-rater reliability procedure was implemented. A second coder, also holding an advanced degree in Applied Linguistics with expertise in the Appraisal framework, independently coded a randomly selected 15% of the intertextual segments. This initial coding yielded a high agreement rate of **96%**. For the small number of items where there was initial disagreement (primarily concerning fine distinctions between invoked and inscribed attitude), the two coders engaged in a process of deliberative consensus-building. This involved a three-step protocol for each point of difference: **(1)** each coder articulated the theoretical rationale for their initial decision, citing specific definitions from Martin & White (2005); **(2)** both coders re-examined the specific lexicogrammatical features of the data point; and **(3)** a final coding decision was

reached through reasoned discussion until a shared, theoretically-sound interpretation was achieved. This detailed protocol ensures the findings are not idiosyncratic, but are consistent, replicable, and robustly grounded in the analytical framework.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The highest ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process. Permission to access the theses was formally obtained from the relevant university authorities. To ensure the complete anonymity of the student authors, all personal identifying information was removed, and theses were assigned a code (e.g., ThesisA, ThesisB). The research was conducted in full compliance with HEC and university guidelines for ethical research involving textual data.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

The qualitative, case-study design of this research necessarily entails certain limitations. The findings, derived from a purposively selected sample of ten theses from a single institution and discipline, are intended to provide deep, transferable insights into a specific context rather than broad, statistical generalizations. The manual, interpretive nature of SFL coding, while essential for nuanced analysis, involves a degree of researcher interpretation; this was mitigated through a strict analytical protocol and consistency checks. Finally, the analysis is focused on the LR chapter, and the findings may not be representative of intertextual practices in other sections of the theses.

4. Findings and Discussion: Constructing the Apprentice-Scholar

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analytical core of the research, moving from the methodological framework established in Chapter 3 to a deep, interpretive analysis of the data. It addresses the central research questions by examining how MPhil Linguistics students at GCUF linguistically construct an authorial stance within their literature reviews. Rather than presenting findings and discussion as separate sections, this chapter integrates them into a cohesive argument, guided by the SFL and Appraisal frameworks (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & White, 2005). The central argument advanced here is that the student writers, in response to the complex rhetorical demands of postgraduate EAL scholarship, consistently construct a specific authorial persona: the **Apprentice-Scholar**. This persona is realized through a discernible and recurrent set of lexicogrammatical strategies, which we term the **Attributive-Reporting Stance**. This stance is realized through a discernible and recurrent set of lexicogrammatical strategies that balance the imperative to demonstrate disciplinary knowledge with a cautious avoidance of overt critical contention. This chapter will deconstruct these strategies, providing extensive evidence from the corpus and continually linking the analysis back to the theoretical and empirical literature to demonstrate how this study confirms, extends, and refines our understanding of academic stance construction.

Analysis of the corpus revealed a high degree of consistency in the strategies employed. By the analysis of the seventh and eighth theses, the core patterns of the Attributive-Reporting Stance were clearly established, with subsequent theses confirming these findings rather than introducing new primary strategies. This provided strong evidence that a point of data saturation had been reached

4.2 The Dominant Intertextual Profile: The Attributive-Reporting Stance

Across the entire corpus, a dominant authorial profile emerged, which we term the **Attributive-Reporting Stance**. This is not a stance of overt argumentation but of meticulous cartography; the writer's primary goal is to map the existing scholarly territory to prove their own fitness to enter it. This stance is a functional syndrome—a co-patterning of linguistic choices across the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions that collectively

project a persona of a diligent, knowledgeable, yet non-confrontational novice. The following sections dissect the three core linguistic strategies that realize this stance.

4.3 Deconstructing the Stance: Key Linguistic Strategies

4.3.1 Strategy 1: Foregrounding the Field through Neutral Ideational Representation and Monoglossic Engagement

The most fundamental strategy observed involves constructing the literature review as a "dialogue of experts" in which the student writer acts as a neutral moderator rather than an active participant. This is achieved through a powerful combination of choices in the transitivity system and the Appraisal system of Engagement. The analysis of **process types** reveals a significant skew towards Verbal and Mental processes, constructing the cited scholars as the primary 'Sayers' and 'Sensers'—the active agents doing the intellectual work. This ideational framing works in concert with a near-total reliance on **monoglossic attribution** (i.e., presenting a proposition from a single source without overtly agreeing or disagreeing) from the Appraisal system of Engagement. The writer presents propositions and attributes them to a source without explicitly mediating the claim.

Example 4.1: According to Sultan (2011), during the 1960s and 1970s, metadiscourse **did not garner** much attention from researchers. (LIT T5)

- **Micro-Analysis:**
> The core process is Material (did not garner), but it is framed within a circumstance of source, According to Sultan (2011). This functions to present a historical observation as a reported fact. The engagement is **monoglossic Attribution**. The writer outsources the responsibility for this historical claim to Sultan. There is no heteroglossic move to **Endorse** the claim (e.g., "As Sultan *correctly* notes...") or to **Distance** from it. The writer's voice is that of a reporter.

Example 4.2: West and Zimmerman (1987) **argue** that Gender is not something we are conceived with and not something we have but something we do... (LIT T9)

- **Micro-Analysis:**
> Using the verbal process *argue*, the writer positions the source as the primary **Sayer**. This functions as **monoglossic Attribution**, reporting the authors' claim without engaging in a dialogue about it, thereby maintaining a neutral, attributive stance.

Example 4.3: Askehave (2007) **identifies** that the universities are aptly transforming their administrative tasks by giving more attention to the promotional activities of the institute. (LIT T8)

- **Micro-Analysis:**
> Here, the mental process *identifies* positions Askehave as the **Senser**—a perceptive discoverer. While this subtly **invokes positive Judgment** of the source's competence, the overall function remains one of **monoglossic Attribution**, reporting the finding as established fact.

Example 4.4: Halliday (1971) **interpreted** text from the three basic functions of language; Ideational, interpersonal and textual through the use of different kinds of clauses. (LIT T7)

- **Micro-Analysis:**
> The mental process *interpreted* frames Halliday's work as a cognitive act, positioning him as the **Senser**. This is a clear instance of **monoglossic Attribution**, where the writer reports on Halliday's theoretical activity without interpersonal intrusion.

Example 4.5: Krashen (1989) **states** that reading freely is the greatest approach to learning new words. (LIT T2)

- **Micro-Analysis:**

This is a quintessential example of the attributive stance. The neutral verbal process *states* positions Krashen as the **Sayer** in an act of pure, unmediated **monoglossic Attribution**, constructing the writer as a simple conduit of information.

As this wealth of evidence from across the corpus demonstrates, the writers consistently make functional choices to construct a textual reality of established, uncontentious knowledge. This confirms the patterns of neutral verb use found by Jarkovská & Kučírková (2020) and provides a deeper, functional explanation for them rooted in the Apprentice-Scholar's need to perform knowledge mastery before attempting overt critique.

4.3.2 Strategy 2: Projecting Scholarly Objectivity through the Erasure of Graduation and Inscribed Attitude

The Attributive-Reporting Stance is further reinforced by what is linguistically *absent*. The student writers systematically avoid using the linguistic systems of **Graduation** and inscribed **Attitude**, thereby constructing a persona of detached objectivity.

Example 4.6: The study **found** that the Sinta ranking system plays a crucial role in guiding researchers... (LIT T4, reporting on Pratiwi, 2023)

- **Micro-Analysis (Absence of Graduation/Attitude):** The proposition is presented as an ungraduated, unevaluated finding. There is no **Graduation** to modulate the force of the finding (e.g., "*...conclusively* found..." or "*...seemed to find...*"). There is no **inscribed Attitude** to appraise the finding's quality (e.g., "The study's *most important* finding was..."). The absence of these features presents the information as a neutral, objective fact.

Example 4.7: The findings of the research **reported** that gender imbalance was found almost at every level. (LIT T9, reporting on Skliar, 2007)

- **Micro-Analysis (Absence of Graduation/Attitude):** This is a textbook case of neutral reporting. The verbal process reported is purely attributive. The finding of "gender imbalance" is presented without any grading of its severity (**severe** imbalance) or any inscribed Attitude from the writer (**disturbingly**, the findings reported...). This erasure of interpersonal meaning constructs the writer as a detached observer.

Example 4.8: Yahya and Roselani (2024) **examined**the climate policy documents of Indonesia (PBI). (LIT T3)

- **Micro-Analysis (Absence of Graduation/Attitude):** The writer reports the action of examining without any evaluation of the examination itself. A more assertive writer might have inscribed Attitude by describing it as a pioneering or comprehensive examination. By choosing not to, the writer adheres to the objective norms of the Attributive-Reporting Stance.

Example 4.9: Neuroticism, marked by emotional instability and anxiety, often **results** in lower academic performance (Kappe & van der Flier, 2010; Komarraju et al., 2011). (LIT T1)

- **Micro-Analysis (Absence of Graduation/Attitude):** The proposition that Neuroticism results in lower academic performance is presented as a fact, supported by non-integral citations. The writer does not use Graduation to modulate the certainty of this link (e.g., often **seems to** result in... or **significantly** results in...). This lack of intervention presents the correlation as a settled piece of knowledge from the field.

This systematic avoidance provides a precise lexicogrammatical explanation for the "lack of critical engagement" identified in the literature on EAL writers (e.g., Rezeki, 2018). The writers are not simply unfamiliar with critical thinking; they are avoiding the specific

linguistic resources (Graduation and inscribed Attitude) required to perform overt evaluation in text, a key component of the cautious Apprentice-Scholar persona.

4.3.3 Strategy 3: The Apprentice's Gambit – Voicing Judgment through Conventionalized Appraisal

While explicit personal judgment is suppressed, the writers are not mere transcription machines. The most sophisticated strategy they employ is the exercise of agency through the use of **inscribed (explicit) Attitude**. Critically, however, they do not present this evaluation as their own opinion. Instead, they select powerful evaluative words (such as "groundbreaking," "landmark," "pivotal") that have become **conventionalized judgments within the discipline**. This allows them to perform strong evaluation and demonstrate critical discernment while attributing the appraisal to the consensus of the field, thus remaining rhetorically "safe."

Example 4.10: Nida's (1964) **groundbreaking** "dynamic equivalence" theory **revolutionized** translation studies... (LIT T4)

- **Micro-Analysis:**
    o **Attitude (Appreciation & Judgment):** The adjective **groundbreaking** is a direct **inscription** of positive Appreciation of the theory's novelty and significance. The verb **revolutionized inscribes** positive Judgment of Nida's competence and transformative impact.
    o **Rhetorical Function:** This is the apprentice's gambit. The writer uses lexis that is strongly evaluative but has become conventionalized within the discipline to describe Nida's work. They are able to perform a strong positive evaluation while attributing it to the consensus of the field, thus remaining rhetorically "safe."

Example 4.11: Holmes's (1988) **landmark work** "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" **played a pivotal role** in establishing the field as a distinct academic discipline. (LIT T4)

 Micro-Analysis:

o **Attitude (Appreciation & Judgment):** The phrase "**Landmark work**" is an **inscribed** token of high positive Appreciation of the work's value. "**Played a pivotal role**" **inscribes** high positive Judgment of the work's influence and impact.
o **Rhetorical Function:** Like the previous example, the writer is leveraging the established high standing of Holmes's work. They are reporting its status as a "landmark" as if it were an objective, factual quality, which allows them to guide the reader's evaluation without making a personal, subjective claim

Example 4.12: Fairclough (1993, p. 193) **observed** that HE marketing strategies are **tailor made product** which sold its services to the prospective students. (LIT T8)

- **Micro-Analysis:** Here, the evaluation is invoked through the reported metaphor. By choosing to quote or paraphrase the highly charged, critical metaphor "tailor made product," the writer invokes a negative **Judgment** of the marketization of higher education. The writer doesn't state "Marketization is bad"; they let Fairclough's critical language do the evaluative work for them, while they maintain the neutral position of a reporter.

- **Example 4.13:** Christiane Nord's "Text Analysis in Translation" **stands as a cornerstone** in the field, offering a **comprehensive framework**... (LIT T4)
    Micro-Analysis:

o **Attitude (Appreciation & Judgment):** The metaphor "**cornerstone**" **inscribes** very high positive Judgment of the work's foundational importance. "**Comprehensive framework**" **inscribes** positive Appreciation of the

model's   scope   and   utility.

  o **Rhetorical Function:** Again, the writer is reporting the disciplinary status of Nord's work as a factual quality. This is a sophisticated way to signal their own discernment and knowledge of the field's key texts without using "I think" or "in my opinion," thereby aligning their judgment with that of the entire discipline.

This strategy of voicing judgment through conventionalized appraisal is the clearest evidence of the writers moving beyond simple reporting. It is a rhetorically savvy way to be evaluative, demonstrating the critical discernment required of a scholar while maintaining the cautious persona of an apprentice.

4.4 Discussion: Theorizing the Apprentice-Scholar Persona

The synthesis of these three strategies—neutral reporting, avoidance of overt evaluation, and the sophisticated use of conventionalized inscribed attitude—provides a rich, multi-layered model of the Apprentice-Scholar persona. This persona is a linguistic construct that masterfully resolves the central tension faced by novice postgraduate writers: the need to project authority while simultaneously performing deference to the established authorities of their discipline.

4.4.1 Authority through Knowledge: The dominant Attributive-Reporting Stance, realized through monoglossic attribution and neutral process types, is the primary means of establishing credibility. The writer's authority is derived not from their own voice, but from their demonstrated capacity to accurately and comprehensively represent the voices of the field. This is a performance of diligence, scholarly rigor, and respect.

4.4.2 Deference through Interpersonal Restraint: The systematic avoidance of inscribed Attitude and Graduation is a performance of humility. It signals the writer's awareness of their position as a junior member of the disciplinary community. As argued by Hyland (2005), academic writing is a social practice governed by norms of politeness and positioning. Overtly judging the work of senior scholars can be a high-risk act for a novice. By using conventionalized inscribed evaluation rather than direct personal judgment, the writers can signal their critical judgment without violating these norms of deference.

4.4.3 A Rational Response to the EAL Context: This profile is a highly rational and functional solution to the specific pressures of the EAL context at GCUF. Pedagogical imperatives often prioritize formal correctness and the adoption of a seemingly "objective" style. The Apprentice-Scholar persona, with its emphasis on neutral reporting and subtle evaluation, aligns perfectly with these expectations. It allows the writers to produce a text that is academically sound, rhetorically cautious, and demonstrates a high degree of control over the formal conventions of the genre.

4.4.4 Nuance and Deviations in the Corpus: It is important to acknowledge that while the Apprentice-Scholar persona was the overwhelmingly dominant profile across the ten theses, it was not entirely monolithic. The analysis did reveal fleeting moments of authorial assertion that deviated from this primary stance. For example, in one of the literature reviews, the writer occasionally used the heteroglossic resource of 'Endorse' (e.g., "As Hyland correctly demonstrates..."), signaling a more confident alignment than was typical. In another thesis, the writer once used a direct counter-argument to a minor source, a rare instance of open contention. These examples, however, were extremely infrequent and represented isolated choices rather than a sustained alternative stance. Their scarcity, in fact, serves to highlight just how pervasively the cautious, deferential norms of the Apprentice-Scholar persona govern this genre for these writers.

4.4.5   Alternative Explanations and Future Research: Furthermore, this dominant stance may not solely be an EAL writer's strategic choice. It could also reflect powerful institutional norms, the explicit or implicit preferences of thesis supervisors for a less confrontational style, or the models of academic writing presented in textbooks. While this study provides the linguistic evidence for *how* the stance is constructed, future research could usefully combine textual analysis with writer and supervisor interviews to disentangle these influential factors.

This integrated analysis has moved beyond a simple description of features to a functional explanation of authorial stance construction. The MPhil Linguistics students at GCUF predominantly adopt an Attributive-Reporting Stance, which is linguistically realized through a coherent syndrome of choices: neutral ideational representations, monoglossic engagement, a suppression of explicit evaluation, and a sophisticated reliance on invoked attitude. This combination of strategies constructs the persona of the Apprentice-Scholar, a writer who expertly balances the need to demonstrate knowledge with the rhetorical caution appropriate for a novice entering a new field. This study provides a precise, SFL-grounded model of this developmental stage in academic writing, offering significant insights for EAP pedagogy. The final chapter will summarize the study's contributions and articulate its implications for teaching practice and future research.

5.Conclusion

This study set out to explain how novice EAL researchers linguistically construct an authorial stance in the literature review, a genre central to academic socialization. Through a systematic analysis grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Appraisal framework, we have moved beyond describing citation practices to modeling the specific lexicogrammatical strategies employed by MPhil Linguistics students in a Pakistani university context. The findings reveal a coherent and highly functional authorial profile, which we have termed the **Apprentice-Scholar**.

This persona is realized through a dominant **Attributive-Reporting Stance**, a rhetorical position that meticulously maps the existing scholarly territory as its primary mode of argumentation. Our analysis demonstrates that this stance is a syndrome of co-selected linguistic choices: a preference for monoglossic Attribution using neutral Verbal and Mental processes; a systematic avoidance of Graduation and inscribed (explicit) Attitude to project objectivity; and, most significantly, a sophisticated use of inscribed (explicit) but conventionalized Attitude to perform evaluation in a rhetorically cautious manner.By describing a key work as "foundational" or "a cornerstone," for instance, these writers guide the reader's judgment without taking direct ownership of the appraisal, thereby demonstrating critical discernment while performing scholarly deference.

These findings make a critical contribution to the field. Theoretically, they provide a robust demonstration of how an integrated SFL/Appraisal model can offer a multi-layered, functional explanation for the complex phenomenon of authorial stance. Empirically, the model of the Apprentice-Scholar provides a nuanced alternative to the deficit narratives often associated with novice and EAL writing, lending robust linguistic support to the argument that rhetorical caution is a strategic, intelligent response to the social and institutional pressures of postgraduate scholarship .The writers are not failing to be critical; they are strategically critiquing in a manner that is safe, subtle, and appropriate for their emergent position within the disciplinary community.

The pedagogical implications of this model are significant. EAP instruction and thesis supervision must evolve beyond a focus on formal citation mechanics to address the interpersonal metafunction of language directly. The Apprentice-Scholar model suggests a

scaffolded pedagogical approach. The initial goal should not be to "correct" this cautious stance, but to validate it as an intelligent and necessary developmental stage for demonstrating knowledge. Once students have mastered this, instructors can then explicitly introduce the linguistic resources for more dialogic engagement, building a versatile repertoire of stances. This approach transforms the goal from simply achieving critical engagement to mastering the ability to choose the right authorial stance for the right rhetorical purpose, guiding students from the role of a diligent apprentice to that of a confident contributor to their field.

While the qualitative nature of this case study necessarily limits its statistical generalizability, it provides a deep, transferable model of stance construction and opens clear pathways for future inquiry. Larger-scale comparative and longitudinal studies are now needed to test the prevalence of the Apprentice-Scholar persona across different disciplines, institutions, and academic levels. Furthermore, the findings lay the groundwork for developing and testing pedagogical interventions aimed at accelerating students' transition from apprentice-reporters to confident, critically-engaged members of their scholarly fields.

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