17 'An international journal publishing high quality, original research': self-evaluative categories in journal descriptions

Davide Simone Giannoni
University of Bergamo
giannoni@unibg.it

Introduction

Disciplinary cultures have been likened to intellectual territories, whose inhabitants share "codes of conduct, sets of values and distinctive intellectual tasks" (Becher 1981: 109). Such factors determine not only the way research is conducted but also how it is published and received within each discipline. Against this backdrop, academic journals play a key role in the dissemination of new scholarship. More specifically, they allow disciplinary communities: (i) to develop legitimate research spaces capable of attracting like-minded scholars with converging interests; (ii) to determine the nature and limits of new research in terms of coverage, methodology and epistemology; (iii) to act as gatekeepers that regulate and police access to such spaces.

While the shift from print to digital has simplified the publication process and made it relatively inexpensive, it has complicated the search for visibility and recognition. Only well-established, reputable journals are likely to publish content that will be widely noticed and eventually cited elsewhere; bibliometric data is often cited as evidence of a journal's relative standing and impact. Thus editors and publishers wield considerable power but are also accountable to readers and subscribers. At the same time, their success requires an ability to attract good submissions. Journals descriptions (JDs) are a common example of self-presentation written with this purpose in mind.

For Tse and Hyland (2010:1880) "surprisingly little has been said about the genres concerned with the distribution, rather than the production, of knowledge. These 'carrier genres', however, play an indispensable role in the mechanisms of delivering and promoting knowledge". Other examples of print-based and/or digital genres belonging to the same category are back-cover blurbs (Basturkmen 2009), publishers' homepages (Gea-Valor 2006)

and book descriptions (Giannoni 2009).

Despite their brevity and apparent simplicity, JDs contain "more than simply a statement of aims and scope, as lexical and rhetorical choices both reflect and define what is valued by the target academic community" (Tse & Hyland 2010: 1888). Accordingly they can provide interesting insights into the ethos and priorities that shape a journal's development and choice of contents. Their audience is necessarily diverse, as JDs are relevant "to novice researchers deciding on a venue for their next paper; for researchers seeking to narrow their search for personally relevant material; to librarians and course leaders assembling bundles of subscriptions for their universities" (Hyland & Tse 2009: 718).

Variation across disciplines

Despite their pervasive presence in publishers' websites, JDs have been largely neglected by authors researching academic discourse. The evidence in hand, however, suggests that disciplinary variation is not very great. In a study of JDs in Applied Linguistics, Sociology, Biology and Mechanical Engineering, Hyland & Tse (2009: 710) found "considerable cross-disciplinary uniformity". Similarities have been observed also between JDs in Applied Linguistics and Medicine, with both favouring "an applied and generally multidisciplinary orientation" harnessing "a range of concerns and audiences" (Giannoni 2008: 214-215). Convergence across disciplines may be explained by commercial considerations but also by a general trend to standardisation noticed in other digital genres. Moreover, it is worth considering that editorial claims about a journal's coverage may not entirely match its content: Kidd's (2002) small-scale study of APA journals, for example, shows a mismatch between invited submissions and actual content.

Hyland and Tse's work (2009) draws on a sample of 200 JDs from 10 academic publishers and only considers titles published in print as well as online. Wordlists were searched for "items carrying evaluative meanings" (p. 707) – mainly qualifiers but also a few nouns and an adverbial. The items were then used to identify five functional categories (Positioning, Standing, Audience, Quality Assurance, Publishing Practices) linked to "tendencies of lexicogrammatical and rhetorical choices in this genre" (p. 707). Unfortunately, the most frequent evaluative items in each discipline are listed but not quantified. The authors conclude that, "the expression of value almost always draws on positive items [...] emphasizing, among other things, reach, novelty, ranking, importance, and scholarliness" (p. 710).

Evaluative categories

By grouping evaluative lexis into semantic categories, an analyst can map out the most prominent values signalled in a given type of text. Hyland and Tse (2009) refer to these categories as 'attributes' but other authors have adopted different labels to indicate the same thing: parameters of value (Thetela 1997), parameters of evaluation (Thompson & Hunston 2000), semantic categories (Pérez-Llantada Auría 2008), evaluative dimensions (Bednarek 2009), values (Breeze 2011). Rather than opt for abstract categorisations based on top-down taxonomies, this strand of studies views 'values' essentially as evaluative parameters built into the lexicon. Although they do not exclude moral principles (expressing ethos), most of the values signalled explicitly in language are of a factual, utilitarian nature. Thus academic discourse signals such attributes as relevance, size and assessment in speech (Swales & Burke 2003), relevance, size, novelty and goodness in research articles (Giannoni 2012) and relevance in lectures (Deroey & Taverniers 2012a, 2012b).

Taking the lead from Hyland and Tse's (2009) pioneering work and building on the lexical approach to the study of values, the present chapter seeks therefore to answer three research questions:

- What are the most frequent evaluative items used in JDs?
- What evaluative categories (i.e. values) do these items encode?
- What do the results indicate about different disciplines?

Material

To assemble an adequate number of texts from reliable sources, a range of international journals were required. For this purpose twenty top-ranking titles, listed by impact factor, were selected for each of the four disciplines investigated by Hyland & Tse (2009), using the Science Edition of Journal Citation Reports (ISI 2013) for Biology and Mechanical Engineering, and the Social Sciences Edition for Linguistics[17] and Sociology. After checking each journal's full title and publisher details, its homepage was consulted to locate the JD. In the case of Linguistics, the first 21 entries had to be included, as one journal (*Language*) appeared to lack a general online description.

Most of the 80 journal homepages considered are hosted by publishers (see Appendix), who tend to adopt a similar template for all of their titles. Where available as an option, the full description rather than its short version was accessed. When deciding what material to incorporate into the JD corpus,

[17] Journal Citation Reports do not provide a separate category for Applied Linguistics.

text detailing the scope, aims and content of each journal was included but not subscription/submission details, benefits to authors or other peripheral content. Topic-lists were also omitted to avoid skewing results and were tagged as 'aaa' in the corpus. Below is a quantitative breakdown, inclusive of data in square brackets from Hyland and Tse's (2009) corpus and SSTR (Standardised Type Token Ratio), generated using a well-known concordancer (Scott 2007).

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
Tokens per discipline	2,544	2,995	2,850	2,736	11,163
Tokens per text	127.20 [232.50]	149.75 [239.50]	142.50 [146.50]	136.80 [214.40]	139.54 [208.25]
STTR	40.85	39.53	43.55	40.20	40.73

Table 1: Quantitative breakdown of JD corpus

The maximum divergence in length across the corpus is relatively small, with Sociology JDs 18% longer than those in Linguistics. The STTR was also similar. Greater differences are noticeable between these texts and those in Hyland and Tse (2009), which were significantly longer in all disciplines with the exception of Biology. It is interesting to note that approximately one third of JDs had no title. Most of them were headed 'Aims' and 'Scope', or 'About this journal' and 'About [name of journal]'. Other options were 'Description', 'Mission Statement' and 'Overview'.

Method

A wordlist was generated for each discipline using WordSmith Tools (Scott 2007). At first only the first 20 items in each list were considered but they included hardly any evaluative lexis and consisted almost exclusively of grammar words (*and, of, the*) and disciplinary terms (*language, social, biology*). These are listed in Table 2 below, with the number of occurrences given before each item.

LING		SOC			BIO		ME	
157	and	187	the		153	and	163	of
136	the	167	of		138	the	159	the
130	of	157	and		133	of	150	and
84	language	80	in		78	to	63	in
67	in	73	to		69	in	60	to
66	to	52	research		50	a	43	are
47	journal	48	a		43	journal	40	journal
43	research	42	social		39	biology	37	a
40	a	41	is		37	is	37	is
30	articles	38	journal		36	articles	29	papers
30	is	37	on		36	research	26	on
30	on	28	sociological		32	for	26	with
22	theoretical	28	sociology		31	biological	24	for
21	as	27	for		30	are	24	research
21	or	23	that		25	reviews	22	aaa
19	for	21	an		24	as	20	as
19	issues	19	articles		23	on	20	energy
18	an	19	as		22	an	20	engineering
18	are	19	from		21	that	19	thermal
16	speech	19	review		18	rhythms	17	or

Table 2: Top 20 lexical items in JD corpus

It was therefore necessary to broaden the coverage, opting instead for any word with 10+ occurrences in the general wordlist. This produced a total of 181 types, 40 of which were identified as candidates, being either qualifiers (*broad*, *important*, *empirical*) or other words associated with a journal's qualities (*including*, *well*, *theory*).

To complete the picture, keywords for each discipline (with the whole corpus used as reference corpus) were generated and those with a minimum keyness of 2 and at least 10 occurrences singled out. However, the items of any interest (because evaluative) also occurred in the general wordlist, so no additions were necessary.

Finally, the concordance lines of the 40 candidates were manually inspected so as to narrow down the count to occurrences that: (i) encode an evaluative parameter, and (ii) target the journal and/or its subject, content, authors and readership. The procedure confirmed a total of 33 types, distributed in 185 relevant tokens). These were then grouped into seven semantically related categories whose constituents, arranged in decreasing order, are summarised in the following section.

Results

After normalising the counts to occurrences per 10,000 words, the picture that emerges is that shown in Table 3. Overall the degree of value marking is not dissimilar across disciplines, ranging from 408.8 in LING to 464.2 in ME (+14%). Orientation is by far the most prominent variable, with ten times more markers than Primacy (167.2 vs. 16.5). It is followed by Relevance and Inclusiveness. The other values (Novelty, Worth, Globalism) are less frequent, all at around 31-34 words each. Conversely, in academic 'About us' pages it is Globalism and Worth that top the list (cf. Giannoni 2014); Primacy comes last at 16.5, while in 'About us' pages it ranks third.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	Mean
Orientation	180.8	163.6	108.8	215.6	167.2
Relevance	51.1	71.1	115.8	106.0	86.0
Inclusiveness	70.7	100.2	73.7	51.2	73.9
Novelty	35.4	43.4	35.1	25.6	34.9
Globalism	35.4	40.1	31.6	18.3	31.3
Worth	31.4	23.4	35.1	43.9	33.4
Primacy	3.9	23.4	35.1	3.7	16.5
Total	408.8	464.1	435.1	464.2	443.0

Table 3: Distribution of values (occurrences/10,000 words)

Turning to the degree of differentiation between domains, it is significant that Orientation ranks first in all fields except Biology, whereas Relevance is second in Biology and Mechanical Engineering, and Inclusiveness comes second in Linguistics and Sociology. On the other hand, Globalism is weak in Linguistics and Mechanical Engineering. Finally, Primacy is particularly low in Linguistics and Mechanical Engineering.

The same data, given below (Figure 1) in column chart form, graphically illustrates the greater prominence given to Orientation, Relevance and Inclusiveness across disciplines. Compared to these, all the other values have a relatively low profile.

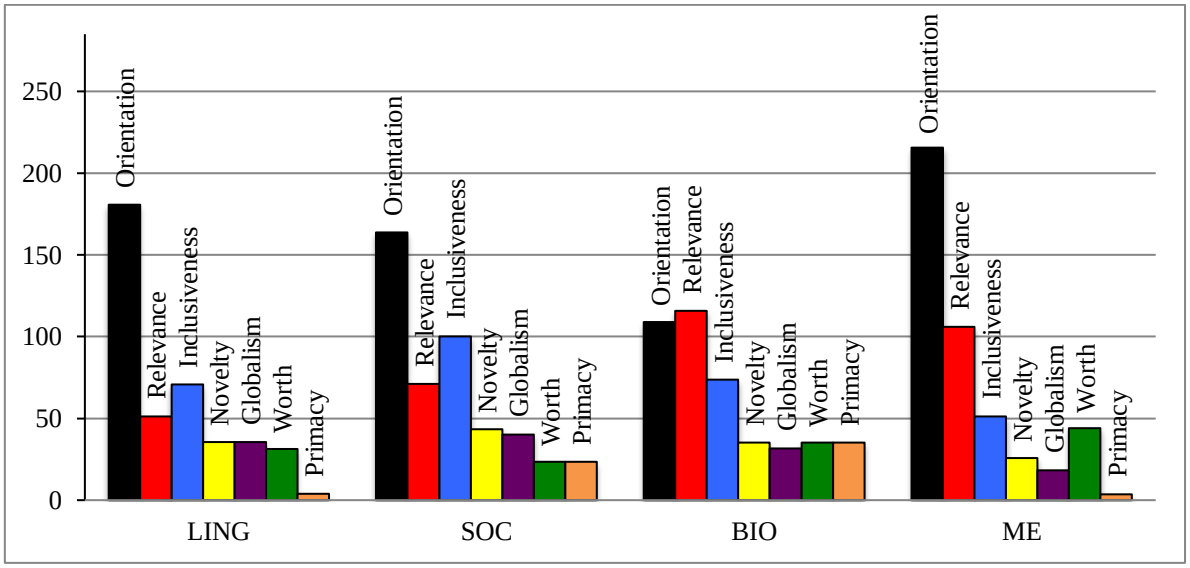

Figure 1: Values present in JD corpus

These findings suggest that Linguistics and Mechanical Engineering are less competitive fields, placing little emphasis on Primacy, compared to Sociology and Biology. Instead, the former are much more likely to emphasise Orientation– arguably because they are more detailed when defining their scope and purpose. Sociology is the field most concerned with negotiating disciplinarity (Inclusiveness) and Mechanical Engineering the one most concerned with Worth.

As in Hyland and Tse (2009), these results can also be interpreted by comparing soft (Linguistics, Sociology) vs. hard (Biology, Mechanical Engineering) disciplines. Table 4 below shows how this pans out for each of the seven values considered. The total figure is very similar but Inclusiveness and Globalism are over-represented in soft JDs, while Relevance and Worth are over-represented in hard JDs.

	Soft	**Hard**	**Mean**
Orientation	172.2	162.2	167.2
Relevance	61.1	110.9	86.0
Inclusiveness	85.4	62.4	73.9
Novelty	39.4	30.3	34.9
Globalism	37.7	24.9	31.3
Worth	27.4	39.5	33.4
Primacy	13.6	19.4	16.5
Total	436.4	449.6	443.0

Table 4: Soft vs. hard fields (occurrences/10,000 words)

Orientation

The first group of items consists of qualifiers and nouns that define a journal's orientation, generally in terms of greater or lesser interest in theoretical/speculative as opposed to experimental/empirical research. The results (Table 5) indicate a clear prevalence of the former in the soft disciplines and of the latter in the hard ones. Here and in all subsequent groupings, the concordance lines of each item were inspected to exclude non-relevant occurrences from the count; specific criteria for exclusion are mentioned below.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
theoretical	22	15	3	6	46
experimental	3	-	9	14	26
scientific	6	1	7	10	24
empirical	7	15	-	1	23
theory	3	12	2	2	19
applied	1	-	3	9	13
applications	1	-	1	10	12
critical	2	6	2	2	12
basic	1	-	4	5	10
Total	46	49	31	59	185

Table 5: Items marking Orientation (occurrences)

The following examples illustrate how each item is used in the corpus:

- *All research papers must clearly explain the theoretical background*
- *It publishes experimental and theoretical papers*
- *It promotes scholarly and scientific discussion of issues*
- *The journal is open to empirical reports and review articles*
- *JMF features original research and theory*
- *Articles on either basic or applied work are suitable.*
- *Industry-relevant papers showing interesting practical applications*
- *It offers critical survey articles of recent research*
- *Articles in the journal pertain to basic and applied chronobiology*

Non relevant occurrences were those incorporating the item in the name of the journal (e.g. *Journal of Experimental Biology*) or of a discipline (*researchers in applied linguistics*) because such uses are not strictly speaking evaluative.

Relevance

Items in the Relevance category draw attention to the significance of

something that is deemed to be worth noting or considering. Hyland and Tse (2009) refer to this quality as 'Importance', which they assign to three adjectives (*important, relevant, significant*). Altogether, Relevance is more prominent in the hard sciences, which may mean that submissions will be treated more selectively or may simply be a self-promotional strategy stressing the journal's quality.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
interest	2	6	12	8	28
important	2	5	7	2	16
significant	1	2	7	5	15
relevant	3	1	3	4	11
established	2	3	1	5	11
essential	2	3	1	4	10
special	1	1	2	1	5
Total	13	21	33	29	86

Table 6: Items marking Relevance (occurrences)

The examples below illustrate how such items are used in the corpus:

- *Emphasis is on exceptional quality and general interest*
- *Some of the important topics discussed include*
- *Opinion papers and reviews of significant timely issues*
- *The work presented is relevant to each of these disciplines*
- *Journal of Consumer Culture is an established journal*
- *Applied Thermal Engineering provides essential reference material*
- *Q&As on topics of special or topical interest*

Non-relevant cases include metadiscoursal uses (*it is important that papers are presented*) and items occurring within lexicalised collocations (*occasional special sections*).

Inclusiveness

The third group comprises words that define a journal or its content in terms of inclusiveness, i.e. of breadth and scope. This is an essential aspect of editorial policy, which risks being too broad on the one hand and too narrow on the other. The results in Table 7 point to a clear prevalence of Inclusiveness in Sociology, which is a particularly rich and diverse field of enquiry, while it is under-represented in Mechanical Engineering.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
interdisciplinary	6	9	3	1	19
broad	2	6	10	-	18
both	3	7	1	5	16
wide	4	4	3	3	14
*range**	2	2	2	1	7
any	-	1	-	4	5
only	1	1	2	-	4
Total	18	30	21	14	83

Table 7: Items marking Inclusiveness (occurrences)
when not co-occurring with broad or wide (otherwise total = 19)

Examples of each item are given below:

- *Social Networks is an interdisciplinary and international quarterly*
- *Work and Occupations provides you with a broad perspective*
- *It focuses on both analytical and experimental research*
- *This interdisciplinary approach spans a wide range of interests*
- *Biological Reviews covers the entire range of the biological science*
- *work on any aspect of the biological foundations of language*
- *Poetics publishes not only advanced research reports but also*

Occurrences not deemed relevant included the use of 'range' as a verb (*papers may range from*), of 'only' as an intensifier (*Only under compelling circumstances will an Editor*) and of 'any' collocating with an external referent (*this journal is a valuable addition to any library*).

Novelty

Novelty is another of the attributes mentioned in Hyland and Tse (2009) for such items as *new, current, original, innovative, recent*. Only two of these had 10+ occurrences in the JD corpus (see Table 8 below), with a prevalence of *new*. The overall figure was not too dissimilar across disciplines.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
new	6	12	7	5	30
recent	3	1	3	2	9
Total	9	13	10	7	39

Table 8: Items marking Novelty (occurrences)

Examples of relevant occurrences:

- *AJS prizes research that offers new ways of understanding the social*
- *The journal provides new information and theoretical approaches*
- *It offers critical survey articles of recent research on specific topics*

Non-relevant instances mainly consisted of uses that were not self-evaluative (e.g. *In recent years, the number of published manuscripts*).

Globalism

Globalism markers highlight a journal's international standing, in terms of contributors, readership and prestige. It was encoded by only two items and is a quality less marked in Mechanical Engineering.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
international	9	11	6	2	28
world	-	1	3	3	7
Total	9	12	9	5	35

Table 9: Items marking Globalism (occurrences)

Examples of the items in this group include:

- *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition is an international peer-reviewed journal*
- *The FASEB Journal is the world's most cited biology journal*

Fully lexicalised forms were excluded from the count (e.g. *international relations specialists*; *research into language with relevance to real-world problems*).

Worth

General references to value are grouped under this label, which comprises three different parts of speech. They are all positive and point to attained or pursued worth.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
high	3	1	7	5	16
advance	2	3	2	4	11
*quality**	1	3	1	3	8
well	2	-	-	-	2
Total	8	7	10	12	37

Table 10: Items marking Worth (occurrences)
when not co-occurring with high (otherwise = 20)

Examples of these markers are given below:

- *It maintains a high level of readability and scholarship*
- *Only papers which represent a genuine advance in the state of the science*
- *The journal publishes the highest quality empirical and theoretical*

research

- *Group-studies on well defined samples*

Non-relevant occurrences were, again, fully lexicalised forms (*well-being of relevant organisms*) and/or those evaluating an external referent (*under high confining pressures and at high temperatures*).

Primacy

The last group is similar to Hyland and Tse's (2009) Ranking, assumed to include such markers as *main, major, best, excellent, highest, leading, most*. Only the last two of these occurred 10+ times in the present JD corpus. Being ahead of others appears to be prized in Biology and Sociology but almost ignored in Linguistics and Mechanical Engineering.

	LING	SOC	BIO	ME	All
leading	-	6	4	1	11
most	1	1	6	-	8
Total	1	7	10	1	19

Table 11: Items marking Primacy (occurrences)

Examples of these items include:

- *Astrobiology is the leading peer-reviewed international journal*
- *This authoritative journal disseminates the most current findings*

Excluded from the count were instances where 'most' is not an adverb but a quantifier, as in *most of the reviews will be of a specialist nature.*

Conclusions

These results are indicative of the way editors perceive their journal, assert its status and claim a position in the field. The four disciplines considered here deploy the same repertoire of values, with Orientation emerging as the dominant evaluative theme. However, interesting differences were observed across the corpus. Sociology and Biology are more competitive (+Primacy), with less emphasis on the journal's stance (–Orientation). Linguistics and Mechanical Engineering are less competitive (–Primacy) with more emphasis on the journal's stance (+Orientation). These differences cut across the hard/soft field division adopted in Hyland and Tse (2009). Turning to individual domains, Sociology is the one most concerned with defining Inclusiveness; Mechanical Engineering is the least concerned with Inclusiveness (being a strong, well-established field) but the one most concerned with Worth.

The type of analysis attempted here has various advantages and some caveats. First of all it ensures that non-relevant occurrences are omitted by manually investigating all concordance lines. Secondly, it does not attempt to map all the lexis associated with each category but only the most frequent, explicit evaluative items. Admittedly, the grouping and labelling of categories is based on the analyst's judgement and may entail a margin of error. Nevertheless, it provides a cross-section of the most frequent value markers associated with JDs and allows comparisons across the corpus.

This is, to my knowledge, one of the rare follow-ups to Hyland and Tse's work on JDs – a genre that deserves closer investigation, although its familiarity appears to have bred neglect. It would be interesting to extend the same kind of analysis to other evaluative genres (e.g. book reviews, review articles, blurbs, introductions) in these disciplines to uncover similarities with JDs. At the end of the day, however, we are left with a question that cannot be answered by textual analysis alone: whether and to what extent the values embedded in JDs are an expression of disciplinary culture or merely part of the rhetorical toolbox of editorial promotionalism.

References

Helen Basturkmen (2009). Back Cover Blurbs: Puff Pieces and Windows on Cultural Values. In Ken Hyland & Giuliana Diani (eds), *Academic Evaluation: Review Genres in University Settings*. Palgrave: Basingstoke, UK, pp68-86.

Tony Becher (1981). Towards a Definition of Disciplinary Cultures. In *Studies in Higher Education*, 6:2, 1981, pp109-122.

Monika Bednarek (2009). Dimensions of Evaluation: Cognitive and Linguistic Perspectives. In *Pragmatics & Cognition*, 17:1, 2009, pp146-175.

Ruth Breeze (2011). Disciplinary Values in Legal Discourse: A Corpus Study. In *Ibérica* 21, pp93-116.

Katrien L.B. Deroey & Miriam Taverniers (2012a). "Just Remember This": Lexicogrammatical Relevance Markers in Lectures. In *English for Specific Purposes*, 31/4, 2012, pp221-233.

Katrien L.B. Deroey & Miriam Taverniers (2012b). "Ignore That 'cause It's Totally Irrelevant": Marking Lesser Relevance in Lectures. In *Journal of Pragmatics*, 44:14, 2012, pp2085-2099.

Maria-Lluisa Gea-Valor (2006). Is an Image Worth a Thousand Words? Net Representations of the Book Industry. In *Revista de Lingüística y Lenguas Aplicadas*, 1:1, 2006, pp37-48.

Davide Simone Giannoni (2008). Popularizing Features in English Journal Editorials. In *English for Specific Purposes*, 27:2, 2008, pp212-232.

Davide Simone Giannoni (2009). Negotiating Research Values across Review Genres: A Case Study in Applied Linguistics. In Ken Hyland & Giuliana Diani (eds), *Academic Evaluation: Review Genres in University Settings*. Palgrave: Basingstoke, UK, pp17-33.

Davide Simone Giannoni (2012). From "Our Methods Apply Equally Well" to "The Model Does a Very Poor Job": A Corpus-Based Study of Academic Value-Marking. In *Proceedings of the Corpus Linguistics Conference 2011*. University of Birmingham: Birmingham, UK. Available at http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/corpus/publications/conference-archives/2011-birmingham.aspx.

Davide Simone Giannoni (2014). "One of the UK's Top Universities": Self-Reported Value Claims in Academic About Us Webpages. Paper presented at the AELFE Conference 'Academic Communication in a Digital Age', Stockholm University, Sweden, 12-14 June 2014.

Ken Hyland & Polly Tse (2009). "The Leading Journal in Its Field": Evaluation in Journal Descriptions. In *Discourse Studies*, 11:6, 2009, pp703-720.

Sean A. Kidd (2002). The Role of Qualitative Research in Psychology Journals. In *Psychological Methods*, 7:1, 2009, pp126-138.

Maria Carmen Pérez-Llantada Auría (2008). Stance and Academic Promotionalism: A Cross-Disciplinary Comparison in the Soft Sciences. In *Atlantis*, 30:1, 2008, pp129-145.

Mike Scott (2007). *WordSmith Tools 5.0*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

John M. Swales & Amy Burke (2003). "It's Really Fascinating Work": Differences in Evaluative Adjectives across Academic Registers. In Pepi Leistyna & Charles F. Meyer (eds), *Corpus Analysis. Language Structure and Language Use*. Rodopi: Amsterdam, Netherlands, pp1-18.

Puleng Thetela (1997). Evaluated Entities and Parameters of Value in Academic Research Articles. In *English for Specific Purposes*, 16:2, 1997, pp101-118.

Geoff Thompson & Susan Hunston (2000). Evaluation: An Introduction. In Susan Hunston & Geoff Thompson (eds), *Evaluation in Text. Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, pp1-27.

Polly Tse & Ken Hyland (2010). Claiming a Territory: Relative Clauses in Journal Descriptions. In *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42:7, 2010, pp1880-1889.