Engagement and reviewers' reports on submissions to academic journals

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This paper examines the use of engagement strategies in reviewers' reports on submissions to academic journals. The data examined are reviewers' reports on submissions to the journal *English for Specific Purposes*. The study found that the reviewers used directives as their main engagement strategy. These directives, however, were often indirect or hedged, making it difficult for writers who are new to the peer review process to know how to respond to them. A further engagement strategy that reviewers employed was the use of reader pronouns through which they established an interpersonal relationship with authors at the same time as they delivered 'bad news' to them. These matters are important to highlight in the teaching of writing for research publication purposes so that beginning authors can better understand reviewers' reports, learn how to respond to them and, as a result, increase their chances of getting published.

Keywords: reviewers' reports, peer review, engagement, research articles, English for research publication purposes, academic writing

1. Introduction

The reports that reviewers write on submissions to academic journals play an extremely important role in the success, or otherwise, of writers getting their work published (Paltridge, 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019b; Hames, 2007; Tardy, 2019). While research has been carried out which looks at the discourse structure and language of reviewers' reports (see Paltridge, 2015, 2017; Fortanet, 2008; Fortanet-Gomez, 2008; Gosden, 2003; Hewings, 2004, 2006; Kourilova, 1998; Samraj, 2016), less attention has been given to the notion of audience in these reports; that is, how authors of reviewers' reports take account of their readers and accommodate them (Bell, 1984) as they write their texts as well as guide their readers to drawing particular interpretations of what they have written (Hyland, 2015; Hyland & Jiang, 2019).

The most obvious ways in which writers do this, Hyland and Jiang (2019) argue, is by engaging with their readers, in particular, giving directions, asking questions, and addressing their readers in ways which involve them directly in the text; that is, by taking account of the audience of the text that they write. The notion of audience, however, is an elusive concept (Hyland, 2005a) and raises questions such as what the author can expect their reader to already know, what they need to know, and whether the reader should be treated as an equal or an expert (Hyland & Jiang, 2019). Key among these questions is the relationship between the reader and writer of the text and how this impacts on what a writer says and how they say it. The ways in which writers project themselves in their writing, then, is an important way in which they address and take account of the audience of their texts. The study reported in this paper examines how reviewers engage with readers in the reports they write on submissions to academic journals, in this case, papers submitted to the peer-reviewed journal *English for Specific Purposes*. Through this analysis, it is hoped that authors who are new to the process of peer review can gain a better understanding of reviewers' reports and, thereby, be able to respond more effectively to them.

2.   Self-representation in academic writing

Ivanič (1998) discusses the notion of self-representation in academic writing and, in particular, the concept of the *discoursal self*. As she points out, there are always a range of alternatives writers can choose from in order to represent themselves in a text, their relationship with their readers, and their relationship to the knowledge they are discussing. This might be through the use of *stance* features such as *self-mentions* (*I, we, my*), *hedges* (*might, perhaps*), *boosters* (*definitely, in fact*), and *attitude markers* (*unfortunately, surprisingly*), which express the writer's attitude towards what they are writing (Hyland, 2005a). Writers might also draw on *engagement* strategies such as *reader pronouns, personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives* and *questions* to connect their texts with their readers (Hyland, 2005a; Jiang & Ma, 2018). Examples of each of these strategies are shown in Table 1. Through the use of these strategies, writers both acknowledge and recognize the presence of their readers at the same time as they position themselves in relation to the claims they are making (Hyland, 2002a, 2005b).

As Hyland (2009) points out, in order to be successful, writers need to represent themselves in a way that is valued by their discipline as they adopt the values, beliefs and identity of a successful academic writer in their area of study. This involves "negotiating a self which is coherent and meaningful to both the individual and the group" (Hyland, 2011, p.11). This identity, further, is only

Table 1. Stance and engagement strategies in reviewers' reports

Strategy	Examples
Stance	
Hedges	The authors *might* wish to comment on the implications of this.
Boosters	The article is *extremely* well written.
Attitude markers	The case study is *at the cutting edge* in terms of the field's development.
Self-mentions	*My* biggest concern is that it appears a true intervention never took place.
Engagement	
Reader pronouns	Are *you* focusing on originality, appropriateness, novelty, value?
Personal asides	Is the role of the journal editor that of a gate keeper or that of a mentor? (*Why either/or?*)
Appeals to shared knowledge	*As we have seen*, plagiarism is a complex and fraught issue, stemming from a host of causes.
Directives	*Add* paragraph breaks to the long paragraph.
Questions	*Is there a way that the author could vary the phrasing?*

successful by the extent to which it is recognized by others (Blommaert, 2005). Writers, thus, choose ways of expressing themselves that will resonate with their audience so that the claims that they make will be seen to be credible and valid (Hyland, 2011).

Who, however, is the audience for reviewers' reports? Reviewers' reports have a number of readers. There is, of course, the author/s of the submission. There are also others in the communicative situation who, in Bell's (1984, p. 159) words, are "present but not directly addressed" in the text. For example, the editor/s of the journal will also read the review, as will the other reviewer/s when a decision is made on the manuscript or when a revised version of the paper is submitted to the journal and they are asked to review the article again. Reviewers' reports, then, like published research articles (Myers, 1989), have more than a single audience. Bell (1984) argues that these audiences and their roles are hierarchically ordered "according to whether or not they are addressed, ratified, and known" (p. 159), calling these three readers the addressee (in the case of reviewers' reports, the author), the auditor (the editor), and the overhearer (the other reviewer/s). Even if a reviewer knows the identity of the author (see below), they do not know who the other reviewer/s will be and so are also writing for imagined, or 'implied' readers (Scollon, Wong-Scollon & Jones, 2011). It is for this reason that reviewers often address the author of a submission in their review as 'The author' and, as a result, might seem somewhat detached to authors. On occasions, reviewers do, however, address the author directly, for example, by using *you* (see Engagement

and reviewers' reports below), but this is not as common as referring to the author in the third person.

With *double-blind review* (as is the case with *English for Specific Purposes*) neither the reviewer nor the author knows each other's identities, although, in some cases, the reviewer may be able to guess who the author is, especially if the article is on a topic an author is well known for. In other cases, where a journal uses *single-blind review* (the reviewer knows who the author is but the author does not know who the reviewer is), the situation is somewhat different in that the reviewer doesn't have to guess who the author is. With *open peer review*, both authors and reviewers know each other's identities.

Thus, as reviewers take account of the values of the editor(s), other reviewers (and in turn the discipline) as they write their reports they also need to imagine (when a submission has been 'blinded') who the author of the submission is so they can write a review that is helpful to the author should the submission get through the initial stage of the review process and be passed on to the author for possible revision. Reviewers also need to understand editors' expectations for the kind of text they are writing. That is, they need to provide sufficient information to support the recommendation they have made as well as be clear about the changes they are asking to be made to the submission. Reviews will also be expected to be written in a tone that is both collegial and respectful of the author of the text. Thus, an overly short or harsh review is not helpful to an editor who will, in most cases, want to pass the review on to the author, regardless of the outcome of the review (Hames, 2007; Schneiderhan, 2013). At the same time, reviewers consider editors' perceptions of them as they take on the identity of competent and appropriate reviewers for the submission as they write their reports and 'index' (Hughes & Tracy, 2015) this competence through their use of language in their texts (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), such as the stance they take towards the submission and the ways in which they engage with readers in their text.

Fortanet-Gomez and Ruiz-Garrido (2010) have examined the stance taken by reviewers of submissions to academic journals, in the areas of linguistics and business organization. Their particular focus was the use of hedges, boosters, and attitude markers. They also compared the results of their analysis with Hyland's (2005a) analysis of research articles, finding attitude markers were three times more frequent in the reviewers' reports they examined than in Hyland's research into academic articles. Boosters were a little more frequent in the referees' reports and while hedges in the linguistics reviews they looked at were similar to research articles in that area, they were twice as frequent in business organization research articles than in the business organization referees' reports.

A number of other studies have also examined stance in reviewers' reports. Paltridge's (2017) study examined reports on submissions to the journal *English*

for Specific Purposes, the same data set that is the basis for this paper. The most frequent markers of stance in the reviews were attitude markers (I am *generally satisfied* with the corrections and incorporations that the author has introduced in the paper) in accept and minor revisions reviews and self mentions (*I find your revision very good*) in major revisions and reject reviews. There were, however, compared to published academic writing (see McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012; Hyland & Jiang, 2016a, 2019), many fewer instances of hedging in the reviews. This, coupled with the frequent use of self mentions in the reviews, showed a high level of certainty in the views expressed by the reviewers. Accept and minor revisions reviews, however, contained more attitude markers than the other two categories of review, major revisions and reject. A subsequent study, which examined reviewers' stance in submissions written by second language authors compared to native speaker authors (Paltridge, 2019b) drawing on the data set that was used for Paltridge (2017), found that the frequency of stance markers in the reviews of the non-native and native speaker submissions was in the same sequence in terms of which were most frequent (self mentions), followed by attitude markers, hedges and boosters (see also Bocanegra-Valle, 2015 for an examination of reviewers' reports on native and non-native speaker authors' submissions to academic journals).

In all of the reports in Paltridge's (2017) study, the reviewers took responsibility for their comments which was reflected in the use of self mentions in the reviews. This was especially the case in the major revisions and reject reviews where self mention was found to be the most frequent stance marker used by the reviewers. This taking of responsibility, together with the low level of hedging, displays a strong sense of authority in the reviews, leaving little space for the authors to negotiate the views expressed in the reports. This authority, of course, needs to be recognised by the readers of the reviews as it is not just through the use of particular stance strategies through which they are created. It also requires that other participants in the interaction recognize this identity of authority. Indeed, writing is only successful, Hyland (2019) argues, to the extent that an appropriate relationship is established with the reader/s of a text. It is through their use of language, then, and the use of the kinds of features described above that reviewers display who they are, and how they want to be seen, as people with authority and expertise on the particular topic.

Reviewers, then, as they write their reports, engage with the author/s by recognizing their presence and bringing them explicitly into their texts through their use of the kinds of engagement strategies outlined above. As they do this, they:

> acknowledge and connect to others, recognizing the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their arguments, focussing their attention, acknowledg-

ing their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to their interpretations.   (Hyland, 2005b, p. 176)

Researchers have shown how this is done in student writing (Hyland, 2005c; Lee & Deakin, 2016), professional writing (Sancho Guinda, 2019; Jiang & Ma, 2019), published research articles (Hyland, 2005c; Hyland & Jiang, 2016a, 2016b, 2019; McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012), and PhD confirmation reports (Jiang & Ma, 2018, 2019). The use of engagement strategies, however, has not been examined in the reports that reviewers write on submissions to academic journals, the focus of the present study.

3.   Engagement and reviewers' reports

This paper examines the engagement strategies that reviewers draw on as they write reports on submissions to academic journals. The data employed in this analysis are reports written on submissions to the journal *English for Specific Purposes* over the period of a year. Articles published in *English for Specific Purposes* focus on the teaching and learning of specialist areas of English use such as English for academic purposes, English for business purposes, and English for science and technology, among others. *English for Specific Purposes* employs double blind reviewing in its review process. When a submission is sent to the journal, reviewers are asked, in their reports, to address matters such as whether the article would be of interest to readers of the journal, to what extent the research reported on is original, whether the author is familiar with other relevant research on the topic, whether the author has employed appropriate research methods for their study, and if the writing is of a suitable standard for an academic journal. Once they have completed their review, reviewers are asked to make a recommendation of either accept, minor revisions, major revisions, or reject on the submission.

A data set of 97 reviewers' reports was collected for the study. All of the reviewers whose reports are included in this paper gave permission for their reviews to be used in the study. The data set contained reviews of both original submissions and revised submissions, 74 and 23 respectively. In total, the data set comprised 71,661 words. An accept recommendation was made in nine of the reviewers' reports, a minor revisions recommendation in 22 of the reports, major revisions in 39 of the reports, and a reject recommendation in 27 of the reports. The reviews varied in length, with the accept reviews being an average of 124 words, the minor revisions reviews an average of 570 words, the major revisions reviews an average of 1,009 words, and the reject reviews an average of 693 words.

The reviewers' reports were examined to explore the engagement strategies that the reviewers employed in their reviews. Descriptions of the engagement strategies investigated and examples of their realisations from the data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Engagement strategies, typical realisations and examples
(based on Hyland, 2001, 2005b; Hyland & Jiang, 2016b)

Engagement strategy	Realisations	Examples
<u>Directives</u>, instructions to the reader which direct readers (a) to another part of the text or to another text, (b) how to carry out some action in the real-world, or (c) how to interpret an argument.	Imperatives (e.g. *note that, consider, refer to, see*) Modals of obligation (e.g. *should, must, ought*) Adjectival predicate expressing judgements of importance/necessity controlling a complement *to-*clause (e.g. It is essential *to*, It is necessary *to*)	*Rephrase* the first sentence. *See* below for a few examples. The authors *should* refer to the difference between indicative and informative abstracts You *must* add specific examples of how language learning and creativity are related in order to make your argument. *It is essential to* reference Halliday here.
<u>Questions</u>, inviting direct collusion because they address the reader as someone with an interest in the issue the question raises and the good sense to follow the writer's response to it, often rhetorical, presenting an opinion as an interrogative.	Interrogatives	Are you going to provide a technical definition? Should 'genre' read 'discipline'? Is there a way you can vary the phrasing?
<u>Reader pronouns</u>, bringing readers into the discourse, normally through second person pronouns, particularly inclusive *we* which identifies the reader as someone who shares similar ways of seeing to the writer, claiming solidarity, acknowledging the presence of the reader.	*You, your, we, our, us*	The approach *you* have taken would be of interest to many ESP practitioners This has ramifications for *your* recommendation *We* (as applied linguists) are forced to decontextualize *our* examples
<u>Personal asides</u>, briefly interrupting the argument to offer a comment on what has been said, adding more to the writer-reader relationship than to propositional development.	e.g. bracketed text, use of –,	(this language group is undefined) In the abstract you say 'seven years ago' – why not say 'in 1997'?

Table 2. *(continued)*

Engagement strategy	Realisations	Examples
<u>Appeals to shared knowledge</u>, explicit signals which ask readers to recognise something as familiar or accepted	e.g. *As we know, obviously, naturally, of course*	*As we know*, writing in academe serves two main functions: learning and display. Such articles are *naturally* of real salience and interest to academics, including this reviewer. *Of course*, you will be discussing this context, but you need to demonstrate, first, that the issue you and your students face is common in ESP contexts throughout the world.

The frequency of engagement markers was calculated for all the reviews, then for each of the categories of recommendation made by the reviewers; that is, for the accept, minor revisions, major revisions, and reject reviews. These frequencies were normed per 500 words so as to make the frequencies comparable across all the texts, regardless of their length.

4.   Findings

The frequency of engagement markers across all of the reviews and in each of the review categories (accept, minor revision, major revisions, reject) is shown in Table 3, the most frequent being directives, followed by reader pronouns, appeals to shared knowledge, and questions. Directives, however, were far more frequent in the accept reviews than in any of the other categories of recommendation. The use of reader pronouns occurred in each of the review categories. However, when they were used, they were not, in any instance, used by the majority of the reviewers. Appeals to shared knowledge did not occur in the accept reviews and when they were used in the other reports were not employed by the majority of reviewers. Personal asides were rare in the data set, only two instances in all.

Beyond this, there were many fewer instances of engagement strategies in the reviews of revised submissions. Fourteen of the 23 reviews of revised papers contained engagement strategies. These were overwhelmingly directives, however,

Table 3. Frequency of engagement markers in all of the reviewers' reports
(per 500 words)

	Accept	Minor revisions	Major revisions	Reject	All reports
Directives	4.08	1.8	1.87	0.14	1.6
Reader pronouns	0.87	1.2	1.01	.04	0.8
Questions	–	0.25	0.1	–	0.04
Appeals to shared knowledge	–	0.12	0.12	.004	0.09
Personal asides	–	0.04	0.01	–	–

with only one appeal to shared knowledge and no reader pronouns or personal asides in the reviews of the revised papers. The reviews of revised submissions were, thus, much less interpersonal in nature than the reviews of original submissions.

While directives were the most commonly employed engagement strategy across all the reviews, it was not always the case that an author might identify what was being said as a directive. Thus, while it is clear that a directive which employed an imperative was an instruction to make a change to the submission, as in Example (1),

(1)   *Reanalyze* your data.

directives which were hedged were much less clear in this regard, as shown in Examples (2) to (4).

(2)   The author *might* rephrase the first sentence of the paragraph.

(3)   *Perhaps* include this page in the appendix.

(4)   The author *could* tone down the claim.

That is, there were occasions where the directives were qualified, or were expressed indirectly, with the author needing to infer that they were being asked to make a change to their submission rather than being explicitly directed to do this. Indeed, just under half of all directions to make changes to the submissions were made indirectly (see Paltridge, 2015), with the use of indirect speech acts (Sbisà, 2009) where a statement, suggestion, or question (for example) was intended to be read as a direction to do something to the submission, as in Examples (5) to (7).

(5)   No rationale is given for the emphasis on the Japanese context [a statement]

(6)   It would be worth citing a more recent volume [a suggestion]

(7)   Are you saying that bilinguals are naturally more creative than monolinguals?
[a question]

Table 4 shows the frequency of direct and indirect directions in the reviewers' reports in relation to the reviewers' categories of recommendation. Thus, when reviewers made an accept recommendation, if they wanted the author to make changes, they nearly always did this directly. In the other categories of recommendation, however, this was not so clear-cut, with slightly over half of the directions to make changes in the minor revisions reviews being made indirectly, an equal balance between direct and indirect directions in the major revisions reviews, and slightly more direct than indirect directions in the reject reviews.

Table 4. Frequency of direct and indirect directions in relation to reviewers' categories of recommendation (per 500 words)

	Accept	Minor revisions	Major revisions	Reject	All reports
Directions					
Direct	7.6	1.8	2.5	0.5	2.0
Indirect	0.9	2.0	2.5	0.3	1.8

This use of indirect speech acts to ask for changes to a submission was common in the reviewers' reports and can be especially confusing for writers new to the peer review process who often do not understand that when a reviewer is stating or suggesting something, or asking a question, they are very often telling them to make a particular change to their submission (see Paltridge, 2015 for further discussion of indirect speech acts in reviewers' reports).

4.1   The accept reviews

By far the most frequent engagement strategy in the accept reviews was directives (82.35%), followed by reader pronouns (17.65%) (see Table 5). There were no questions, personal asides, or appeals to shared knowledge in the accept reviews.

Table 5. Engagement markers in the accept reviews (*n* = 9)

	Items per 500 words	% of total
Directives	4.08	82.35%
Reader pronouns	0.87	17.65%
Questions	–	–
Personal asides	–	–
Appeals to shared knowledge	–	–

Examples (8) to (10) illustrate the use of directives in the accept reviews. In every instance of these directives the reviewers used an imperative form.

(8)   *Be* consistent in in-text referencing.

(9)   *Replace* 'by' with 'in an effort to meet'.

(10) *Renumber* the other figures.

Only one of the nine reviewers who made an accept recommendation used reader pronouns in their report. An example of this is shown in Example (11).

(11) Does each of these terms have its own integrity vis-à-vis the other two? If so, *you* need to explain how it does.

In doing this, the reviewer was making it clear that, at this point in the review process their primary reader was the author of the submission.

4.2   The minor revisions reviews

The most frequent engagement marker in the minor revisions reviews was directives (53.8%), as was the case with the accept reviews. There was, however, more use of reader pronouns (35.3%) in the minor revisions reviews than in the accept reviews. There were also questions (7.3%) and appeals to shared knowledge (3.6%) that had not occurred in the accept reviews. There was only one instance of a personal aside in the minor revisions reviews (see Table 6).

Table 6. Engagement markers in the minor revisions reviews ($n = 22$)

	Items per 500 words	% of total
Directives	1.8	53.6%
Reader pronouns	1.2	34.5%
Questions	0.25	7.1%
Appeals to shared knowledge	0.12	3.6%
Personal asides	0.04	1.2%

Examples (12) to (14) illustrate the use of directives in the minor revisions reviews.

(12) *Tone down* the links the author makes between ESP genre approaches and form-only focused instruction.

(13) I *suggest* you present the questions on separate lines.

(14) The author *should* summarize what the results of the study showed.

With the minor revisions reviews, imperative forms and *should* were used to make a directive, with imperatives being the most frequent (60%). Beyond this, however, many of the directives that used an imperative in the minor revisions reviews hedged what was being said by the use of *I suggest, might* and *perhaps* (see Paltridge, 2017 for further discussion of hedging in reviewers' reports).

Seven of the 22 minor revisions reviews used reader pronouns (Example 15), four of the 22 reviews used questions to engage with their reader (Example 16), and two of the reviewers used appeals to shared knowledge (Example 17).

(15)   At the very least, I believe *you* should reference Halliday.

(16)   I think there's a mislabelled sub-heading in Table 5. Should 'Genre' read 'Discipline'?

(17)   *As we know*, writing in academe serves two main functions: learning and display.

4.3   The major revisions reviews

In the major revisions reviews, as with the accept and minor revisions reviews, the most frequent engagement strategy was directives (62%). This was followed by reader pronouns (33.4%), appeals to shared knowledge (4.2%), questions (0.4%) and personal asides (0.4%) (see Table 7).

Table 7. Engagement markers in the major revisions reviews ($n = 39$)

	Items per 500 words	% of total
Directives	1.87	61.4%
Reader pronouns	1.01	33.6%
Appeals to shared knowledge	0.12	4.2%
Questions	0.1	0.4%
Personal asides	0.1	0.4%

The use of directives in the major revisions reviews is illustrated in Examples (18) to (20).

(18)   *Delete* name initials for authors cited.

(19)   This sentence *should* be deleted.

(20)   You *must* add specific examples of how language learning and creativity are related in order to make your argument.

The most frequent realisation of directives in the major revisions reviews was *should* (54.3%), followed by *imperatives* (45%), and *must* (0.7%). Imperatives, thus, were employed less frequently in directives in the major revisions reviews than they were in the minor revisions reviews.

Ten of the 39 reviewers used reader pronouns to engage with authors in the major revisions reviews, in every case using *you* or *your* to do this, a similar percentage to the minor revisions reports, but more than in the accept reports. Examples of reader pronouns in the major revisions reviews are shown in Examples (21) and (22).

(21)   *You* need a specific definition.

(22)   *Your* article is interesting and worth publishing after major revisions.

Appeals to shared knowledge were employed by seven of the 39 reviewers in the major revisions reviews (see Examples (23) and (24)).

(23)   *It is true that* over time, ESP, in many places, has lost the emphasis on those core features.

(24)   *Of course*, a country's investments in research is also a VERY important factor!

Questions were very rarely used in the major revisions reviews. An example of this, however, is shown in Example (25).

(25)   In the USA, I think we talk about a PhD dissertation but in the UK it is a PhD thesis. *Isn't that so?*

This example, however, could just as easily be seen as a personal aside as it adds more to the writer-readership than the propositional content of what had been said. Furthermore, it is an example of an indirect speech act in that the statement 'In the USA, I think we talk about a PhD dissertation but in the UK it is a PhD thesis' is not telling the author a point of fact but also telling them to make a change to their submission, illustrating how reviewer comments can have more than just one engagement function.

4.4   The reject reviews

The use of engagement markers in the reject reviews is shown in Table 8, the most frequent being directives (75%), followed by reader pronouns (22.5%) and appeals to shared knowledge (2.5%). There were no questions in the reject reviews and no personal asides.

Table 8. Engagement markers in the reject reviews ($n = 27$)

	Items per 500 words	% of total
Directives	0.14	75%
Reader pronouns	.04	22.5%
Appeals to shared knowledge	.004	2.5%
Questions	–	–
Personal asides	–	–

The use of directives in the reject reviews is shown in Examples (26) and (27).

(26)   The author *should* provide more detailed descriptions of the theoretical assumptions behind the two approaches.

(27)   *See* Hyland 1999.

As with the major revisions reviews, directives were more frequently realised by *should* (74.2%), than by imperatives (25.8%).

Reader pronouns were employed by two of the 29 reviewers who made a reject recommendation, in every case using *you* or *your* (Example 28).

(28)   Why not examine work in Reading Research Quarterly, English for Specific Purposes, TESOL Quarterly (etc.) before refocusing *your* study? Or *you* could follow David Rose's work much more carefully…

Only one reviewer in the reject reviews used an appeal to shared knowledge (Example 29).

(29)   *Certainly*, South Africa, with its complex linguistic picture and its history of under-resourced schools, is of interest to the international literacy community.

A point to note, however, is the differences in length between the reject and major revisions reviews. As mentioned above, the average length of reject reviews was 693 words, whereas the average length of major revisions reviews was 1,009 words. Notwithstanding there was still a lot of very helpful advice for authors in the reject reviews. As Iida (2016) argues, even if a paper is rejected there is still a lot to be learnt from what the reviewers have said about the submission that can help improve it. Writers, then, should take on board the feedback they have been given on their paper and revise it accordingly before they send it to the next journal on their list. In fact, it is not at all uncommon when an author sends a paper that has been rejected to another journal that it is sent to the same reviewer who looked at it for the earlier journal. If the author hasn't made the changes the reviewer asked for when they were reviewing the original submission, in many cases, the reviewer will let the editor of the new journal know this and s/he may then ask

for an explanation as to why the changes that were asked for were not made. All reviews, then, need to be taken seriously, even if the outcome of the submission is a rejection (Paltridge & Starfield, 2016).

4.5   Reviewer roles

Reviewers, further, as Englander and López-Bonilla (2011) have argued, take on different roles as they write their reports. They might switch between roles as they review the author's work without using engagement strategies as they do this. For example, they might take on the role of an evaluator when they judge the quality of a paper (Example 30).

(30)   The author has done very nice work revising this manuscript

Or they might make a recommendation on the submission (Example 31).

(31)   I recommend this paper be accepted for publication

Reviewers may also make editorial comments on the papers they are reviewing (Example 32).

(32)   There are a few minor language points to clear up.

They might also take on the role of an expert on the topic (Example 33).

(33)   The author seems to be attributing the notion of t-unit to Peter Fries (1994), but it was actually developed by Kellogg Hunt (1965).

Or they might make it clear they are expressing their own personal view on the submission (Example 34).

(34)   I feel that the application has been somewhat formulaic.

At times, a number of roles might co-occur as in Example (35) where the reviewer makes an evaluative comment at the same time as they make a recommendation.

(35)   While the major reworking of this article has greatly improved the flow of the argument [evaluation], I cannot recommend it for publication [recommendation].

Reviewers' reports also employ particular rhetorical strategies such as where they combine 'good news' with 'bad news' on the submission (Belcher, 2007) or as Hyland (2000) and Bocanegra-Valle (2015) point out, combine both praise and criticism in what they say (Example 36).

(36)   I applaud the authors' effort to address reviewers' comments [praise], but I'm afraid this manuscript is still not appropriate for publication [criticism].

Sometimes a reviewer might apologise before providing bad news (Example 37).

(37)   I regret not being able to simply recommend publication.

These examples illustrate some of the politeness strategies that reviewers employ as they anticipate their readers' reactions to what they write, taking account of the fact that criticism, in English, is often seen as a face threatening act which needs to be mitigated, or softened, in some way (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Haugh, 2012; Huang, 2014; Scollon, Wong-Scollon, & Jones, 2011).

Other ways in which reviewers aim to save the face of the author are intensifying their interest in the submission (Example 38)

(38)   This is an excellent piece of work in all respects

and expressing approval (Example 39)

(39)   I enjoyed this paper for a number of reasons

but follow this with 'However .....'

In addition, reviewers sometimes avoided disagreement by employing a strategy such as in Example (40).

(40)   I am not sure if I have understood what the author wants to say.

These, combined with the engagement strategies outlined in this paper, are examples of the rhetorical strategies which reviewers employ to take account of the audiences of their texts, show involvement with their readers (Scollon, Wong-Scollon, & Jones, 2011) and anticipate how readers will react to their texts. As they do this, reviewers display their understanding of the characteristics of 'good research' and criteria for evaluating this in the particular disciplinary community as they comment on the work they are reading in terms of how the submission fits with the audience of the text.

5.   Discussion

The use of engagement markers in the reviewers' reports were similar in some ways to those employed in other kinds of academic writing and differed in others. A study by Jiang and Ma (2018), for example, which examined doctoral students' confirmation of candidature reports, as with the current study, found directives to be the most frequent engagement marker, used by 47.9% of markers in the reports. This, however, was followed by knowledge appeals (31.5%), reader mentions (16.6%), questions (2.8%) and asides (1.2%) which is different from the current study. Research which has looked at PhD examiners' reports, while working

with a different theoretical model to that drawn on in the current study, namely systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), has found that examiners take on similar roles to those found in the current study (Starfield et al., 2017). PhD examiners also often make judgements on students' work, taking responsibility for their comments in a similar way to self mentions as outlined above (Starfield et al., 2015).

Studies which have examined engagement in research articles in the areas of applied linguistics, biology, electrical engineering and sociology, have found directives to be the most frequent engagement device employed by writers (Hyland & Jiang, 2016b) as was the case with the current study. This, however, contrasts with research into engagement markers in pure mathematics research articles where reader references were most frequent (72.8% of all engagement devices) followed by directives, and knowledge references (McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012).

Studies which have examined directives specifically (e.g. Hyland, 2002b) have found that academic textbooks use this device just as frequently as they do in the reports examined in the current study, whereas research articles use them less. It needs to be remembered, however, that although directives were frequent in the reviewers' reports, they were much less so in the reports that made a reject recommendation and were much more frequently used in the reports that recommended acceptance of the submission than in the minor and major revisions reports. This is perhaps not surprising as reject reports generally do not give a lot of direction for revision as, if the editor follows the reviewer's recommendation, the article will not be considered further for publication in the journal. Accept reviews, by contrast, are assuming that the article will be published and so reviewers often give very specific directions on what needs to be done to the paper in order for it to be published, with much less hedging than in the other categories of review (see Paltridge, 2017 for further discussion of this).

The functions of the directives in the reviewer's reports, further, were different from that of other genres that have been examined from this perspective. In the reviewer's reports directives were mostly used as an instruction to perform an action rather than as a textual act which guides the reader through the text. There were, further, in contrast with other academic genres that have been examined, fewer instances of directives performing a cognitive function (such as *consider* and *suppose*) which aim "to secure the reader's understanding of the content" of the text (Hyland, 2000, p. 226).

It needs to be remembered, however, that the purpose and nature of reviewer's reports are very different from other genres where the use of engagement strategies have been examined. Reviewer's reports are, essentially, an evaluative genre where readers are asked to make a judgement about the quality of an author's work which is different, for example, from published academic research. Reviewers are

looking to see to what extent the author has command of particular subject knowledge, has demonstrated particular research skills, and has presented their work in a way which convinces the reader (at this point, the reviewer) of their claims. Reviewers are also looking to see how the article 'fits' with current conversations, values and understandings within the discipline and if it follows the norms and expectations for published research in the area of study. Reviewers are also expecting to see a certain level of literacy quality in the submission. If any of these do not meet expected requirements, then reviewers give authors directions on how the work can be revised to meet the required standard, hence there is a high level of directives in the reports that they write. All of this is important for writers to understand so they can more accurately interpret the feedback they have been given on their work and, in turn, take the actions that are required of them as a result of this feedback.

6.   Conclusions

This paper has examined the engagement strategies that reviewers employ when writing reports on submissions to academic journals, in this case articles submitted to the journal *English for Specific Purposes*. It has then considered how the engagement strategies that reviewers draw on are both similar to and different from other kinds of academic writing. Reviewers' reports, however, are a very different genre from other academic texts. They are different in terms of their intended readership as is the overall reason for which they are written. While the author is clearly the primary reader of the texts, the reports are written with other readers in mind as well, notably the editor of the journal as well as the other reviewers who, at a later stage, may read the reports and make judgements about them in terms of quality, accuracy and appropriateness of the feedback.

Some of the rhetorical strategies that reviewers employ in their texts are not specific to the genre of reviewers' reports, however, but are reflective of the discourse community's expectations for interactions within the community as a whole, such as the use of particular politeness strategies and the ways in which reviewers attempt to engage with their readers. The ways in which reviewers do this, however, may be confusing for new researchers, suggesting that the reviewers are more 'on-side' with the authors than they actually are and that they do not necessarily need to make all the changes that have been suggested by the reviewers when, in fact, they do. This has implications for the teaching of writing for research publication purposes where beginning academic authors need to learn not only what the expectations and conventions are for research articles in their area of study but also how they should read and respond to reviews of their work.

As they will find, there are often many more negative than positive comments in reviewers' reports, and, as this paper has shown, reviewers engage with their readers in different ways in their reports depending on the recommendation they are making on the submission. And, as was the case with the data analysed in this paper, some reviewers, at the interpersonal level, engage very little in the reports that they write. These are all important points to discuss with beginning academic authors so they learn how to interpret the reviews they receive on their work, how to respond to them, and, of course, not be discouraged by what might seem like an overwhelming amount of criticism on their work.

There are, of course, limitations to the analysis that has been presented in this paper. The reviews that were examined were from a single journal and in a single field of study. The findings, thus, cannot necessarily be generalised to other journals in other areas of study. The results of the study outlined in this paper could, however, be the focus of further studies which examine reviewers' reports in other journals in both the same and different areas of study to see to what extent the analysis presented in this paper holds for reviewers' reports written for different journals and in different areas of study. These further studies would reveal to what extent there is discourse variation across journals and disciplines in terms of the features focussed on in this paper. As Hyland (2005a) has argued, scholarly discourse:

> is not monolithic but an outcome of a multitude of different practices and strategies, where argument and engagement are crafted within specific communities that have different ideas about what is worth communicating, how it can be communicated, what readers are likely to know, how they might be persuaded and so on. (p.196)

Further research into the use of engagement strategies in reviewers' reports on submissions to academic journals in other disciplinary areas would help us to see to what extent our field is similar to, or different from, other fields of study showing us how writers of reviewers' reports, through the texts that they write, "see the values, interests and assumptions of their communities" (Hyland, 2005a, p.195) and the rhetorical strategies they draw on as they do this.

There may also be changes in reviewing practices since the data for this study were collected which would no doubt impact the reports that reviewers write. Journals such as *Theoretical Linguistics*, for example, use *open peer review* where both the author and the reviewers know each other's identity. The journal *Publications* which publishes research into scholarly writing also offers open peer review to its authors. In this version of peer review, authors can opt to have their reviews and editorial decisions published alongside their manuscript and reviewers can identify themselves in the reviews that are published if they

wish (Ross-Hellauer, 2018). *TESOL Quarterly* has recently moved to single blind review, instructing authors not to blind their previous publications so it is clear to the reviewers which (and whose) work is being referred to. As other journals move to different ways of managing the peer review process, the nature of reviewers' reports might also change (see Bocanegra-Valle, 2015 for a discussion of other types of peer review; Bravo, Grimaldo, López-Iñesta, Mehmani, & Squazzoni, 2019 for an examination of the effect of publishing reviewers' reports on referee behaviour).

Notwithstanding, this study has provided a more complete view of metadiscourse in reviewers' reports than has been the case with other studies based on the same set of reports by focussing on engagement, as opposed to stance which was the focus of previous work with this data (see Paltridge, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). This is important, as a stance analysis does not include directives (an aspect of an engagement analysis) which, it has been argued elsewhere (Paltridge, 2015, 2019a), are a challenge for beginning authors, especially if they are made indirectly or if they are hedged. This use of indirect and hedged directives needs to be highlighted in the teaching of English for research publication purposes so that authors who are new to the peer-review process know how to interpret reviewers' reports and make changes to their submissions rather than thinking reviewers are giving them a choice as to whether they should make particular changes or not. In addition, the high use of reader pronouns revealed in the study shows reviewers taking an interpersonal orientation (Bocanegra-Valle, 2015) in their reviews as an involvement strategy (Scollon, Wong-Scollon, & Jones, 2011) at the same time as they deliver 'bad news' to the authors. It is very easy, then, for authors to misinterpret reviewers' intentions, especially when directions to make changes to a paper are unclear through the use of indirect speech acts or hedging. The different roles that reviewers adopt as they make their comments complicate the situation further. Pointing out matters such as these to beginning authors can help them better understand reviewers' reports, learn how to respond to them and, as a result, increase their chances of getting published. This is especially the case when editors' decision letters can be equally difficult to interpret (Farley, 2016; Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002) and lead novice authors to wondering, even if they are invited to, whether they should revise and resubmit their article to a journal, or not.

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