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Evaluative Language in Arabic Academic Discourse

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of evaluative language in Arabic academic discourse. The analysis was carried out based on the evaluative posts published in the Arabic language in social networks related to the defense of Ph.D. dissertations and the obtaining by Arabic-speaking students of Ph.D. degrees. The focus of the research in the language of appraisal in Arabic academic settings is related to socially and traditionally determining aspects in the perception of the Ph.D. degree in Arab society. In order to identify specific features of the written language of evaluation in Arabic academic discourse, our study is built on the Appraisal theory proposed by James Martin and Peter White (2005) and focused on its sub-categories of the Appraisal theory: *Affect*, *Appreciation*, *Judgment*. The comparative analysis made it possible to identify both universal and specific components in the regarded ways of evaluation within the framework of academic discourse. The authors determine the lexico-grammatical methods of assessment in Arabic academic discourse, which characterize the perception and functioning of the evaluative language in the system of value coordinates of the Arab society. The novelty of the proposed research lies in the fact that at present the appeal to the Arabic academic discourse has not been sufficiently studied. In the end of the study, the authors concluded that the Appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005) can be applied to the research of Arabic language of evaluation. The authors also argue that the written language of assessment in the Arabic academic discourse is directly proportional to cultural, traditional, religious factors that are reflected in the lexico-grammatical components of the assessment. Misunderstanding of these specific features of the evaluative language of the Arabic academic discourse leads to communicative failures. The authors noted the prospects for studying the evaluative language within the framework of the Arabic academic discourse could be conducted in a comparative analysis of the oral and written Arabic language of assessment, each of which has its own specific culturally determined features.

Keywords: evaluative language, Arabic academic discourse, Arabic language, Appraisal theory, communicative failures

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Оценочная лексика арабского академического дискурса

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена изучению оценочной лексики в арабском академическом дискурсе. Анализ проведен на основе опубликованных на арабском языке оценочных постов в социальных сетях, связанных с защитой кандидатских диссертаций и получением арабоязычными студентами степени кандидата наук. Выбор данного материала для исследования обусловлен тем, что в арабоязычном обществе присвоение степени кандидата наук является важным социальным событием в жизни студента и его семьи. Чтобы выявить специфические черты письменного языка оценки в арабском академическом дискурсе, исследование было основано на теории оценки (the Appraisal theory), предложенной Джеймсом Мартином и Питером Уайтом (2005), и сосредоточено на таких подкатегориях, как аффект (*Affect*), признательность (*Appreciation*), суждение (*Judgment*). Сравнительный анализ позволил выявить как универсальные, так и специфические компоненты рассматриваемых способов оценивания в рамках академического дискурса. Авторы определяют лексико-грамматические способы оценивания в арабском академическом дискурсе, характеризующие восприятие и функционирование оценочного языка в системе ценностных координат арабского общества. Новизна предлагаемого исследования заключается в том, что в настоящее время обращение к арабскому академическому дискурсу недостаточно изучено. В результате исследования авторы пришли к выводу о том, что теория оценки, предложенная Мартином и Уайтом (2005), может быть применена к изучению арабского оценочного языка. Авторы также утверждают, что письменный язык оценки в арабском академическом дискурсе напрямую зависит от культурных, традиционных, религиозных факторов, которые отражаются в лексикограмматических компонентах оценки, а непонимание этих особенностей оценочного языка арабского академического дискурса приводит к коммуникативным неудачам. Перспективы дальнейшего исследования оценочного языка в рамках арабского академического дискурса авторы видят в сравнительном анализе устного и письменного арабского оценочного языка, каждый из которых имеет свои специфические, культурно обусловленные особенности.

Ключевые слова: оценочная лексика, арабский академический дискурс, арабский язык, теория оценки, коммуникативная неудача

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Introduction

The study of evaluative language in academic settings has been recently gaining momentum in the fields of pragmatics [1; 2], discourse studies [3; 4; 5], and comparative linguistic studies [6; 7]. It is worth noting that most of the research works examining evaluation in the frames of academic discourse focused on the English language academic discourse [8; 9]. Alongside we can mention several studies that seek to analyze Arabic academic discourse [10; 11; 12]. However, these works concentrated on the Arabic texts' structures in academic settings (articles, presentations) rather than analyzing the implication of Arabic evaluative language at large.

The Arabic evaluative language in academic discourse presents a unique research opportunity for several reasons. Firstly, being part of a culture where interpersonal relationships play a key role in society, Arabic evaluative language consists of a balance of adherence of its participants to cultural, religious, verbal, and non-verbal norms of communication. Secondly, the Arabic language of verbal evaluation within the framework of academic discourse has distinctive features for each of the education stages (e.g. university admission, dissertation defense). Thirdly, Arabic evaluative language in academic settings is determined by a certain lexico-grammatical set, which, when directly translated into other languages, loses its evaluative specificity.

Theoretical background

At the moment, we cannot convey a single omnipresent theory for evaluation in academic discourse. At different times and places, scientists put forward and researched areas similar to the theory of evaluation. For example, American scholars explored the complexities of writer-reader interactions from the standpoint of *metadiscourse* which has been taken to mean the rhetorical field that controls the communicative function of language [13; 14]. Also, some researchers looked at the way academic writers gain interpersonal positioning within their fields of study through the use of the evaluative language recognized in evidentiality and hedging [7], mindset markers [9], stance markers [5; 2], voice markers [15], and Appraisal [14].

The use of evaluative language to produce stance and voice has been given academic engagement in recent years. Researchers conjured a broad spectrum of methods in analyzing evaluation language: corpus-based methodology [13, 16; 17];

Systemic Functional Linguistic discourse semantic standpoint [14], and discourse analytic, qualitative, and quantitative approaches [18].

As part of the study of the evaluative language in the context of written academic discourse, it has been shown that the argumentative and rhetorical practices used to express and position one's views differ according to the generic, disciplinary and cultural context in which they are produced [16; 17].

In essence, some studies analyze the dependence of evaluative language on cultural values (collective or individual values). These studies proved that cultural values are directly related [19] to such aspects of evaluation in language as the style of evaluation [20] and preferred rhetorical practices for expressing judgments [21].

The Appraisal theory has recently made a big-scale contribution to the development of evaluative language theory in general. The Appraisal theory describes semantic systems that interpret interpersonal relationships in the English language. This theory has attracted the attention of many scholars nowadays due to the theory's affordability of implementation to different contexts, discourses, and languages. The appraisal is involved with the interpersonal dimension in the language [22—24]. Particularly, it implicates a study of the subjective presence of the writer that is reflected by (1) the expression of statements concerning the material a writer produces and (2) the audiences of communication. The appraisal is presented by Jeannett Martin and Peter White [23] as follows: "it is concerned with how writers/speakers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticize, and with how they position their readers/listeners to do so likewise". The Appraisal suggests a sample for the experiment of how writers transfer sentiments, tastes, and formative judgments. Also, the Appraisal inquires how to evaluate in a way to ultimately permits to create through text communities of shared feelings and values [24].

There are practically no research papers devoted to evaluation within the framework of the Arabic academic discourse. We can single out one research work on the study of the evaluative Arabic language, which was carried out within the framework of comparative linguistics. Thus in 2016, Mahdi Al-Ramadan conducted research based on written materials of Anglo-American and Arabic-speaking students from Saudi Arabia. The study concluded that culture plays a pivotal role in differentiating between the means of academic persuasion that are preferred by writers in the two relevant cultures, as the Anglo-American texts adopted an evaluative stance (the writer appears to the target audience as an objective and impartial person). She concluded, that Americans for the language of evaluation were careful, precise, and restricted by the rules and standards that govern the rhetorical practices of the academic discourse group. It was discovered that these texts depend on the use of what is called in the literature the analysis of the interchangeable meaning of the discourse *the voice of the arguer*, which is characterized by its interactive nature. On the other hand, it was found that Arabic essay writers prefer to use a more personal persuasive style, and the evaluative meanings in Arabic texts were more intense and focused as a result of the adoption of repetition as a persuasive rhetorical method. In addition, the textual voice of an

Arabic student was more trusting, unilateral, and less interactive with the audience in a way that generally resembles the distinctive textual sound of *teaching books*. The Arabic rhetorical features are also found in most of the academic texts written in English as a foreign language by the students. This supports the role of culture in determining the optimal persuasive methods for the writer and also supports the validity of the hypothesis of contrastive rhetoric at the level of reciprocal meaning in the process of constructing the academic text. The results of Al-Ramadan research [25] indicate that due to both the process of linguistic interaction (transfer) from the mother culture and the possibility of the student writers' lack of awareness of the rules and standards of academic persuasion followed in the target discourse community, the students tend to produce what she calls *intergenres* — “hybrid genres that carry features from different sources and that do not entirely reflect the character of either the native culture's or the target culture's version of the genre in question” [24. P. 215].

Methodology

The present study is limited to the analysis of written academic discourse. Spoken academic discourse, such as that represented by the genres of presentations, lectures, and conferences, is out of the scope of this study. The study is based on the Appraisal theory within a detail look at the category of the *attitudinal stance* of the Appraisal Analytical Model, which is explained in section *Arabic Evaluative language: implementation of the Appraisal theory* of the present study.

Forming the methodological base, both linguistic and non-linguistic methods are engaged in executing the study. The present analysis seeks to implement such standard methods of research as induction and deduction. Using the method of induction in our study, we summarize the results of individual private observations of evaluation in Arabic in terms of academic discourse. The deduction method allowed us to investigate the language of evaluation within the framework of the Appraisal theory, which had not previously been tested on the Arabic-speaking academic discourse.

In addition to this, the method of component analysis was applied to analyze the content component of the language structures of evaluation within the framework of the Arabic academic discourse.

The study is based on posts about the successful defense of dissertations and obtaining a Ph.D. degree published in social media, which have become the main platform for communication in Arabic-speaking countries during the pandemic COVID-19. This material for the study was chosen since the phenomenon of expressing a written evaluation (writer) associated with the academic achievements of a person (reader) has not been studied in Arabic academic discourse. Nevertheless, the widespread use in social media, in particular by the Arab-speaking population for academic purposes, have been proven by previous studies [26; 27]. We have chosen the aspect of evaluating in Arabic academic settings in obtaining the Ph.D. degree since this process is a socially significant moment in the

life of a student and his family (قابلة). In the Arab world, it is believed the one who has received a Ph.D. (the field of study does not matter) is an example for the whole family to follow. After the obtaining of the Ph.D. degree, this student's name will be preceded by the letter *د* or will be written (and also pronounced) *doctor* (الدكتور (هيثم هاني الحديد).

Some key standpoints of Arabic academic discourse and its theoretical background

Arabic academic discourse is a unique subject for analysis; however, we can find hardly any works related to the study of Arabic academic discourse. Moreover, most of the researchers are genre-based and attempt to involve genre-structure analytical models in the study of Arabic academic discourse [10—12; 28—31]. Thus, Sultan [30], provided research on the nature of interpersonal communication in the Arabic academic texts. He developed his study on the published research articles in the field of linguistics and concluded that “the Arab writers were more inclined than the English-speaking writers to use attitude markers (*surprisingly, unfortunately, I agree*) to guide readers in understanding their opinions, intentions, and points of view” [30. P. 29]. In addition, the research reveals that Arabic students prefer to use boosters to express conviction and determination. It also discovered that evidence (for example, *X claims according to Y*) was about twice as common in English-language articles. According to Sultan, English authors equip a granular basis for verifying the facts they provide. This study indicates the majority of intercultural contrasts in the use of interpersonal elements in academic discourse. However, Sultan's research got criticism, because it remains relatively limited studies that are devoted to the study of interpersonal metafunction and how it is fully realized in various lexicographical resources [1; 32].

From a cross-cultural perspective, Arabic academic discourse has attracted the attention of Arabic-speaking researchers. Therefore, in 2010 Mohamed-Sayidina investigated the culture-specific factors of Arabic Academic discourse. He finalized that Arabic students use such elements of verbal communication in the written texts as “additive modes of propositional development” (درس درسا، كتب كتابا) and religious statements, such as (سبحان الله، بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم). He connected this phenomenon with “dependence of Arabic educational systems on memorizing and rote learning” [33. P. 264]. It is important to mention, that Arabs at large use religious vocabulary in many uncommon Islam fields without understanding the need for their implementation [34].

Tareq Hamed explored the nature of the conjunctive transition in argumentative essays written by Libyan undergraduate students. Thus, his analysis revealed an excessive use of intersentential coordination with the conjunction *and* (و) and inappropriate use of adversative coordination (expressing the opposition of one word or sentence to another). The data obtained are explained by the negative borrowing of the use of the conjunction *and* (و) from the Arabic language of students, in which the conjunction *and* (و) can express five functions: continuative

(وكنتيجة الدراسة هذا الامر مهم جدا), additive (عدي اليوم الرياضة والرياضيات), commentary (مبروك وعقبك), adversative (اليوم مدومين, وبكرا العطللة) (وأنني مسرور جدا), and simulative (الدكتوراه). The Libyan students carried over the function of continuing *and* (و) into their English writing, as it is used at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs in Arabic texts [35].

Also, within the framework of studying Arabic academic discourse from a cross-cultural perspective, much attention is paid to studies that examine how the choice of vocabulary contributes to the formation of certain culturally specific meanings that help achieve compelling goals. Thus, R. Rass concluded that the frequent repetition of the form of the word, which is characteristic of the Arabic academic discourse, also appeared in the writing of the text by the Arabs in English. He believes that this strategy is perceived by the Arabs as a strategy of persuasion. R. Rass also concluded that Arabs often use superlatives (*the best, the most*) in student papers in both Arabic and English. Speaking about the pattern of frequent use of superlatives, Russ writes: “unity of belief, indicating that there is only one true path, one right way; there is a single answer; there is black and white and no shades of gray” [36. P. 209]. This study also provides an analysis of the frequent use of the pronouns *we* and *our*, which, in the author’s opinion, is the strategy of Arabic-speaking students who are “oriented to the group”. The frequent use of the pronouns *we* and *our* can be explained by the collective nature of the Arab culture. As in previous studies, R. Rass in his research proves that the use of Islamic expressions in the framework of academic discourse is characteristic of Arabic-speaking students who do not always understand the correct context for using these Quranic expressions, or according to the author “often fail to consider the idea of “audience” when they write” [36. P. 209].

Arabic Evaluative language: implementation of the Appraisal theory

To analyze the language of evaluation within the framework of the Arabic academic discourse, according to the methodology described above, we applied the Appraisal theory provided by J. Martin and P. White (2005). In the Appraisal theory, J. Martin (2003) and Martin and P. White (2005) constructed standard distinctions such as “those holding between modality and attitudinal lexis” [4. P. 35], and “between attitudinal and epistemic stance” [38. P. 241]. The Appraisal theory can be diagrammatically displayed as follows.

In this study, we focus on the *Attitude* section, since in the framework of obtaining the Ph.D. degree, this gradation will allow us to provide a more detailed analysis of the evaluation language within the framework of Arabic academic discourse.

Firstly, *Affect* is clarified as “a semantic resource for construing emotions” [38. P. 148]. The *Un/happiness* sub-category of *Affect* “covers emotions concerned with ‘affairs of the heart’ — sadness, anger, happiness and love” [38. P. 150]. The *Dis/satisfaction* sub-category of *Affect* presents “emotions concerned with telos (the pursuit of goals) — such as ennu, displeasure, curiosity, respect” [38. P. 150].

The *In/security* sub-category of *Affect* “covers emotions concerned with ecosocial well-being” as is displayed in the consistencies of “anxiety, fear, confidence and trust” [38. P. 150]. The *Dis/inclination* of *Affect* is associated with the type of sensations that implicate “intention (rather than reaction), to a stimulus that is unrealis rather than realis” [38. P. 150]. The Appraisal theory can be diagrammatically displayed as follows:

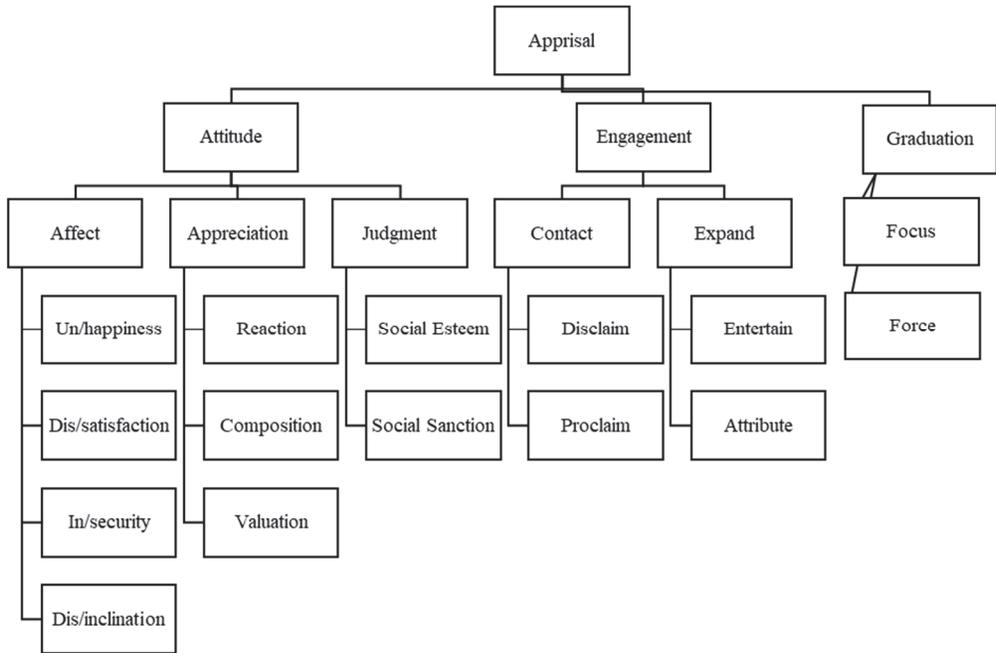


Fig. 1. The Appraisal theory Module by Martin and White (2005)

Рис. 1. Схема теории оценки, предложенная Мартином и Уайтом (2005)

Table 1 / Таблица 1

**Examples of *Affect* in the Arabic academic discourse data /
Примеры аффекта (*Affect*) в арабском академическом дискурсе**

Affect	happiness	دكتورنا الحبيب الغالي لك خالص تبريكاتنا... داعين المولى عز وجل بأن تكون سيفاً للحق تندود عن الوطن والأمة...،،، أقسم أنك حامل نياشين الفخار والعلم والطيب
	satisfaction	كيف لا وأنت على طريق الآباء والأجداد ترفع الراية الأردنية بسواعدك وتفدي الوطن بروحك ، وتبسط على وجه المعمورة المنير فروسية وفراسة تشربتها في عرين شيخنا الغالي الاجودي صاحب المواقف المشرفة وكلمة الحق المدوية راعي الشومات ومدرسة الفخار وسنديانة الولاء والانتماء
	security	بارك الى نسبي الغالي الدكتور هيثم هاني الحديد حصوله على درجة الدكتوراه من جامعة جورج واشنطن مع مرتبة الشرف ، كل الدعم والتوفيق
	inclination	غادرنا قبل لحظات متوجها الى موسكو لاتمام الحصول على شهادة الدكتوراه في العلاقات الدولية ، بعد حصوله على شهادة التميز بالماجستير من جامعة الصداقه في موسكو وقد تكرمت الجامعة بمنحه الالتحاق بدراسة الدكتوراه من الجامعة تمنياتنا له بالتوفيق

Secondly, *Appreciation* is mostly dedicated to *things* (materials) rather than people and their manners. Particularly, it contains optimistic/pessimistic estimations of the constitution, formation, formatting, impact, presentation, value of natural objects, procedures, or conditions of experiences by “reference to aesthetics and other systems of social value” [24]. People can also be *Appreciated*, whereas the *judgment* does not directly reveal the in/correctness of behaviors [25]. *Appreciation* is supposed to be an institutionalization of *Affect* because in the *Appreciation* one directs to socially identified approaches of *value*. In this way, “*values of Appreciation* [are] less directly personalizing, at least relative to *values of Affect*” [25].

Appreciation consists of *reaction*, *composition*, and *valuation*. *Reaction* characterizes the evaluator’s responses to things; whether these things are acceptable, dissatisfying, whether are rewarding. An essential contrast between the system of *Affect* and the system of *Reaction* is that *Affectual* values are permanently connected with a distinct human experiencer (طالبة مجتهدة). *Reaction* (قضية مثيرة) (للاهتمام) is separated from human experiencers to the assessed entity “as if it were some property which the entity objectively and intrinsically possesses” [24].

The second kind of *Appreciation* is *Composition*. It is affiliated with the evaluation of the format or form of the thing; how agreeably the elements of the entity under evaluation fit together, how balanced, and congruous it is. *Valuation* as a type of *Appreciation* is connected to assessments of the social weight of the entity; whether it is beneficial or not.

Table 2 / Таблица 2

**Examples of *Appreciation* in the Arabic academic discourse data /
 Примеры признательности (*Appreciation*) в арабском академическом дискурсе**

Appreciation	reaction	تخرجك بامتياز مع التوصية بنشر رسالتك الدكتوراه في ريادة الأعمال للمنظمات غير الربحية من الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية أجمل فرحة فرحتك في وصولك لهدفك، وفرحك في يوم تخرجك
	composition	الى الكزن ابو غازي الغالي دكتورنا والدبلوماسي المستقبلي الف مبروك التخرج وعقبال الدكتوراه ونتمنى ان تشاركك اللحظة ونفرح بتخرجكم لكن القادم افضل
	valuation	الحمد لله على فضله ونعمه وكثير عطائه، أبارك لنفسي حصول أخي الغالي والعزيز عبدالله حمودات على شهادة الماجستير في السياسة والعلاقات الدولية.. حبيبي ابو رزان نجاحك نجاحنا.. وفرحك وفرحنا.. ويا رب أعلى المراتب والدرجات دائماً.

Thirdly, the type of *Attitude*, *Judgment*, concerns the area indicating that expresses the writers’ *Attitude* towards and normative judgment of people and “their character (how they measure up)” [23. P. 52]. *Judgments* of manners are separated into two types, those dealing with *Social Esteem* and those dealing with *Social Sanction*. *Social Esteem* affects individual estimations of affection or objection of manners, notably those connected to peoples’ *Normality*, *Capacity*, and *Tenacity*. *Social Sanction* interests’ moral judgments of recognition or condemnation of behaviors that have to do with peoples’ *Veracity* and *Propriety*.

Table 3 / Таблица 3

**Examples of Judgment in the Arabic academic discourse data /
 Примеры суждения (Judgment) в арабском академическом дискурсе**

Judgment	Social Esteem	Normality	ما شاء الله كتب رسالته بالإنجليزية حول ريادة الأعمال للمنظمات غير الربحية
		Capacity	الحمد لله الدكتوراه الفخرية من جامعة البريطانية
		Tenacity	لا قوة الا الله هاشم قرر دراسة اللغة الروسية لمدة عام، ثم الدراسة في كلية الدراسات العليا بالروسية
	Social Sanction	Veracity	ألف ألف مبروك!
		Propriety	كل التقدير والتجاح!

Conclusion

The analysis carried out on the study of evaluative language in Arabic academic discourse based on posts published in social media and dedicated to the successful defense of Ph.D. dissertations, allowed us to draw the following conclusions. Firstly, the applicability of the Appraisal theory proposed by J. Martin and P. White can be applied not only to the analysis of the English appraisal language for which it was developed but also to the analysis of the appraisal language within the Arabic language discourse. Secondly, the language of evaluation in the Arabic academic discourse is determined by such factors as social (a specific attitude in Arab society towards a person who obtained a Ph.D. degree), traditional (a student who obtained a Ph.D. degree is the example for the whole family), religious (the entire language of evaluation includes religious, Islamic expressions). Thirdly, in the context of the pandemic, social media have become the main platform for communication between Arabic-speaking users, including academic communication, which allows us to study evaluative language, as shown in this study. We could note the prospects for studying the evaluative language within the framework of the Arabic academic discourse could be conducted in a comparative analysis of the oral and written Arabic language of assessment, each of which has its own specific culturally determined features.

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