

**Worksheet used in adult numeracy class****Where are the decimal points?**

Insert decimal points in the most suitable places:

A woman **163 metres** tall gave birth to a baby weighing **32 kilograms**. Before she went into the local hospital **25 kilometres** away (5 minutes drive), she purchased a leg of lamb weighing **25 kg** for **\$729** and told her husband to cook it at **180°C** for **25 hours**. She also asked him to buy some petrol for their **32 litre** Jaguar, as the price was down to **492 cents per litre**.



**J.R. MARTIN**

## Reading positions/positioning readers: Judgment in English

### Abstract

This paper explores the issue of reading positions from the perspective of one aspect of appraisal in English. The analysis focuses on the realisation of judgment in history texts, taking note of explicit and implied realisations, and the range of reading positions (compliant, resistant or tactical) that might be taken up. It is suggested that the interpretation of interpersonal resources, such as judgment, reinforces the notion of text as a meaning potential whose readings are enabled socially with respect to a culture's divergent subjectivities.

### Reading positions

Typically, early in their training, students of linguistics are introduced to the problem of ambiguous sentences and the need to provide different analyses for different meanings. For example, my daughter (then six) once asked my son (then four) for a bite of his apple. (She asked, 'Can I have a bite of your apple, Hamee?') His response was to bite off a piece and hand it to her, which she accepted, rolling her eyes at her care givers. She'd intended, of course, that he hand over the apple so she could bite into it, with '...I have a bite...' interpreted as a material Actor<sup>^</sup>Process<sup>^</sup>Range structure. He, on the other hand, reluctant no doubt to part with the apple, and probably uncomfortable with her construal of the action 'bite' as a noun, read her request as a relational Carrier<sup>^</sup>Process<sup>^</sup>Attribute structure — and so put her in possession of a piece of the apple, but didn't hand it over so that she could do what she wanted with it. So, in the context, the one sentence had two readings, reflecting the different reading positions of older sister and younger brother in what care givers like to construe (yet another reading) as a time for sharing.

Of course, for some sentences there may be many more than two readings. Michael Halliday (1976) once devoted an entire article to various grammatical interpretations of the apparently unproblematic sentence 'The teacher taught the student English.' And in his work on scientific English (eg Halliday and Martin 1993: 77–79), he has often emphasised the highly ambiguous nature of nominalised expressions — outlining hundreds or even thousands of possible meanings where a writer has presumably intended only one. And once we move beyond the sentence

into the meaning(s) of text, in one sense the problem simply compounds. In the face of this explosive complexity, one 'natural' reaction is to try and reduce the meaning potential of a text to something more manageable — a single reading which integrates the parts into a whole and suits the context. But as cultural theorists (eg Lee 1993) have taken pains to point out to those guilty of reductive reading practices of this kind, this kind of simplification involves promoting one reading at the expense of others — and this involves promoting one group of readers in our culture at the expense of others. It is reasonably argued in education that, if the readings of socially dominant readers are the only readings valued and taught, then the readings of less powerful readers are devalued and marginalised. This in turn places unnecessary limitations on the range of voices in our culture which enter into dialogue with one another, and this means that our culture's potential for negotiating social change is unnecessarily restricted. At the same time, if a single clause can be read in thousands of ways, and any text in thousands of thousands of ways, how on earth do we manage the complexity of reading text on a day-to-day basis in our classrooms? How can we manage overwhelming complexity, while at the same time fostering difference as a resource for social change?

### Appraisal in English

My most recent encounter with the dilemmas arising from these issues was in the context of the Disadvantaged Schools Program's *Write it Right* project, where we were involved in unpacking the discourse demands of the junior secondary school curriculum and various workplace institutions. In this project we were working mainly with monologic texts, and so the descriptions of speech function and exchange structure developed at the University of Sydney during the 1980s weren't much help to us as far as studying interpersonal meaning was concerned. Yet we were aware that the texts we were working with were positioning and repositioning readers in ways we needed to account for — that obviously had to do with the dynamics of tenor relationships in and around the texts. To tackle these we had to shift our focus from grammar to lexis, and develop some theory for handling what we came to call *appraisal* resources, where these included resources for modalising, amplifying, reacting emotionally (affect), judging morally (judgment) and evaluating aesthetically (appreciation).

To illustrate just the last three of these, consider the following pieces of dialogue from the opening scene of the movie *Educating Rita*, the cinematic rendering of Willie Russell's classic study of conflicting reading positions and the negotiation of discourse across divergently gendered and classed subjectivities. In example 1 Rita responds emotionally to her tutor Frank's office and the view from its window and, quite characteristically,

attempts to share this reaction with him. Grammatically she draws on affective mental processes to construct how she feels.

#### Example 1

Affect (emotion): reacting to phenomena, behaviour, text/process)

Rita: I love this room. I love the view from this window. Do you like it?

Frank: I don't often consider it actually.

In example 2, Frank makes a number of moral judgments about the ethics of his actually tutoring Rita and, also quite characteristically, makes no attempt to negotiate this judgment with Rita; grammatically he draws on three attributive processes to make allowances for and then, for Rita's sake, to condemn his teaching.

#### Example 2

Judgment (ethics: evaluating behaviour)

Frank: You want a lot and I can't give it. Between you, and me, and the walls, actually I am an appalling teacher. That's all right most of the time. Appalling teaching is quite in order for most of my appalling students. But it is not good enough for you young woman.

In example 3, Rita, quite unselfconsciously, makes an untutored evaluation of a piece of popular culture she's just read, offering it to Frank in the process. The movie goes on to tell the story of how Rita learns to appreciate high culture (the canon) according to the by and large implicit aesthetic criteria by which educated people are expected to evaluate it.

#### Example 3

Appreciation (aesthetics: evaluating text/process/phenomenon)

Rita: Rita Mae Brown, who wrote 'Rubyfruit Jungle'.

Frank: No. Haven't...haven't you read it?

Rita: No.

Frank: It's a fantastic book, you know. Do you want to lend it?

Rita: Ah yes.

Frank: Here.

Rita: Yes. Well, thank you very much.

Frank: That's okay.

### Judgment in English

In this paper I will take up just one of the appraisal systems noted above — judgment. As noted, this is a system for evaluating behaviour. Semantically it involves qualities, and so tends to be realised adjectivally in grammar. This means that when behaviour is judged directly, it tends

to be realised nominally — a lucky break, an unfortunate incident, a rash shot, an ethical decision, an unfair practice. Alternatively, behaviour may be judged as an aspect of character (imputing behaviour) — a predictable fellow, an unstable partner, a powerful leader, an immature student, a plucky officer.

In our work, we developed judgment categories by drawing on Halliday's (eg 1994) account of English modality with its variables of probability, usuality, obligation, inclination and ability. From these variables evolved our judgments of fate (usuality), capacity (ability), resolve (inclination), truth (probability) and ethics (obligation). Based on our media research (Iedema, Feez and White 1995), we grouped these into judgments of social esteem (fate, capacity, resolve) and social sanction (truth, ethics), roughly on the basis of the legal implications of negative judgments — basically the difference between needing a therapist (negative social esteem) and needing a lawyer (negative social sanction). The Catholics in our group, and those recalling Dante's *Inferno*, noted that this resonated with the difference between venal and mortal sins in an alternative moral schema. A rough guide to our categories is outlined in Table 1, along with some sample realisations.

**Table 1:** A simple scaffold for judgment in English

Social esteem: 'venal'	Positive [admire]	Negative [criticise]
fate (usuality)	lucky, fortunate, charmed normal, average, everyday stable, predictable	unfortunate, pitiful, tragic odd, peculiar, eccentric unstable, unpredictable
capacity (ability)	powerful, vigorous, robust adult, mature, experienced insightful, clever, gifted	mild, weak, wirmy immature childish, helpless stupid, thick, slow
resolve (intention)	plucky, brave, heroic curious, inquisitive tireless, persevering, resolute	rash, cowardly, despondent uninterested, complacent weak, distracted, dissolute
Social sanction: 'mortal'	Positive [praise]	Negative [condemn]
truth (probability)	truthful, honest, credible authoritative discreet, trustworthy	dishonest, deceitful unconvincing indiscreet, untrustworthy
ethics (obligation)	right good, moral, ethical law abiding, fair, just	wrong bad, immoral, evil corrupt, unfair, unjust

### Analysing judgment

I'll move on now to illustrate the realisation of this system in the discourse of secondary school history. Example 4, below, is the introduction to a historical recount chronicling one phase of the Chinese revolution (from Buggy's 1988 senior secondary text). It sets up the two streams of judgment which Buggy moves on to consider in more detail in the recount — the positive capacity (here *diplomatic skills*) and resolve (here *bravery*) of the Red Army and its leaders.<sup>1</sup>

#### Example 4

##### Inscribing judgment

This most successful phase of the Long March owes a great deal to the diplomatic skills [+ capacity] of Zhou Enlai and to the **bravery** [+ resolve] of the rearguard. (Buggy 1988: 224)

The text continues by first exemplifying the diplomatic skills of Zhou Enlai, and then reviewing the bravery of the rearguard (Example 4.1).

#### Example 4.1

##### Continuation of the historical recount

Knowing that the south-west sector of the encircling army was manned by troops from Guangdong province, Zhou began negotiations with the Guangdong warlord, Chen Jitang. Chen was concerned that a Guomindang victory over the Communists would enable Chiang Kaishhek to threaten his own independence. Chen agreed to help the Communists with communications equipment and medical supplies and to allow the Red Army to pass through his lines.

Between 21 October and 13 November the Long Marchers slipped quietly through the first, second and third lines of the encircling enemy. Meanwhile the effective<sup>2</sup> resistance of the tiny rearguard lulled the Guomindang army into thinking that they had trapped the entire Communist army. By the time the Guomindang leaders realised what was happening, the Red Army had three weeks' start on them. The marching columns, which often stretched over 80 kilometres, were made up of young peasant boys from south-eastern China. Fifty-four per cent were under the age of 24. Zhu De had left a vivid description of these young soldiers.

(Buggy 1988: 224–225)

What is striking here is that when the historian Buggy is backing up his judgments, he doesn't directly comment on either Zhou Enlai's capacity or the army's resolve. Rather, he exemplifies these judgments with recounts of what went on. In a sense, in these paragraphs the ideational meaning stands as a token of the judgments Buggy has already set up. So while judgment is not directly *inscribed* in these two paragraphs, it is *evoked*. Textually, of course, 'naturalised' readers expect Buggy to back

up his introduction (example 4); and interpersonally, we're all likely to read his recount in judgmental terms, regardless of how we've been instructed to judge what went on.

This distinction between directly inscribed judgment and judgment evoked by ideational tokens brought us face to face with the problem of reading positions outlined above. With inscribed judgment we are confronted with the historian's interpretation; the reading position that the text is naturalising is clear — and it takes a positive act of resistant reading not to comply with it (or a 'negligent' act of tactical reading simply to ignore it). With evoked judgment, on the other hand, the situation is less coercive. We can carefully scan the co-text for clues about how the historian wants us to interpret the evidence — clues such as Buggy's introductory paragraph with explicitly inscribed instructions about how to judge what follows (*the diplomatic skills of Zhou Enlai and the bravery of the rearguard*). And for many students, this way of managing the co-text needs to be taught. Alternatively, we may judge the ideational tokens in our own terms. It's not hard, for example, to imagine a Chinese nationalist reading of Zhou Enlai's behaviour as dishonest and manipulative, or a grieving family's reading of the rearguard's action as foolhardy and misguided. Closer to home, some Australian readers might find it as difficult to admire Zhou Enlai's diplomatic dealings as it is to admire politicians' pork-barrelling before elections; others might find it as difficult to admire soldiers fighting as it is to admire Rambo on patrol or boxers knocking each other's brains out in the ring. Beyond this, just how much of the ideational meaning in a text do we read as evoking judgment? If we read compliantly, in line with Buggy's introduction, then perhaps the following analysis of tokens of judgment will suffice.

#### Example 4.2

Tokens in judgment

Knowing that the south-west sector of the encircling army was manned by troops from Guangdong province, Zhou began negotiations with the Guangdong warlord, Chen Jitang. **Chen was concerned that a Guomindang victory over the Communists would enable Chiang Kaishek to threaten his own independence** [token of Zhou's positive capacity]. Chen agreed to help the Communists with communications equipment and medical supplies and to allow the Red Army to pass through his lines.

Between 21 October and 13 November the Long Marchers slipped quietly [token of Red Army's positive capacity] through the first, second and third lines of the encircling enemy. Meanwhile the effective resistance of the tiny rearguard [token of Red Army's positive resolve] lulled the Guomindang army into thinking [token of

Guomindang Army's negative capacity] that they had trapped the entire Communist army. **By the time the Guomindang leaders realised what was happening** [token of Guomindang Army's negative capacity], the Red Army had three weeks' start on them. The marching columns, which often stretched over 80 kilometres, were made up of young peasant boys from south-eastern China. Fifty-four per cent were under the age of 24. Zhu De had left a vivid description of these young soldiers.

But, just how far do we take the interpretation of ideational tokens? For example, we might have taken the peasant background and young age of the communist soldiers as further evidence of their bravery, as seen in the following analysis.

#### Example 4.3

Further tokens of judgment?

The marching columns, which often stretched over 80 kilometres, were made up of **young peasant boys from south-eastern China** [token of Red Army's positive resolve]. **Fifty-four per cent were under the age of 24** [token of Red Army's positive resolve].

This, then, is the central dilemma of appraisal analysis. A text may have inscribed judgments which we can decide to comply with, resist or tactically ignore. Moreover, any text has the potential to be read judgmentally, whether these judgments are directly inscribed or not. And just how much of it is to be judged, and just how it is to be judged, is a matter of interpretation. This makes the problem of ideational ambiguity, with which this paper began, seem a relatively small problem indeed. The problem of the relatively open-ended nature of appraisal systems compounds this problem many times over.

#### Reading positions

But is this all really such a problem? Or is the vexation we're dealing with here simply modernist angst — the result of assumptions we make about finding *the* meaning of a text, and aligning it with what we think the author of that text must have meant? And if we shift to a post-modern stance, and allow for more than one reading, then how many readings are there? If we interpret text itself as a meaning potential, how many readings are we responsible for as literacy professionals?

By way of partially answering these questions, I'll close with one of the texts we looked at and argued about in some detail. It follows a few pages after example 4, after Buggy has completed his chronicle of the Long March. In the analysis below, I'm offering a compliant reading of the text, focusing on Buggy's judgmental themes — positive capacity and positive resolve. In the annotation, '+' stands for positive, '-' for negative, and 't,' for token of.

### Example 5

Judgment analysis — a compliant reading of a factorial explanation

#### Why Did the Long March Succeed?

This question has often been raised by historians, and a number of factors have been suggested to explain the success of the Long March.

1. One of these is the **leadership** [+ capacity] of Mao Zedong. The success of his guerrilla tactics after Zunyi **revived the confidence** [+ resolve] of a **demoralised** [- resolve] army at a crucial stage.
  2. He also had the benefit of the **brilliant** [+ capacity] army commanders such as Zhu De and Peng Duhai, who were able to implement his guerrilla strategies.
  3. The **courage** [+ resolve] and **toughness** [+ resolve] of the young members of the Red Army, many of whom were teenagers, also contributed to its success.
  4. The **discipline** [+ resolve] of the Red Army, which won the **confidence and support** [+ resolve] of the peasant population, contrasted with the **disunity** [- resolve] of the enemy. For example the warlord of Yunnan province, **Long Yun, was more concerned about Chiang Kai-shek taking over his province than he was about smashing the Communists** [- resolve].
- Beside the Long March other great military exploits, such as Hannibal's crossing of the Alps or Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, pale into insignificance. Innumerable stories of heroism [+ resolve] and **military brilliance** [+ capacity] **boosted Communist morale** [+ resolve] and **steeled the movement to endure** [t, + resolve] the Japanese invasion and the continuing civil war. Like the ANZACS of Australia and New Zealand, the grizzled survivors of the Long March have become national heroes, embodying all that is **strong** [+ capacity] and **noble** [+ ethics] in the nation's history.

It is one of the sad ironies of history [- fate] that during the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), the Communist Party turned on its heroes [t, - ethics]. The army commander Peng Duhai was **fortured and eventually killed by his Red Guard captors** [t, - ethics]. He Long, a diabetic, was killed by an injection of glucose [t, - ethics]. Even the great commander, Zhe De, was attacked [t, - ethics]. His house was **ransacked** [t, - ethics] and his wife, who also endured [t, + resolve] the Long March, was **humiliated** [- ethics] as the consort of a 'black general' [t, - ethics]. Deng Xiaoping, whose role in the Long March was more humble, spent three years doing menial work in a school in Nanchang [t, - ethics]. In 1976 he re-emerged to **wreak vengeance** [- ethics] on his attackers.

(Buggy 1988: 257)

One of the most interesting aspects of this text is the shift in key in the last paragraph — from a concern with capacity and resolve to a concern with ethics. Buggy's voice shifts here, from that of an *interpreter* of social

esteem to an *adjudicator* of social sanction (see Coffin in press<sup>3</sup>). We felt, on the basis of the amplified lexis used to describe the actions of the Red Guards and their cohorts (*tortured, attacked, ransacked, humiliated, menial*), that Buggy was invoking condemnation of their behaviour, although he does not explicitly inscribe negative judgment. Somewhat more problematic was his description of Deng Xiaoping emerging in 1976 to wreak vengeance on his attackers. I've analysed this, above, as negative ethics, since — by choosing the phrase *wreak vengeance* (instead of, say, *restore order, set things right, move things forward* etc) — Buggy seems to be appealing to the liberal notion that repayment in kind outside the legal system deserves social sanction. But it's hard to imagine many of those who suffered through the Cultural Revolution sympathising with this reading; for them, Deng's behaviour probably appears quite honourable.

Where does this leave us as literacy teachers? Perhaps the first thing I'd like to emphasise is that I don't think any of this absolves us from the responsibility to teach students to read powerful texts in the ways powerful people expect them to be read. The mainstream discourses of the culture still need to be deconstructed and opened up to students who can't access them by osmosis. But if we're to give students the ability to use these discourses, this will have to mean more than simply displaying their structure and talking about how the culture uses them. We'll have to think as well about the affect, judgment and appreciation inscribed in, and evoked by, these discourses — and how they position anyone using them. This means thinking harder about appraisal in our pedagogy and working out strategies for making what we teach usable, particularly where it is not user-friendly.

At the same time, dealing with powerful readings doesn't absolve us of the responsibility to deal with resistant and tactical ones (for discussion of compliant, resistant and tactical readings see Cranny-Francis 1992). We can't really expect a student whose relatives suffered through the Cultural Revolution to read Buggy's history in the compliant way he, or sympathetic examiners, may intend. Because of the degree of affect and judgment involved, they might well be more comfortable resisting his text by directly challenging his account of what went on and how it is valued. How would this, then, position them in a public examination? Alternatively, some students might be more comfortable with a tactical response that doesn't really engage with the interpretation as history per se, but rather picks up on just one part of Buggy's text to write, say, an exposition on propaganda, or tell a story about the Red Guards, or write a thematically related poem, or write 'Fuck off' on an examination paper, or sit silently and refuse to participate at all.

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What is interesting is not so much the complexity of a text and the way it provides the basis for an indefinite number of responses, but

rather the social basis of the responses a text provokes. This provides some basis for managing the issue of complexity raised above. For example, when considering the range of readings associated with *wreck vengeance* in example 5, we noted the presence of a compliant reading that took the rest of Buggy's text and the subjectivity it manifested into account. In addition, we considered the alternative, probably resistant, reading position of Australians whose relatives had suffered during the Cultural Revolution. Had space permitted, we might have gone on to consider the social basis of any number of tactical responses to the text, including those that seem quite pathological from the perspective of success in school. This kind of orientation deals with complexity and non-compliant readings by opening up the question of how readings are made, including the ways in which they are conditioned by appraisal systems, whether these are directly inscribed in, or less directly evoked by, the texts under consideration.

Our best way of managing the complexity of reading text is to acknowledge divergent students' readings and find ways of valuing them, without at the same time losing sight of our responsibility to make available the powerful readings of our culture for anyone who wants them. It may be that work on judgment, and other appraisal systems, will help us to engage directly with these understandings, which have tended to be backgrounded in our concern with field (uncommon sense), mode (abstraction) and genre (as staged, goal-oriented, social process). □

### Notes

- 1 The text also appraises this phase of the Long March as successful, a valuation from the system of appreciation.
- 2 As with *successful*, above, *effective* would be treated as an appreciation of the effect of the resistance of the rearguard.
- 3 Compare Iedema, Feez and White 1995 on the comparable difference between correspondent and commentator voice in the print and electronic media.

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