HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO

Evaluation in preliminary examiners' statements

Ruut Kosonen
Pro gradu -tutkielma
Englantilainen filologia
Nykykielten laitos
Helsingin yliopisto
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The purpose of science is to create new knowledge and hopefully share and/or to apply that knowledge in different, useful ways. Building new knowledge, and presenting it to others requires entering into a dialogue with the scientific community. Hypotheses need to be tested; the tests themselves must be free from personal biases. The results must be evaluated: are they of any use or scientific significance? Were they presented in a truthful manner? If a theory is proposed, does it hold? Are the findings presented, in fact, new information, and how do they relate to the previous body of knowledge? The standards and norms of the scientific community are constantly being negotiated and enforced through this evaluative dialogue.

More specifically, there are genres, contexts and situations within academia that are undoubtedly essentially evaluative in their function. In universities, teachers evaluate the output of their students constantly. These evaluations can be one- or two-sentence comments written in the margins of an essay or just some oral feedback, for example. Once an academic enters the publication game, his or her article usually receives reports from the journal's peer reviewers, offering criticism and requests for clarification or improvement. One very public evaluative academic genre is the book review. In this study, I am investigating evaluation in one of these genres, the preliminary examiner's statement, which, to my knowledge, has not been investigated before.

Evaluation, being such an integral part of the knowledge production process, has become a much-researched aspect of academic language in the last 20 years. Mauranen and Bondi (2003: 269) consider Susan Hunston's doctoral work and publications following it (e.g. Hunston, 1993, 1994; Hunston and Thompson, 2000) to have been the discussion opener. However, as Mauranen and Bondi and others (cf. for example Hyland 1998a: 6-7, 2005: 65-66) point out, the type of discourse Hunston and others have since discussed in their works had previously been seen as somewhat contradictory to the ideals of science. Evaluation in science was seen as being objective and neutral, whereas today, it is recognised as being an interactional

and intersubjective process of stance-taking which involves the interplay of the voices of speakers, writers, their audiences and the communities of discourse around them. Silver (2003: 362) neatly summarises why scientific evaluation is no different from other evaluative language, and says, that "[k]nowledge claims come in the form of arguments, and arguments have to be convincing if they are to elicit attention and support". Academic evaluation also does not take place in some ideal objective reality: "Implicitly and/or explicitly the writer always works within a dialogical framework (Bahktin, 1973: 6), negotiating her/his claims (Hyland, 1998a[1]: 349) to accommodate what s/he postulates as the potential or hypothetical readership" (Silver 2003: 362).

Hyland has been a central figure in investigating how different interactional elements are utilised in academic writing. A substantial part of his work has focused on hedging – the ways in which authors indicate the extent to which they are prepared to stand behind an argument. He has repeatedly shown that "Scientific claims are rarely made without interpretive statements and these involve both assessments of probability and judgements concerning the impact of linguistic choices on readers (Hyland 1998a: viii)" and, "[r]ather than being factual and impersonal, effective scientific writing actually depends on means of augmenting propositional information in order to alert the readers to the writer's opinion" (ibid.: 6).

This "effective scientific writing" is thus also a skill which students have to acquire. "Academic writing" is practiced from the very beginning – more often than not it is academic *English*, the unchallenged lingua franca of the modern scientific community, which needs to be mastered in order to take part in said community.

English is the *de facto* lingua franca of the modern globalised world, and as such, it naturally extends to all international domains of language use. A lingua franca is a "vehicular language used by speakers who do not share a first language" (Mauranen 2012: 08). However, as Mauranen points out, this situational definition is only a part of the picture:

[1] Not listed in references. Hyland, K. (1998) Boosting, hedging and the negotiation of academic knowledge. In *Text*, 18 (3), 349–382.

> […] speakers may take on the identity of a lingua franca speaker in response to situational demands, irrespectively of whether in other situations they approach the same language as a target language to be learned. However, on a more stable basis, the prototypical ELF [=English as a lingua franca] speaker is one who uses English habitually without either being a native speaker or a learner. (ibid.)

In this respect, ELF is not the same as English as a foreign, or as a second language. These concepts overlap of course, but ELF is less about acquiring a language and more about using it. English, to an ELF speaker, is a part of their social existence, whether it is restricted to specific contexts (work, academia, a hobby, or a certain group of friends) or whether it encompasses their daily experience more fully.

Still, even native English speakers have to learn academic communication – whether it means giving presentations in conferences, writing papers, or just interacting with peers and superiors. All this is increasingly happening in contexts, where native speakers of English are in the minority. Therefore, academic English does not automatically mean academic English produced by native speakers, even though initially, and continually, the norms of academic English have been set and upheld according to the established standards of the native varieties. Thus everyone entering academia must learn a new, specific way of communicating, and sometimes in a language foreign to him or her. Mauranen (2012: 68-69) explains: ”All novices in academic institutions undergo secondary socialisation into academic discourses, regardless of their linguistic background. There are no native speakers of *academic* language”. It is no surprise, then, that linguists have taken an interest in describing what that academic language actually looks like and how it works – what exactly the characteristics that students are being taught to emulate are.

1.2 The purpose of this study

In Finnish universities, to be able to publish and defend his or her PhD thesis, the doctoral candidate must get two external evaluators to write a statement concerning the thesis, either granting or withholding the permission to defend it. The evaluators, usually experienced scientists in their field, must evaluate the thesis based on the relevance and scientific integrity of its contents, as well as the clarity of its presentation. These statements thus reflect, in a very concrete and explicit manner, the process of establishing and maintaining scientific standards in an international context.

There are many aspects of evaluative language one could investigate in these statements, not to mention their language and structure in general. However, what makes these statements particularly interesting, in my opinion, is the dual-role that evaluators have to play: on one hand, they are like teachers, assessing the work of a student; on the other hand, they are reviewing the work of a future colleague. In this respect, I am interested in the ways in which evaluation ties in with interpersonal relationships, formality, and cordiality. Another interesting aspect to investigate is to what extent these statements manifest the overall discourse features of their respective disciplines. Do examiners use similar linguistic strategies in evaluating PhD theses as they do when writing other types of academic texts?

To paint a somewhat crude overall picture, what examiners express in these statements is that a) something is good, b) something is bad, and c) that something could/should be done to improve the thesis. The last one, especially, offers a good opportunity to investigate the interpersonal aspect of evaluation since it usually involves the examiner suggesting that the candidate do something. This act, according to Brown and Levinson's classic account on politeness (1987), could be construed as a face-threatening act (FTA), because it impedes the addressee's freedom to act as they please, and indicates that what they've done previously was perhaps not good enough. Therefore, it also encourages the writer to soften the impact of the statement to mitigate threats to the addressee's face.

In this study I am investigating the evaluative language of preliminary examiners' statements in the WrELFA corpus (2014), focusing specifically on how the examiners give recommendations. A part of this corpus consists of preliminary examiners' statements from both ELF (English as a lingua franca) speakers and ENL (English as a native language) speakers.

In addition to recommendations, I will also take a look at the general trends in modal verb usage and self-mention within this genre to see possible variation among disciplines and language background, and to enable better comparison between this study and previous studies on evaluative language in academia. Modal verbs are "markers of stance" (Biber et al. 1999: 970), often used as hedges, and several different types of stance markers have been shown to differ in their usage among disciplines (cf. for example Stotesbury 2003; Hyland 2005; Charles 2006; Hiltunen

2010). Of course, modal verbs are also central in giving recommendations. Self-mention – the authors' explicit reference to themselves in their writing – has also been shown to vary among disciplines (Hyland 2002a; Hyland and Tse 2004; Charles 2006), and it has been observed to be a carefully and calculatingly used feature in academic writing and evaluation.

This study is organised as follows. In the next chapter, I will discuss how evaluation has previously been approached and defined in literature, followed by a closer look at three aspects of evaluation central to this study, hedging, politeness and authorial presence. The theoretical section ends with a look at how modal verbs participate in evaluation and how they are used in text, with a focus on recommendations. Chapter 3 presents my data and methods, in chapter 4 I will discuss my results and finally, chapter 5 concludes.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 What is evaluation?

Firstly, I must state the obvious: *evaluation is everywhere*. This is a paradox that linguists investigating evaluative language must face. Hunston, in her book *Corpus Approaches to Evaluation: Phraseology and Evaluative Language* (2011) gives an excellent review of the different ways researches have approached this elusive concept. One thing everyone seems to agree upon is the fact that nearly everything can be viewed as evaluative:

> Indeed, it may be said that subjectivity and ideological value permeate even the most objective of discourses. It can reasonably be argued that every text and every utterance is evaluative, so that the phenomenon itself disappears, to be replaced simply by 'language'. (Hunston, 2011: 19)

She argues that "[…] researchers have to either insist on an evaluation-non-evaluation distinction (while acknowledging the difficulties therein) or deal with evaluation as a self-contained system, ignoring what might be considered to lie outside of it" (ibid.).

Despite this rather discouraging start, it must be stated that the term "evaluation" is obviously not entirely devoid of meaning. Non-linguists are perfectly able to use it without spiralling into conceptual anxiety. "Evaluation" is the stuff teachers write with a red pen on the margins of school essays. It is the film reviews in Friday's paper. It is the answer to the question "How are you?" whether you truly are "alright" or not. Ideally, for the purposes of linguistic research, evaluation must be seen as something that can be reliably identified in language, without having to speculate on extra-linguistic factors (this is not to say that context doesn't play a role – it certainly does) but one must be careful not to get caught up in the "all language is evaluation if you look deep enough" -trap in order to do meaningful research on the subject.

Illustrative of the problem of defining evaluation is the multitude of different terminology under which it has been investigated. Hyland and Diani (2009) list some of this terminology: "'affect' (Ochs, 1989), 'evidentiality' (Chafe and Nichols, 1986), 'point of view' (Simpson, 1993), 'hedging' (Hyland 1998[a]), 'stance' (Biber and Finegan, 1989; Conrad and Biber, 2000; Hyland, 2005[b]); 'metadiscourse'

(Hyland and Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2005[a]) and 'appraisal' (Martin, 2000; Martin and White, 2005)" (Hyland and Diani, 2009: 4). In addition to Hyland and Diani's list, Thompson and Hunston (2000: 2) even mention 'connotation' (e.g. Lyons, 1977).

Hunston (2011: 12) argues that what lies behind the differences between approaches and their associated terminology is the particular starting point from which evaluation is investigated, that is, "what kind of phenomenon 'evaluation' is taken to be" (ibid.). She provides a very useful summary of these different viewpoints, presented in a shortened form below (Hunston 2011: 12-13):

- *Evaluation is an action* – a viewpoint which "draws on a tradition (largely conversation analysis) which regards interactions as the sites where people accomplish social activities (e.g. Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008: 12)"
- *Evaluation is the set of words and phrases which express evaluative meaning* – "The tradition used here is that of corpus linguistics, which takes the recurrence of linguistics items […] as its object of study." Here Hunston refers to Hyland and Tse (2004) and Conrad and Biber (2000)
- *Evaluation is a set of meanings which might be expressed in a given text using a wide variety of language resources* – Here Hunston includes Martin and White's system of appraisal (Martin and White 2005), which stems from the tradition of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Martin and White nest appraisal under the interpersonal meaning of language (other two being textual and ideational) (Martin and White 2005: 8).
- *Evaluation is a function performed by a text, or a part of a text.* This approach "treats the text as an agentive entity, independent of its interactants." Here Hunston mentions the work of Hoey (2001) who "talks of sentences providing elements of text patterns." She also mentions her own work (Hunston, 1989, Thomson and Hunston, 2000) where the function of evaluation is discussed.

Clearly, these are all ways of looking at what is essentially one phenomenon – approaches differ in what particular aspect is under scrutiny and where the line is drawn between evaluation and other related phenomena. Despite this array of different approaches, Hunston (2011: 12-19) also suggests a number of characteristics of evaluation, upon which different researchers seem to agree. These aspects can roughly be divided into two groups. The first points of consensus deal with the actors and entities involved in the act of evaluation, the second with the linguistic resources through which evaluation is expressed.

2.1.1 Evaluation and intersubjectivity

The first points of consensus that Hunston identifies all have to do with evaluation as a social phenomenon. Obviously, language itself is a social phenomenon, but the nature of evaluation in particular is such that the interactants and their relationship to each other and the world play a central role in the process. Thus, Hunston mentions the fact that "evaluation is both subjective and intersubjective" (Hunston 2011: 12). Englebretson (2007) takes subjectivity as a common thread between different theories on evaluation, and approaches it from the more general idea of actual language use itself being inherently subjective. He sums up evaluation as

> […] subjectivity with a focus. In other words, while subjectivity refers broadly to "self-expression" (Lyons 1994: 13), evaluation implies self-expression that is focused toward a narrow purview – self-expression about the "entities or propositions" (Thompson and Hunston 2000: 5) present in the very language that the speaker or writer is currently producing. (Englebretson 2007: 16)

However, Englebretson, too, mentions that some researchers, especially coming from the framework of discourse analysis, have also focused on "interactional nature of stancetaking" He says that "[s]tance, then, from this perspective, takes its place among the aspects of language that are jointly constructed, negotiated, and realized in and through interaction" (ibid.: 19).

Thompson and Hunston (2000: 8) also highlight building and maintaining relations as one of the functions of evaluation. They mention three areas where this aspect has been studied in particular: manipulation, politeness, and hedging, and say, that "[i]n each of these areas, the writer can be said to be exploiting the resources of evaluation to build a particular kind of relationship with the reader (ibid.).

Intersubjectivity is also central to Martin and White's *appraisal*-model (2005). The model stems from the traditions of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL). SLF's main developer, Michael Halliday explains SFL as "functional and semantic rather than formal and syntactic in orientation" (Halliday 2003: 433). Hence, to refer back to the list above, the focus here is on the possible "set of meanings" the language user wishes to express, and this "meaning potential" influences the set of options available to the language user in order to express those meanings. (ibid.: 434). In SFL, language is seen as performing three abstracted metafunctions: ideational, textual and interpersonal. Martin and White (2005: 7) explain:

> Ideational resources are concerned with construing experience: what's going on, including who's doing what to whom, where, when, why and how and the logical relation of one going-on to another. **Interpersonal resources are concerned with negotiating social relations: how people are interacting, including the feelings they are trying to share.** Textual resources are concerned with information flow: the ways in which ideational and interpersonal meanings are distributed in waves of semiosis, including interconnections among waves and between language and attendant modalities (action, image, music etc.). (Martin and White 2005:7, my emphasis)

Martin and White nest their appraisal-model under the interpersonal metafunction, along with *negotiation* and *involvement* (ibid.: 33) and it deals with the said "feelings" people "are trying to share" with each other.

Evaluation as an intersubjective exercise can also be looked at from a metadiscoursal point of view. Much like evaluation itself, the definition of metadiscourse is not uncontroversial either, but here I will simply refer to Hyland, who, after addressing the history of, and different approaches to the term (2005a: 37), defines metadiscourse as follows:

> Metadiscourse is the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate **interactional meanings** in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) **to express a viewpoint and engage** with readers as members of a particular community (Hyland 2005a: 37, my emphasis).

Hyland explains that many metadiscourse analysts have categorised it, using SFL, as either "performing a textual function by organising a coherent discourse, or performing an interpersonal function by conveying the writer's attitudes to the text" (Hyland 2005a: 26). Hyland, in a way, puts both functions under metadiscourse, and uses Thomson and Thetela's (1995) distinction between *interactive* and *interactional* resources to reflect this distinction. What Hyland (2005a: 49) calls the *interactive dimension*, is concerned with the ways the writer (or speaker) guides the reader through the text, i.e. makes sure the targeted reader/hearer will understand what the writer/speaker is trying to say. *Interactional dimension*, in turn, "concerns the way writers conduct interaction by intruding and commenting on their message. […] Metadiscourse here is essentially evaluative and engaging, expressing solidarity, anticipating objections and responding to an imagined dialogue with others" (Hyland 2005a: 49-50).

Intersubjectivity also relates to two other points of consensus on Hunston's (2011: 12-19) list, of which the next one deals with the essential components of an

evaluative act: evaluation involves a target, or object, and a source. Du Bois, approaching evaluation from a dialogic perspective, illustrates this arrangement in his "stance triangle": "In taking a stance, the stancetaker (1) evaluates an object; (2) positions a subject (usually the self); and (3) aligns with other subjects" (Du Bois 2007: 163).

Hunston summarises her own work on evaluation in written academic prose as viewing it as an act comprising of three-moves: "identification and classification of an object to be evaluated [*status*], ascribing a value to that object [*value*] and identifying the significance of the information [*relevance*]" (Hunston 2011: 21). Of these, status is a concept she has continued to develop more fully.

Hunston describes status as a function of evaluation, where an epistemic status is assigned to a text or a proposition, and that status in turn aligns the text or proposition to a construed world (Hunston 2011: 25). For example, a statement might be described as a claim, a fact, or an interpretation; a book might be characterised as fiction or non-fiction, and a proposition might be judged as unlikely, likely or certain to happen. It is this "construed world" in which evaluators operate. In assigning a status to an object or a proposition, the stancetaker uses the available information they have in order to do so, and also, in so doing, must anticipate whether or not the reader shares their interpretation. Thus, the process of evaluation does not happen in isolation, it takes place in an interactively built, maintained, and continuously rebuilt "reality". This brings me to the final point of consensus that reflects the Intersubjectivity of evaluation, namely, that evaluation "construes an ideology, shared by writer and reader" (Hunston 2011: 12).

In evaluating an object, one can of course simply express a personal opinion, but more often than not, things are evaluated against a shared ideological framework, with established norms and standards – the scientific method, for example. As already mentioned in the introduction, the process of evaluation actively constructs and enforces these standards, and it works as long as the underlying assumptions of what is good and what is bad are shared by the writer/speaker and reader/hearer.

In his book, *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing* (2004), Hyland discusses how ideology construction and power has been investigated

within the framework of critical discourse analysis. One insight of postmodern theorists has been the view that "social interaction can only be understood in terms of discursive context, which is seen as constituting a coherent framework for what can be said and done, bridging the distinction between thought and reality" (Hyland 2004: 156). In academia, like in any other discourse community[2] one has to play by certain rules. Academia is a highly hierarchical system, where power is not distributed evenly. Thus, all opinions are not equal, which, at it best, means that science works as it should, constantly exercising quality control to ensure that claims are supported by evidence, but also means that, for better or worse, "the ideological and discursive system which reproduces knowledge also reproduces a particular arrangement of social relations" (Hyland 2004: 170).

This means that evaluation in science is more than just an objective search for "truth". The act of evaluating within academia involves also knowing one's place within the hierarchy.

2.1.2 Linguistic expressions of evaluation

The final points of consensus regarding the nature of evaluation that Hunston (2011: 12-19) identifies relate to ways it manifests in language: Evaluative meaning is achieved by a broad range of lexical and other indicators, and they are so numerous and variable that trying to list all of them would be pointless (Hunston 2011: 13). Despite this, many linguistic resources involved in evaluation have been listed and investigated. What most people recognise as indicators of evaluative meaning are adjectives such as *good, bad, awesome, horrible, exciting, boring, desirable, successful*, adverbials such as *luckily* or *unfortunately*, value-laden "feeling" verbs such as *like* and *hate*, et cetera. But evaluation can take many other forms as well.

[2] A Discourse community is "a concept developed by Swales (1990) to characterise social formations in academia (Mauranen 2012: 20)". The concept shares features with "Community of practice" which Eckert has defined as "an aggregate of people coming together around a particular enterprise" (Eckert 2000: 35, as cited in Mauranen 2012: 19). The difference between these concepts is that a community of practice is considered to exist among people who know each other and to an extent interact face-to-face, whereas in a discourse community this is not a requirement (ibid.: 20-21). A central feature of both of them is that they "are sites where participants co-construct social meanings and linguistic norms as part of their common activity" (ibid.: 20).

Thompson and Hunston (2000: 21) have tentatively grouped linguistic features signalling evaluation into three categories, each of which "prioritizes a different inherent characteristic of evaluation":

(1) Evaluation involves comparison of the object of evaluation against a yardstick of some kind: the comparators. These include: comparative adjectives and adverbs; adverbs of degree; comparator adverbs such as *just, only, at least*; expressions of negativity (morphological, such as *un-* and other affixes; grammatical, such as *not, never, hardly*; and lexical, such as *fail, lack*).
(2) Evaluation is subjective: the markers of subjectivity. This is a very large group including: modals and other markers of (un)certainty; non-identifying adjectives; certain adverbs, nouns, and verbs; sentence adverbs and conjunctions; report and attribution structures; marked clause structures, including patterns beginning with *it* and *there*, and 'Special Operations Clauses' (Winter 1982) such as pseudo-clefts.
(3) Evaluation is value-laden: the markers of value. These may be divided into two groups: lexical items whose typical use is an evaluative environment (the circularity of this definition seems unavoidable); and indications of the existence of goals and their (non-)achievement ('what is good' may be glossed as 'what achieves our goals' and 'what is bad' may be glossed as 'what impedes the achievement of our goals'). (Hunston and Thomson 2000: 21)

Finally, one cannot escape the fact that context plays an important role in determining what could be interpreted as evaluative (Hunston 2011: 13). So, a lexical item or a grammatical construction in itself might not be inherently evaluative, unless it is used that way. Hunston (2011: 14) puts it bluntly: "the meaning of any word cannot be identified reliably if the word is encountered in isolation". She continues to give an example of evaluative meaning: "A speaker may consider that the most likely context for electric is 'electric fire' or 'electric storm' and so consider that electric is a non-evaluative word. On the other hand, in a context such as 'her performance was electric', the meaning is evaluative and positive (ibid.)."

The focus of this study is on modal verbs, which Thompson and Hunston have listed in the above list under "markers of subjectivity". Biber (2006; Biber et al. 1999) has investigated modal verbs under "grammatical markers of stance". Modal verbs, their function in evaluation and the kinds of constructions they appear in are discussed in more detail in 2.3 below. Modal verbs are also central to the concept of hedging, which is discussed in 2.2.1.

2.1.3 Evaluation – a working definition

As we have already seen, different researchers have made several semantic distinctions and taxonomies regarding different types of evaluation. Perhaps the most complex and detailed one is Martin and White's (2005) appraisal model, in which appraisal is divided into three concepts: *engagement, attitude* and *graduation*, which are further divided into more specific concepts, and so on. As mentioned above, Hunston (2000) makes a distinction between status, value, and relevance, and Hyland (2005a) and Biber (2006; Biber et al. 1999) also group different lexical and grammatical items according to several different types of evaluative meanings they express. Depending on what types of phenomena one wishes to investigate, these distinctions might be more or less useful. Hunston, for example, compares how her notion of status and Martin and White's notion of engagement (which deals with "sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse" [Martin and White 2005: 35]) could be used in analysing academic discourse, and concludes that both reveal different aspects from the text, but that status is perhaps more relevant in terms of the genre (Hunston 2011: 42-49), as it "prioritises the role of epistemology in building an argument (ibid.: 49)" rather than engagement, which "is here more successful in accounting for how a persuasive argument is put together" (ibid.: 47).

In this present paper my focus is on how evaluative statements are formulated so that the intended force and directness can be manipulated – I am not particularly interested in different types of evaluation, rather in different ways of presenting an evaluative proposition. Thus, these different taxonomies will only be discussed herein to the extent to which they apply to the task at hand.

This means that a general enough definition is needed if one wishes to encompass all of the aspects discussed above. Thompson and Hunston have formulated a working definition of evaluation thus:

> Evaluation is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about (Thompson and Hunston, 2000: 5).

This is a good common sense definition, which does the job of summing up the intuitive meaning of the term "evaluation". Taking into account the list of different aspects of evaluation summarised above, this definition seems to neatly encompass

most of them. It highlights the *linguistic expression* of evaluation as the target of inspection, the *set of meanings* for evaluation being the "speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about". It includes in it the *evaluator*, i.e. the person doing the evaluating, and the *object of the evaluation*: the "entities or propositions" that are talked about – thus, it also reminds us of evaluation being an *action*, performed by a person, through linguistic choices.

2.2 Modifying evaluative statements

Now that we have settled on a general definition on what evaluation is, we can move on to discuss a couple of more specific aspects of this phenomenon. There are different ways language users can modify their evaluative statements. These processes are, again, focused on the intersubjectivity of evaluation and the ways the speaker/writer positions his- or herself in relation to the hearer/reader and the propositions expressed. The first of these perhaps has more to do with the addressee, the reader of the text, and how the stancetaker takes into consideration how the act of evaluation might be perceived by him or her. This is discussed under "hedging and politeness". The second focuses on the source of the evaluation: the stancetaker, and how they choose to present themselves in text. I discuss this under the notion of "authorial presence"[3]. Both of these work in unison in negotiating and maintaining relations between the stancetaker and their audience.

2.2.1 Hedging and politeness

Hedging is one of the phenomena which has been discussed in particular in relation to evaluation and academic language, and is closely related to Martin and White's notions of engagement and graduation[4], politeness, and in more grammatical terms, modality. The term was first introduced by Lakoff (1972) to describe "words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy" (Lakoff 1972 as cited in Hyland 1998a: 1). Hyland explains: "Hedging is central to academic writing as it expresses

[3] I use this term here purely to encompass all the different terms used by previous researchers, as, for example, Biber and Hunston use the term *attribution* slightly differently, and Hyland, and Martin and White differ in their use of *engagement*.

[4] Graduation is "modulating meaning by degree" and include "recourses for intensification (force) and for adjusting boundaries (focus)" (Martin and White 2005: 40)

possibility rather than certainty and collegiality rather than presumption" (Hyland 1998a: viii).

As to the definition of the term, Hyland (2004) explains:

> Hedges and boosters are communicative strategies for increasing or reducing the force of statements. In academic discourse their importance lies in their contribution to appropriate rhetorical and interactive tenor […] Writers need to invest a convincing degree of assurance in their propositions, yet must avoid overstating their case and risk inviting the rejection of their arguments. (Hyland, 2004: 87)

Hyland further defines the term hedging as referring to "any linguistic means used to indicate either a) a lack of complete commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition, or b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically" (Hyland 1998a: 1). Hedges are the "means by which writers can present a proposition as an opinion rather than a fact" (Hyland 1998a: 5).

In his book *Hedging in Scientific Research Articles* (1998a), Hyland studies hedges which fall strictly into the above definition, stating that "items are only hedges in their epistemic sense, and only when they mark uncertainty" (Hyland 1998a: 5). Epistemic sense, in the realm of modality, refers "to the logical status of events or states, usually relating to assessments of likelihood: possibility, necessity, or prediction" (Biber et al. 1999: 485). However, Hyland acknowledges that hedging has also been seen as a way to express politeness, as "one device often used to mitigate threats to the 'face' or self-image of interlocutors […]" (Hyland 1998a: 5). Furthermore, it can be difficult to discern whether a certain proposition truly reflects the writer's uncertainty or whether it is softened purely to make it more polite, or whether it is both at the same time.

In contrast to epistemic modality, deontic modality "refers to actions and events that humans (or other agents) directly control: meanings relating to permission, obligation, or volition […]" (Biber at al. 1999: 485). These meanings can be, and are manipulated in terms of their force just like their epistemic counterparts are. The difference here is perhaps whether hedging is approached from the point of view of the writer's relationship to the propositions expressed (epistemic modality), or the writer's relationship to their interlocutors (deontic modality).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) classic and influential account on politeness describes how interactants in a social situation essentially have a desire to maintain face, both their own and their interlocutor's. Brown and Levinson divide this notion of *face* into *positive face* – "the consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (1987: 61) and *negative face* – "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (ibid.). Interactions that could pose a threat to either kind (FTA= Face Threatening Act) are often mitigated by several different strategies. Brown and Levinson discuss under *negative politeness* strategies used to mitigate threats to a person's negative face. They explain:

> When we think of politeness in Western cultures, it is negative politeness behaviour that springs to mind. In our culture, negative politeness is the most elaborate and the most conventionalized set of linguistic strategies for FTA redress; it is the stuff of etiquette books […] Its linguistic realizations, - conventional indirectness, hedges on illocutionary force, polite pessimism (about the success of requests, etc.), the emphasis on H's [the hearer's] relative power – are very familiar and need no introduction. (Brown and Levinson 1987: 129-130)

They also note, that these strategies could also be used in "general forms of social 'distancing'; […]" and "are therefore likely to be used whenever a speaker wants to put a social brake on to the course of his interaction" (ibid.: 130). So, expressing an evaluative statement, for example, might constitute as an FTA.

In order to protect the hearers negative face, i.e. "put redress to H's want to be unimpinged upon" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 131) a person might, instead of saying "You drink too much" choose to say "Have you ever felt that you might be drinking too much?" The assumption here is, that the speaker does not really need an answer to that question; they already think the addressee might have a drinking problem. Still, they choose not to presume that the hearer shares their view, and thus make a declarative sentence into an interrogative one, and use the modal *might* as a hedge to boost.

2.2.2 Authorial presence

As noted above, evaluation involves both an object under evaluation, and a source of the evaluation. The source can be indicated explicitly, implicitly, or attributed to

somebody else. When writers do not attribute a proposition to somebody else, it is usually interpreted as the opinion of the writers themselves. However, they can still manipulate the extent to which they make the source clear, or stand behind the proposition. The choice of pronoun is one way to manipulate engagement, *I* being the most explicit (*I think that…*), impersonal, general *one* or *you* being somewhere in the middle (*One thinks that…*) and passive voice (*It is thought, that…*) being the most obscuring.

Biber et al. (1999: 976-978) distinguish explicit, implicit, and ambiguous attribution of stance. Explicit attribution is accomplished using personal pronouns or proper names. Implicit attribution occurs when the writer of the text is inferred as the source even if it is not explicitly stated. These implicit strategies include constructions like the complement clause in this example from Biber et al (1999: 977): *It might be that it only affected the absorption and emission processes of black bodies,* where, as this example comes from academic discourse, we might assume it is the opinion of the writers. Ambiguous attribution of stance is, in turn, when the source is made unclear. Biber et al (ibid.) mention the use of passive: *It was expected that they would interview him later today*; adverbial *ed*-clauses: *As expected, the volume of retail sales rose 0.5 per cent in August;* and nouns controlling a complement clause: *This is the claim that industrialism had lightened the intensity of human productive activity* (ibid: 978).

In academic discourse, there exists a school of thought where the presence of an authorial voice is frowned upon. As the ideal of academic discourse is often considered to be objective and neutral, the author is supposed to take a backseat and let the science speak for itself. In their study of 'voice'[5] in a simulated peer-review, Matsuda and Tardy (2007) comment that "Caught in the dichotomy between personal writing and academic writing, the notion of voice has often been relegated to the

[5] Matsuda and Tardy (2007) quote Matsuda (2001) when defining 'voice': '"Voice is the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires''; it is the overall impression associated with particular features that make 'impersonation' or 'mimicking' possible (Matsuda 2001: 40 in Matsuda and Tardy 2007: 239)". They further explain, that "It is important to note that, in Matsuda's (2001) definition, voice is not a set of certain discursive features; rather, voice is the reader's impression derived from the particular combination of the ways in which both discursive and non-discursive features are used. (ibid.)"

realm of personal and individual, whereas academic writing has been characterized as relatively impersonal – if not objective or neutral – and therefore voiceless" (Matsuda and Tardy 2007: 236). However, as I already mentioned in the introduction, many researchers besides Matsuda and Tardy have since contested this myth.

Swales (1990: 110), referring to Ard (1983), reminds us of the fact that the classic format of the scientific research article emerged from the "informative letters that scientists had always written to each other" and that articles in early journals took the form of first person narrative. The role of an observer, and the individual skills of the scientist played a central role (ibid.: 114). Swales also argues that the use of first person pronouns reflected the desire to project "personal honesty and modesty" in scientific writing (ibid.).

So it was only after the nineteenth century that a shift began to take place, where the method of investigation and the results and findings took centre stage and the focus was less and less on the individual scientist (Swales 1990: 116). Kuo (1999), investigating the use of personal pronouns in academic writing, continues on to describe how, in a typical journal article in a modern academic context, the role of the individual scientist-author must at the same time be highlighted and downplayed:

> [A] journal article is often organized from general to specific, orienting a scientist's research from a larger research context and then from specific to general, linking the scientist's research findings and results back to the larger research context. Such a feature reveals the need of a scientist to integrate his/her research into the whole discipline. As a writer, therefore, the scientist must claim the significance and contribution of his/her research to the discipline on the one hand, but appeal modestly to both editors and expected readers—his/her peer researchers—seeking their approval and acceptance on the other. (Kuo 1999: 122)

This careful balancing act continues to cause confusion especially among many young academics, who continue to receive mixed instructions as to how impersonal they are expected to be (Hyland 2002a: 1095). Some researchers (e.g. Bloor and Bloor 1991; Hyland 2002a) have pointed out that this might be an issue among ELF speakers in particular, who have to accommodate to the conventions of academic English. Hyland (2002a) investigated the use of *self-mention* and attitudes towards it by examining the project reports of final year Hong Kong undergraduates and interviewing both them and their supervisors. He found out that experienced writers

use the first person four times as much as undergraduates. (Hyland 2002a: 1098) He noticed, that "'expert writers' were more willing to make a solid personal commitment to the most authorially powerful aspects of their texts, those which carried both the most risks and potentially gained them the most credit. (ibid.: 1099)" In comparison, "L2 writers [non-native English speakers] not only chose to avoid self mention, but principally chose to avoid it at points where it involved making a commitment to an interpretation or claim. They generally sought to downplay their authorial identity by restricting their visibility to the more innocuous functions, such as guiding readers through the discourse" (ibid.: 1106).

Hyland argues that while this might also be due to the fact that student writers do not yet feel confident enough to project a strong authorial identity, their cultural background might influence the way they approach authorship in science: collective authority is preferred over the individual. (Hyland 2002a: 1108-1111)

A feature in academic writing, which Kuo and Hyland both also noted in their studies, is the use of plural first person pronoun *we* in single-authored text. Based on his subsequent interviews with the students, Hyland concludes that "Many of these students seem uncomfortable with the subjectivity and assertiveness of the singular form and seek the rhetorical distance that the plural meaning allows, reducing their personal intrusion while not completely eliminating their presence from the text" (Hyland 2002a: 1108). Kuo, though only investigating journal articles through corpus methods, also postulates, that "The fact that the writer of a single-authored article uses *we*, instead of *I*, as he/she is referring to himself/herself, may suggest an intention to reduce personal attributions" (Kuo 1999: 125). What both Hyland's and Kuo's studies reveal is the fact that displaying a strong authorship carries risks which lead to the need of authors to carefully balance their positioning and to choose wisely the occasions when to display a strong alignment to a proposition.

In Martin and White's appraisal model, these strategies, among others, are discussed under "engagement". They are concerned in "meaning making processes by which the speaker/writer negotiates relationships of alignment/disalignment vis-à-vis the various value positions referenced by the text and hence vis-à-vis the socially constituted communities of shared attitude and belief associated with those positions (Martin and White 2005: 95)." Engagement also encompasses "this negotiation of

alignment/disalignment as it applies to the relationship which the text construes as holding between speaker/writer and the text's putative addressee" (ibid.). In terms of authorial presence they posit a category of *pronounce*. This "covers formulations which involve authorial emphases or explicit authorial interventions or interpolations". They give examples such as *I contend,… The facts of the matter are that…, You must agree that…* (ibid.: 127).

One central concept in their system is the idea that writers can adjust the dialogic expansiveness of a statement (ibid.: 104-108). For example, by framing a proposition by adding "I believe, that…" the writer is making it more dialogically expansive by highlighting the fact that this is just one possible opinion among others. In contrast, if they frame it by adding "It is common knowledge, that…" they are limiting the dialogic space of the proposition by leaving very little room to alternative positions. This is also related to Hunston's (2000) concept of status: By choosing to present a proposition as an opinion, one alludes to the fact that other opinions are available, and thus opens up other dialogic possibilities.

The questions that I take as being central to both the notions of engagement and hedging are: how explicit is the source of the evaluation? And: how dialogically expansive is the proposition made to appear? A figure from Martin and White (2005: 17) devised to illustrate two "clines" of modality, is useful also in illustrating engagement and hedging more broadly. One cline is "orientation" moving from subjective to objective (or from a more specific source towards a more ambiguous, general source) and from high value to low value, i.e. the degree of "commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition", to use Hyland's (1998a: 1) words.

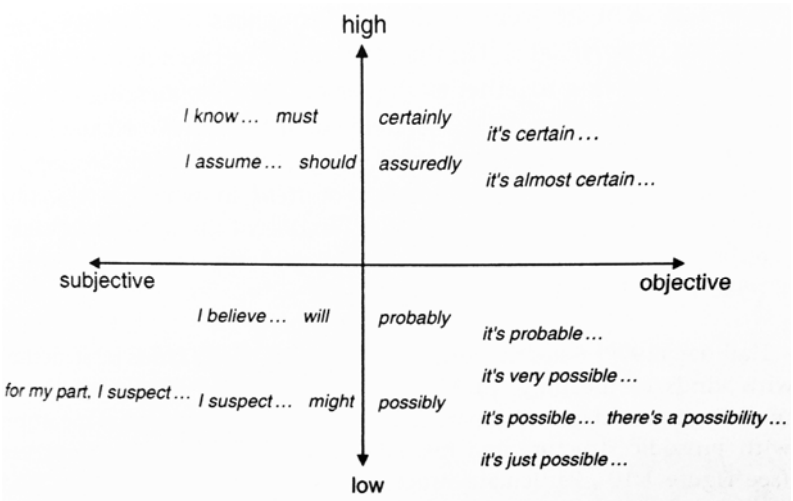

Figure 1.9 A topological perspective on value and orientation

Source: Martin and White 2005: 17)

Thus, a maximally vague and dialogically expansive statement might be: "It could perhaps be wise to consider changing the subject", where the source of the evaluation is not explicitly expressed – but can be inferred to as the writer – and the use of modal verb *could*, the verb *consider*, the adverb *perhaps* indicate a low degree of commitment to the truth value of the proposition. The counterpart to the above might be: "I believe you should change the subject", where the attribution of the writer as the stancetaker is made explicit, and the value of the commitment is high, indicated by the verb *believe*, and the modal *should*. Both those statements are dialogically expansive, in the sense that they acknowledge the possibility of other viewpoints. In contrast, "Everybody thinks that you should change the subject" is dialogically contrastive.

2.3 Modal verbs and evaluation

Above I discussed evaluation as a concept and chose to adhere to Thompson and Hunston's (2000: 5) general definition of the term. Then I went on to discuss how evaluative statements can be modified, introducing the notions of hedging, politeness, and authorial presence.

In this chapter the focus moves from general concepts and theories to describe how modal verbs take part in evaluative acts and how they are used in text. All in all, we can see that, whether it is expressed through the usage of modal verbs, adverbs such

as *perhaps*, or *probably*, or other lexical or grammatical means, modality is closely related to, or an aspect of, evaluation in language, and a central to the notions of hedging and politeness. In attaching modality to a statement, the speaker/writer is *evaluating,* most typically, the degree to which the statement is true or probable. Introducing hypotheses, reporting research results, and reviewing the claims of others requires one to take an epistemic stance in relation to the propositions expressed. However, deontic statements are not outside of academic discourse either, especially in instructive settings and genres, as in preliminary examiner's statements, for example. According to Biber (2006: 95) "modal verbs are by far the most common grammatical device used to mark stance in university registers". He further explains that they "are especially common in the spoken registers, but they also show a strong association with directive purposes, whether in speech (class management) or in writing (course management: syllabi, homework assignments, etc.)" (ibid). Furthermore, wherever the maintaining and negotiation of interpersonal relationships and one's position in a discourse community is concerned, examples of hedging through modality are surely to be found.

2.3.1 The grammatical marking of stance

Biber et al. (1999) have used a corpus methodology to investigate the different lexical and grammatical items that express evaluative meaning. As already mentioned, they call these "stance markers" (Biber et al 1999: 966). They separate two linguistic markings of stance, lexical and grammatical. Lexical marking of stance (affective or evaluative word choice) involves a single proposition, rather than a stance relative to other proposition (ibid.: 968), i.e. 'It's **hot** today' or 'I **hate** hot weather'. In contrast, grammatical marking of stance "includes two distinct linguistic components, one presenting the stance and one the proposition that is framed by that stance" (ibid.: 969).

The grammatical stance markers Biber et al. identify are as follows (list and examples adapted from Biber et al. [1999: 969-970]):

- Stance adverbials: *unfortunately, kind of, in actual fact, as one might expect, I guess*
- stance complement clauses: *I just **hope**, that… I'm **very happy** that… It's **amazing**, that… The **fact**, that…*
- modals and semi-modals

- stance noun + prepositional phrase: *the possibility of…*
- premodifying stance adverb (stance adverb + adjective or noun phrase): *I'm **so** happy for you, **about** 478 million years*

To recap, in this present study I am looking at constructions that involve the use of modal verbs, thus focusing on the grammatical marking of stance. Central to this is the notion of metadiscourse discussed above, i.e. not the propositional content of an utterance, but rather, the frame, which expresses the writer's stance towards that propositional content.

2.3.2 Modals and semi-modals

There are considered to be two senses of modality, deontic (permission/obligation/volition or intention) and epistemic (possibility/necessity/prediction) (Biber et al. 1999: 485). As already noted, both senses manifest themselves in language in similar ways – both eliciting opinion in terms of positive/negative (good/bad, certain/uncertain) the difference being that the former usually refers to entities and the latter to propositions (Thompson and Hunston 2000: 3). Another way of differentiating between these two meanings is that modals expressing deontic meanings commonly occur with human subjects and main verbs which describe activities and event that can be controlled (bid.: 485).

Modals and semi-modals can be divided into three main groups according to the meaning they are used to express. These are **permission/possibility/ability** modals: *can, could, may, might*; **obligation/necessity** modals: *must, should, (had) better, have (got) to, need to, ought to, be supposed to* and **volition/prediction** modals: *will, would, shall, be going to.* (Biber et al. 1999: 485) Semi-modals are marginal auxiliary verbs (*need (to) ought to*) or fixed idiomatic phrases (*(had) better, (have) got to, be supposed to, be going to*) which behave similarly to the central modals (*can, coud, may, might, shall, should, will, would*) (ibid.: 484) .

Biber et al. (1999: 970) point out that, even though they list modals as grammatical stance markers, their grammaticality is less clear than say, stance adverbials and stance complement clause constructions, as they are incorporated to the main clause (and are in themselves lexemes). However, they typically occur "before the main lexical verb", and thus "before the presentation of new information of the clause"

and act as a "frame for the interpretation of the propositional information" (ibid.: 971).

2.3.3 Modal verbs in recommendations

Modals are perhaps most commonly investigated in academic writing relation to their use in their epistemic sense: when writers are assessing the truth value of propositions, and whether or not they are hedging in doing so (see subchapter 2.2.1 in this study). However, modal verbs in their deontic sense are used in expressing directives, i.e. in an attempt to make somebody else act a certain way or do something – which is the subject of this present study. This is a more clearly interpersonal use of modal verbs.

The most simple way of expressing a directive is to use the imperative, for example, if you want someone to stop because you see they are about to walk into a manhole, the most effective utterance would be "Stop!". However, modal verbs are often utilised in less urgent situations, such as in requests. Referencing Blum-Kulka (1989), Fortanet (2008: 29) recounts how "there are three main strategies to formulate requests in English: direct requests, conventional indirect requests and non-conventional indirect requests". In her study of evaluation in peer review reports (2008), she identified three types of recommendation patterns that were in the form of direct requests: imperatives, performatives, and requests using modal auxiliaries (Fortanet 2008: 29). Performatives refer to instances where the reviewer expresses the act of recommending, for example by using a verb like *suggest* (ibid.: 33). She also discusses conventional indirect requests, similar to the classic example of "Could you open the window?" (where, of course, the addressee's ability to open the window is not the concern) and in addition, recommendations given through questions. In this present study however, the focus is on recommendations with modal verbs.

Recommendations in which modals are used, most typically have a subject, a modal, followed by a proposition expressing the desired action. The choice of modal can reflect how strongly the writer feels about the proposition, or it can reflect a desire to be polite, or perhaps both. A strongly obligating modal narrows down the dialogic expansiveness of the statement, a weakly obligating one leaves more room to

alternative positions. For example, similarly to polite indirect requests, in the following example from the WrELFA (2014) corpus, *could* does not indicate the writer's estimation of the addressee's ability to do the action, it is a polite recommendation:

(1) Thus, the *author* **could** explain in more detail, how stakeholder salience is measured in this study. (131A, AGR) [6]

As explained above, according to Biber et al. (1999: 971), modals could be construed as a "frame for the interpretation of the propositional information". Even in a simple clause, such as "I should go", the speaker is expressing a stance towards the act of going, saying that something makes them feel obliged to go. Modals can, though, be incorporated into other framing devices for the propositional content of the utterance. One such construction which has been identified, in academic discourse in particular, is what Hyland and Tse (2005) have called the "evaluative *that*"-construction, Biber et al. (1999) the "stance complement clause" and more recently, Hiltunen (2010) as the "declarative content clause". The following example from the WrELFA corpus (2014) illustrates this:

(2) *I* **would** recommend that a few tables and figures summarise [sic] the main data are included in the results and more detailed references are made to the tables/figures in the publications. (220_eng, MED)

The structure here is that of evaluative frame (the matrix clause) + proposition (the complement clause). This is also a recommendation in the form of a performative, as discussed by Fortanet (2008). The performative could be seen as a subtype of the evaluative-*that* construction. Biber (2006), also, noticed these types of polite directives occurring especially in classroom management.

Another similar framing device is the "introductory *it*-pattern", (called this by Francis et al. 1996; Hunston and Francis 2000 and Groom 2005, as mentioned in Hiltunen 2011: 121) or the "extraposed *it*-construction (Biber et al. 1999) with the proposition as an extraposed subject:

[6] Examples from the WrELFA corpus are referred to by their file numbers. A letter after the number indicates that there were two statements concerning the same thesis, and the code "_eng" indicates that the author is a native speaker of English. All emphases in examples are mine. The three-letter code indicates the domain: SCI: natural sciences, MED: medicine, AGR: agriculture and forestry, BEH: behavioural sciences, SOC: social sciences and HUM: humanities.

(3) *It* **might** help to increase the spatial resolution of the stiffness depth profiling approach, described in section 4.1.2. (88A, SCI)

This is also another recommendation type Fortanet (2008) found in peer reviews. She says, that "[i]nstead of pointing out the problem of the evaluated aspect through criticism (mainly by means of a negative adjective), the reviewer emphasizes the recommended action by creating a hypothetical situation in the future with 'would' and positive adjectives such as 'helpful', 'useful', 'desirable' or 'clearer'" (Fortanet 2008: 34). This enables the writer to approach the evaluation from a more positive standpoint, but also, the choice of an impersonal structure hides the source of the evaluation, reducing personal responsibility and making the evaluation appear more objective.

Both components in a frame + matrix construction can contain evaluative elements. However, it is the frame, which orients the reader to interpret the framed proposition a certain way. There are a number of reasons a writer might use a construction like the evaluative *that*. Hyland and Tse (2005) mention that "it allows the writer to thematize the evaluation, making the attitudinal meaning the starting point of the message and the perspective from which the content of the *that*-clause is interpreted" (2005: 40). They further argue that "the evaluative *that*-structure highlights such evaluations by turning them into an explicit statement of opinion with the potential for elaboration and further discussion" (ibid.). Thus, it is another way of adjusting the dialogic expansiveness of a statement – making it more or less negotiable.

3 Data and Methodology

The research conducted for this study falls under corpus linguistics, but moves from a purely quantitative, birds-eye view of the genre into a more qualitative, closer look at a specific set of examples. Thus, it might be described as qualitative corpus research (cf. Hunston 2011: 50). The scope of this study is too narrow for a close inspection of all evaluative elements in the preliminary examiners' statements, and thus, I have chosen to take a look at one particular class of stance markers, modal verbs, and more specifically at a typical context modal verbs appear in, recommendations. In addition, to investigate the attribution of stance and the interpersonal relationship among the examiners and their audience, I have investigated the use of self-mention in these statements. My research questions are as follows:

- Describing the genre: How are the usage patterns of modal verbs and self-mention distributed? For example, do the examiner's statements follow the general usage patterns of their respective academic domains or are there perhaps differences between statements written by native and non-native speakers of English?
- Describing the evaluative statements: How are recommendations given in the examiners' statements? How direct or strong do they tend to be? What can be said about the interpersonal relationship between the examiner and the candidate?

The research is divided into two parts: first, I investigate the use of modal verbs and self-mention overall, then, I will discuss the recommendations in my data.

3.1 The preliminary examiner's statement

The preliminary examiner's statement can be seen as belonging to one of the "occluded genres" of the academy, which Swales describes as "those [genres] which support the research publication process but are not themselves part of the research records" (Swales 1996: 45). It is one of those genres that "operate to support and validate the manufacture of knowledge […]" (Swales 1996: 46). Two related genres to the preliminary examiner's statement are peer review reports – a similarly occluded genre, as well as book reviews in academic journals. The preliminary examiners' statements reflect what is required of the candidates to become, as one examiner put it, "a *proper* member of our scholarly community" (02, HUM) (my

emphasis). Thus, examiners are not merely evaluating a piece of writing – they are effectively judging who is worthy enough to participate in the knowledge-creating process.

The preliminary examiner's statement plays a very important part in a scholar's life – to become a scientist, he or she must gain the respect and approval of the scientific community, and fulfil the requirements that the community has set up to maintain its standards. It is also a peculiar from of correspondence, public in theory, but it could also be described as semi-private, as no one else usually is interested in reading these statements apart from the Faculty Council[7] members and the candidate. This is one of the reasons why I believe it is "occluded", to use Swales' terms. Even though the University of Helsinki (through which the statements were obtained) treats these as public documents, they are primarily intended for the doctoral candidate, their supervisors and the Faculty Council. Formally, they are usually addressed to the council or a member of the faculty's administrative staff, but as they contain critique and suggestions on how to improve the thesis, as well as other messages (e.g. congratulations) to the candidate, the most important relationship, in my opinion, is that between the examiner and the doctoral candidate. Similarly, Räisänen has characterised the peer review process as "a negotiation process between reviewers and author(s) with the editor of the journal as mediator and arbitrator" (Räisänen 1999: 124, as cited in Fortanet 2008: 28).

Examiners are usually selected by the supervisors of the candidate and they receive payment for writing the report. Being selected as an external preliminary examiner means that one's expertise in the field has been recognised and one's opinion is trusted. The examiners may also have other professional connections to the person/persons who selected them. Thus they are walking a very particular social tightrope when formulating these statements. As already discussed in the introduction, evaluating a (future) colleague's work is undoubtedly a potentially face-threatening act, and requires that it be handled tactfully. As Hyland reminds us, "the academic world is small, and it may be prudent not to antagonise those within it" (Hyland 2004: 45).

[7] The administrative body of the faculty headed by the dean. Among other duties, the faculty councils make the final decision concerning the acceptance of doctoral dissertations, aided by the preliminary examiners' statements)

The examiners receive instructions on how to review the theses. Many of these are available on the faculties' webpages. These guidelines vary somewhat from one faculty to another, but the central themes to be addressed are more or less the same. Most importantly, they are asked to judge whether the dissertation makes an original contribution to knowledge, whether it indicates that the candidate is familiar with previous literature and masters the research methods chosen, and whether the presentation and structure are clear and appropriate. Finally, they are required to make an explicit statement whether they grant or deny a permission to proceed to public defence. In addition to the statements themselves, I have also looked at these instructions to see whether they might help explain some of the findings.

3.2 The WrELFA corpus

The statements I am analysing in this paper are a part of the WrELFA corpus (2014; Corpus of Written English as a Lingua Franca in Academic settings), which is a part of the ELFA project at the University of Helsinki. The corpus, as it stands now at the time of writing, has two subcorpora: The first consists of entries from various academic research blogs (371887 words, 46 % of total) and the second of the preliminary examiners' statements (442614 words, 54 % of the total) A third subcorpus is also being compiled at the time of writing, which consists of drafts of scientific research articles that have not undergone professional language revision.

Even though the project deals with ELF, a sample of examiners' statements from ENL (English as a native language) speakers was also collected. As these statements represent a previously un-researched, relatively unknown genre, the inclusion of ENL statements will help to get a more complete picture of the genre, and of the academic English used within. It also reflects the realities of modern academia where ELF and ENL speakers frequently collaborate.

57 per cent of the statements received from the faculties were written in Finnish, 40 per cent in English, 2 per cent in Swedish and the one remaining per cent contains all other languages (Italian, Spanish, Russian and French). The statement subcorpus contains 330 preliminary examiner's statements *written in English*. Of those statements, 236 (72 per cent) are from ELF speakers and 94 (28 per cent) from ENL speakers.

The statements were collected from six different faculties at the University of Helsinki during 2012-2013 and were divided into *natural sciences* (natural sciences, agriculture and forestry and medicine, henceforth abbreviated as Sci) and *social sciences and humanities* (behavioural sciences, humanities and social sciences, henceforth abbreviated as SSH). Table 1 shows the distribution of the statements by domain.

Table 1. Distribution of statements by domain

Domain	**No. of statements n=330**	**No. of words n: 402135**	**Percentage**
agriculture & forestry	60	78311	19 %
behavioural sciences	23	29820	7 %
humanities	58	99469	25 %
medicine	42	35983	9 %
natural sciences	93	69385	17 %
social sciences	54	89167	22 %

The ratio of first languages (by word count, 442 614 words in total) in the examiner's statements subcorpus is as follows:

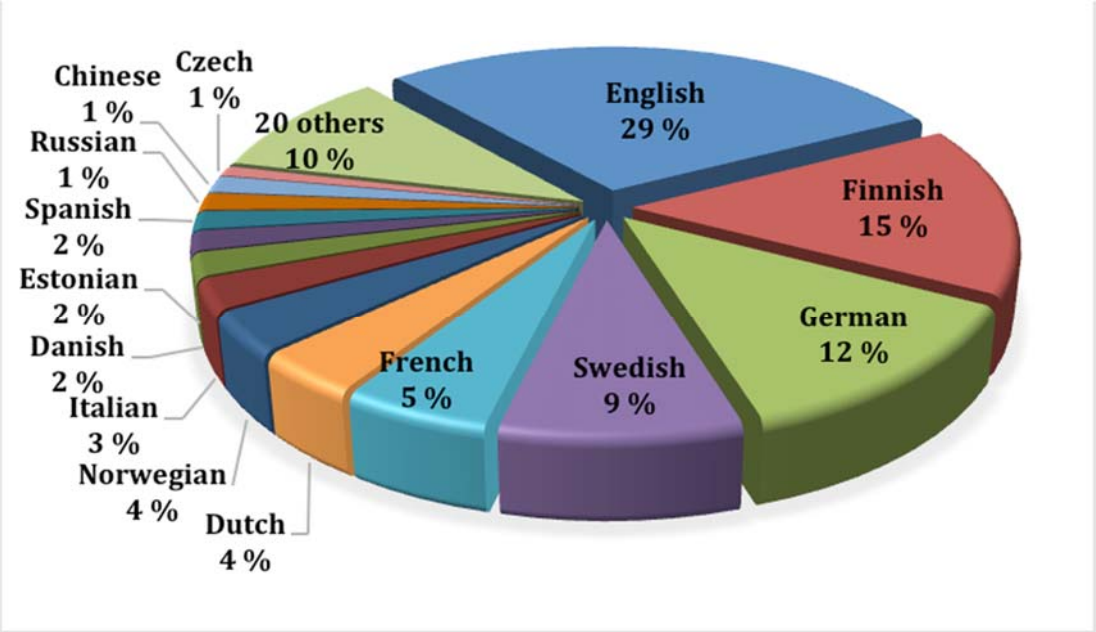

Figure 1. First languages in the statement subcorpus. (Source: Carey 2014)

The average length of the statements is 1219 words and statements regarding the so-called "hard" disciplines such as natural sciences or medicine tend to be shorter (average number of words: 942) than ones regarding "soft" disciplines like the humanities (average number of words: 1618).

The corpus was annotated with part-of-speech information using Tree Tagger[8], a POS-tagging software available for free for education, research and evaluation purposes. The POS-tagged corpus was then converted to plain text format. Tree Tagger has been credited with 96.36% accuracy (Schmid 1994:1). However, as the WrELFA corpus (2014) contains some non-standard language use, the accuracy might in this case be lower.

3.3 Methods

In order to find recommendations, I searched the corpus for modal verbs (tagged MD) preceded by a personal pronoun, (PP) or a noun (N) referring to either the examiner or the candidate. The choice to narrow down the search to constructions containing a personal pronoun or a referring noun was motivated by two reasons: the amount of data to analyse qualitatively would not become too large, and the focus

[8] Tree Tagger software by Helmut Schmidt, University of Stuttgart. Available from: http://www.cis.uni-muenchen.de/~schmid/tools/TreeTagger/ POS-tagging by Ray Carey.

would remain on the interpersonal aspect of the evaluation. In addition, a python script[9] was used to find raw counts and metadata for all modal verbs and all self-referring pronouns (regardless of context) to examine their overall distribution and their relation to previous corpus findings.

Using AntConc (Anthony 2011), the following regular expression searches were conducted. The square brackets indicate the parts of the search strings, which are changed according to each search. Searching for modal verbs preceded by the noun *candidate*, for example, one would use the following search string: candidate\w+\W+(?:\w+_RB\W+){0,3}?\w+_MD. I also searched for semi-modal *have to*, in addition to the modals that receive the tag "MD" in TreeTagger: *can, could, may, might, need to, ought, should, will, would*.

- Personal pronoun/candidate/author/examiner/reader/name + modal verb: [\w+_PP][author\w+][candidate\w+][examiner\w+][reader\w+][<NAME S\w+]\W+(?:\w+_RB\W+){0,3}?\w+_MD
- Personal pronoun/candidate/author/examiner/reader/name + have/has to: [w+_PP—author][w+/candidate\w+][examiner\w+][reader\w+] [<NAME S\w+]\W+(?:\w+_RB\W+){0,3}?have/has\w+\W+to

The above searches provided altogether 1409 hits. From these, I first excluded false hits (n=13), for example "What authority might they possess?"; and in addition, to be consistent, I excluded instances where the pronoun referred to an antecedent other than the candidate or the examiner (n= 202). This obviously excludes a great deal of suggestions, such as

(4) If these studies are relevant , *they* **should** be discussed . (146A, AGR),

along with other types of more specific recommendations, with a noun other than the ones searched for, as a subject.

I wanted to focus on examples where the modal verb was participating in an act of giving advice, recommendations or suggestions, i.e. cases where the examiner thinks the candidate should/could have done/do something differently. The pronoun/noun + modal construction could be a simple sentence, such as:

(5) The *author* **should** clarify this issue. (209, SOC)

[9] Overall figures for modal distribution were obtained from an XML version of the POS-tagged examiners' statements. Counts were obtained through a Python script written by Ray Carey.

It could also act as a frame, a matrix clause, which expresses the source of the evaluation and the stance towards the proposition expressed in the main clause:

(6) *I* **would** have liked to see more of a discussion on these points (164, SOC)

Some clauses contain two instances, a frame which precedes a recommendation with a PP and MD such as:

(7) *I* **would** suggest to the candidate that *he* **should** make the concepts of aspiration level, target and threshold more precise. (124A, AGR)

In the following example, only the construction in the matrix clause was counted, although the main clause is also interesting in that it makes a reference to a reader, a role which could be construed as the implied source of the evaluation, followed by a clear attribution (*I think*):

(8) In this respect, *the author* **should not** assume that *the reader* **will** make the connections -- I think it is worth asserting them strongly. (232_eng, BEH)

Even though pronouns referring back to other nouns were excluded, the data includes so-called extraposed *it*-constructions. These are examples like

(9) Finally *it* **would** be desirable to comment on self decomposition of hydrogen peroxide at reaction conditions and its influence on catalytic results. (85, SCI)

These constructions enable the writer to avoid mentioning either the source of the evaluation or the person who should do the act described in the proposition – they are the most indirect way of giving recommendations. After narrowing down the data according to the above criteria, I was left with 534 concordance lines, the analysis of which I will present below, after first discussing overall use of modal verbs and self-mention in the corpus.

4 Results and discussion

First, I will present and discuss statistics for all modals and self-mention in the corpus. After presenting the general statistics, I will look more closely at the kind of constructions and trends that I discovered examining recommendations.

4.1 General trends

4.1.1 Modals

There seems to be two major trends in the overall distributions of modal usage in the preliminary examiner's statements. Modal verbs occur more frequently in the so-called soft disciplines (social sciences and humanities) than the so-called hard disciplines (natural sciences). This is statistically significant at $p < 0.0001$ (G2 value: 38.17)[10]. Hyland and Tse (2004) also note that distinction in their study of metadiscoursal elements in master's and PhD theses (2004: 172), observing that metadiscourse, especially interactional metadiscourse, is higher in the soft disciplines. The same trend is also true with university textbooks (Hyland 2004) and research articles (Hyland 1998b) as well. The distribution of modals by domain is presented in Figure 2.

[10] p and G2 values calculated using Log-likelihood calculator by Paul Ryson, Lancaster University. http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html. The G2 value indicates the difference between two frequency scores: higher G2 value indicates a higher difference. The G2 value relates to the p-value as follows:
95th percentile; 5% level; $p < 0.05$; critical value = 3.84
99th percentile; 1% level; $p < 0.01$; critical value = 6.63
99.9th percentile; 0.1% level; $p < 0.001$; critical value = 10.83
99.99th percentile; 0.01% level; $p < 0.0001$; critical value = 15.13

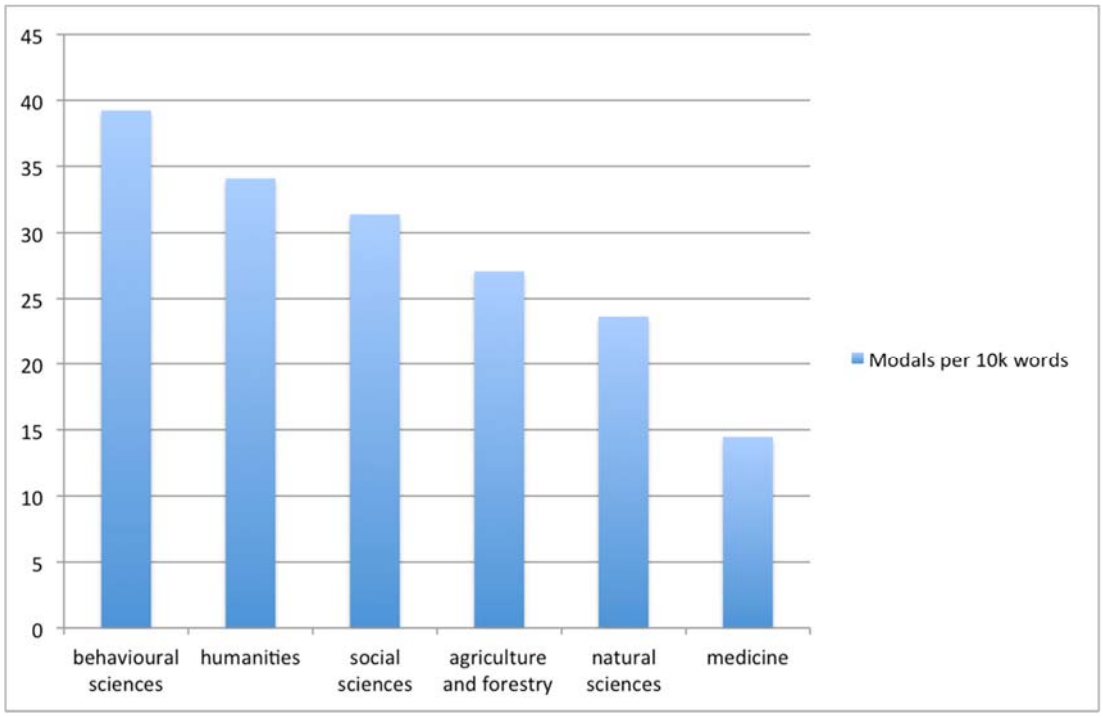

Figure 2. Distribution of modals by domain.

Here, one can see a clear progression from behavioural sciences with the largest number of modals, to medicine with the lowest. Obviously, the frequencies of modal verbs in this study cannot be directly compared to Hyland's (2004, 1998b) and Hyland and Tse's (2004) investigations of metadiscourse markers overall. In the present study I have not, for example, made a distinction between modals participating in metadiscourse which "comments on the writer's estimation of possibilities" and "propositional" use of modal verbs where they are used to describe a situation whose "outcome depends on external enabling or disabling circumstances" (Hyland and Tse 2004: 167). However, as this is a review genre, it is likely that a great deal of the modals are used "metadiscoursally" and that their usage here is in alignment with the results of several previous studies on academic metadiscourse. Furthermore, Hyland also noted that in book reviews, hedges in general were primarily used to mitigate threats to the face, rather than to reflect degrees of probability (Hyland 2004: 56). Contrary to the findings in this present study, where there are clear differences among disciplines in the usage of modal verbs, Hyland noticed that in book reviews, the use of modal verbs, especially *would, might, may* and *could* "predominated virtually in all disciplines" (ibid.). Stotesbury's (2003) study of evaluation in research article abstracts, however, offers an interesting

counter-example: she found that "[…] abstracts in the humanities and social sciences as a group used more evaluative attributes than those in the natural sciences, while the latter more often resorted to modality as a way of expressing authorial stance" (Stotesbury 2003: 339). This means, that even though this present study shows that modals are less frequent in the hard disciplines, their relationship to other markers of stance might be higher than in the soft disciplines. Unfortunately, as this study only uses modals as a general indicator of evaluation overall, tendencies between different types of evaluative language cannot be investigated here.

The next major trend one can observe is that modal verbs also occur more frequently in ENL statements than ELF statements which is statistically significant at $p<0.0001$ (G2: 35.43). The figures are presented in tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2. Overall modal verb frequency in relation to first language (ELF/ENL) and domain (Sci/SSH)

	No. of modals	**Total words**	**Per 10k***
ELF	2733	276015	99
ENL	1514	126120	120
Sci	1740	183679	95
SSH	2507	218456	115

**Standardised frequency per 10 000 words*

However, the ELF-ENL difference is not so great when one looks at modal usage within each domain. In natural sciences the gap between ENL and ELF becomes significantly narrower ($p<0.01$, G2: 10.34) and also somewhat narrower in social sciences and humanities ($p<0.001$, G2: 13.78). Table 3 illustrates this distribution.

Table 3. Overall distributions of modals between ELF and ENL speakers within domains (Sci/SSH)

Sci	**No. of modals**	**Total words**	**Per 10k**
ELF	1300	143200	91
ENL	440	40479	109
SSH	**No. of modals**	**Total words**	**Per 10k**
ELF	1433	132815	108

ENL	1074	85641	125

Furthermore, looking at modal frequency on the level of individual statements, any overall trends become less obvious. The average number of modals in a statement in the corpus is 14; however, the number ranges from zero to 90, so variance between individual examiners is large. It should also be pointed out, that 20 per cent of examiners are responsible for just over 50 per cent of the modals in the corpus.

As for the usage of different modals, both hard and soft disciplines and native- and non-native speakers seem to follow the same general pattern, with *would*, *can* and *should* being the most used modal verbs, the prevalence of *would* corresponding with Hyland's (2004) findings concerning hedging in book reviews. The greatest differences are to be found with *might* and *would*, which are both used more in social sciences and humanities and among ENL speakers.

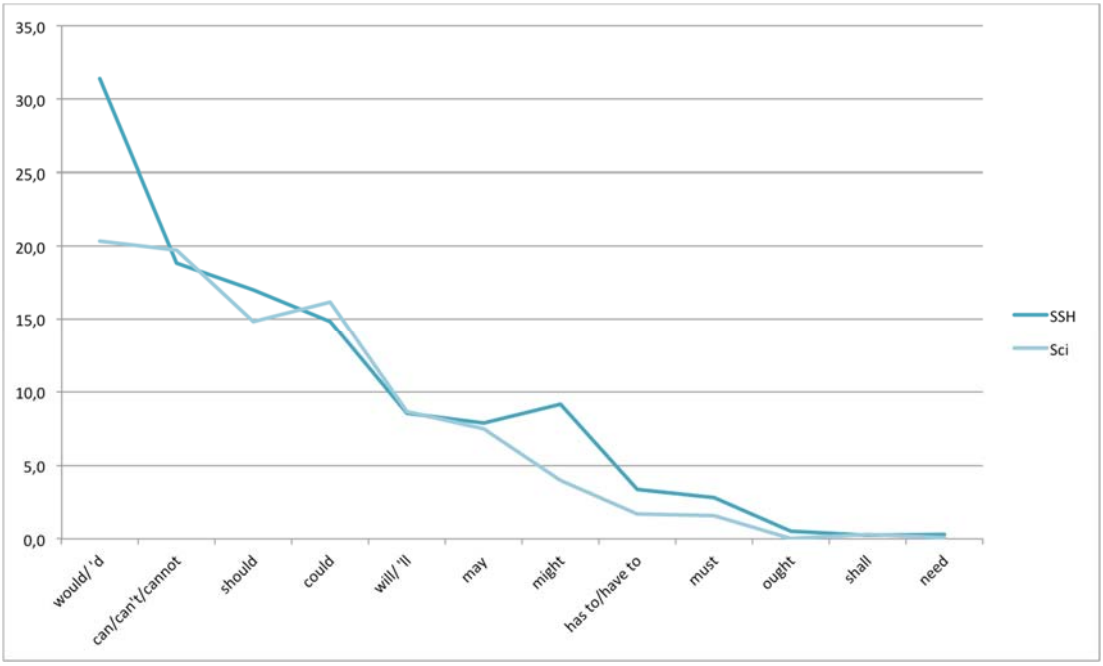

Figure 3: Distribution of modals between social sciences and humanities and natural sciences. Standardised frequencies per 10 000 words.

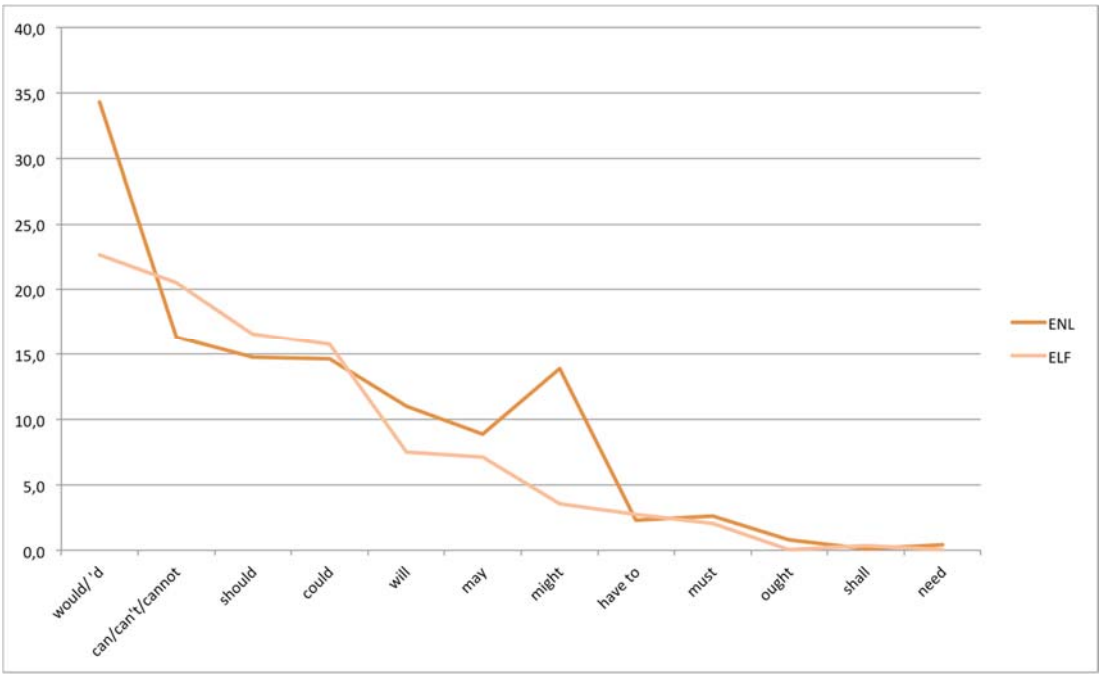

Figure 4: Distribution of modals between ELF and ENL speakers. Standardised frequencies per 10 000 words.

Once again there are notable differences between individual statements, and contributing to the higher use of *would* and *might* in SSH and ENL statements are a few individual statements with high numbers of these modals.

4.1.2 Self-mention

To get an overall picture on how much examiners choose to make their authorial presence explicit, I investigated self-referring personal pronouns occurring in the corpus (*I, me, my, myself, we, us, our)*. In terms of first person plural, just by looking at raw counts, I could not differentiate inclusive *we* from exclusive *we*. Also, I have noticed that occasionally, examiners might refer to themselves as *this reader (n=15)* or, on one occasion, *this examiner*. However, the following data concerns pronouns only.

The overall pattern of self-referring pronouns follows that of modals – the only exception being that natural sciences precedes agriculture and forestry in terms of their frequency.

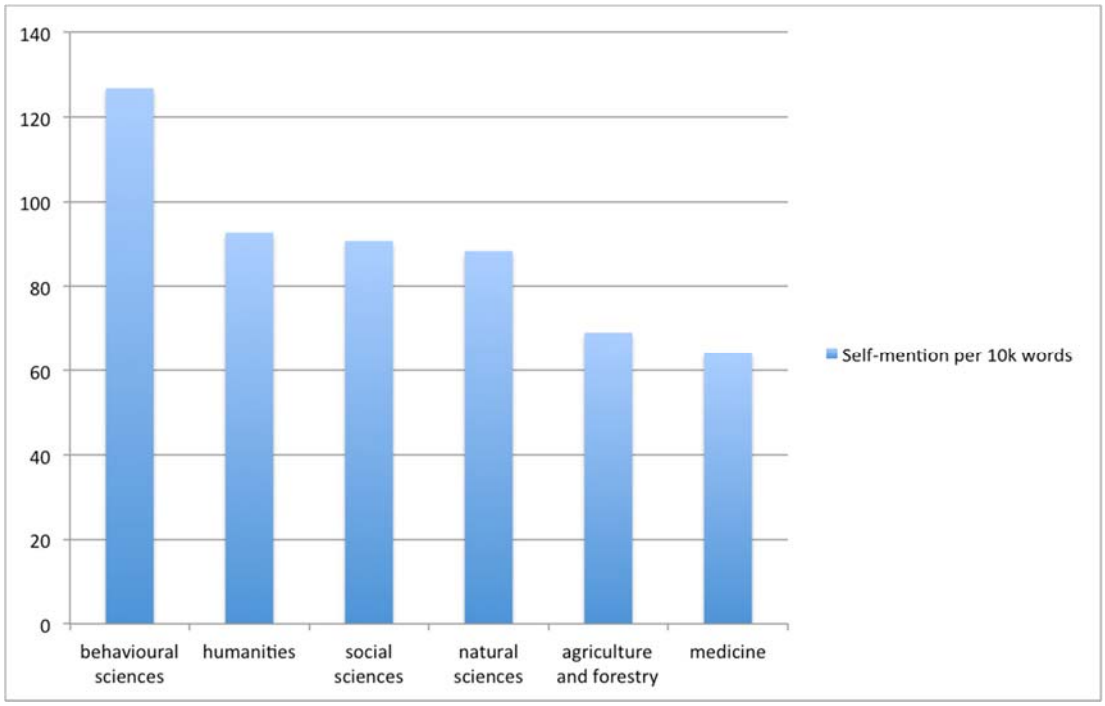

Figure 5. Distribution of self-mention by domain.

Trends in self-mention follow modals also in that native language users utilise them more frequently than ELF users ($p<0.0001$, G2: 91.36) and that they are more frequent in statements concerning social sciences and humanities than natural sciences ($p<0.0001$, G2: 51.81). In her study of reporting clauses in theses, Charles (2006) also noted that "social science, politics, generally" allows "a greater degree of writer visibility than the natural science, materials" (Charles 2006: 514). This result is also in accordance with Hyland's (2002a) and Hyland and Tse's (2004) findings.

Again, as with modals, the difference between ELF and ENL speakers becomes much more narrow within natural sciences ($p<0.01$, G2: 9.65). However, when one looks at self-mention within social sciences and humanities, native speakers use it much more frequently ($p<0.0001$, G2: 64.71). These results are presented in tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4. Self-mention frequency in relation to first language (ELF/ENL) and domain (Sci/SSH)

	No. of self-references	**Total words**	**Per 10k**
ELF	2131	276015	77
ENL	1363	126120	108
Sci	1385	183679	75
SSH	2109	218456	97

Table 5. Overall distributions of self-mention between ELF and ENL speakers within domains (Sci/SSH)

Sci	**No. of self-references**	**Total words**	**Per 10k**
ELF	1031	143200	72
ENL	354	40479	87
SSH	**No. of self-references**	**Total words**	**Per 10k**
ELF	1100	132815	83
ENL	1009	85641	118

4.1.3 Interim summary

The first of my research questions concerned the preliminary examiner's statement as a genre, and asked, "How are the usage patterns of modal verbs and self-mention distributed? For example, do the examiner's statements follow the general usage patterns of their respective academic domains or are there perhaps differences between statements written by native and non-native speakers of English?"

The answer is that the usage varies both among disciplines and between ELF and ENL speakers. Modal verbs are used in social sciences and humanities, and by ENL speakers, more frequently than they are used in natural sciences and by ELF speakers. Within natural sciences, the use of modals was relatively uniform between ELF and ENL speakers, but within social sciences and humanities, ENL speakers used them more frequently.

Because these statistics do not reveal anything about *how* these modals are used, it is very difficult to speculate why this might be. If one assumes that at least partly, these

modals are used to hedge evaluation, (i.e. saying something *might* problematic instead of saying that something *is* problematic) it might be that native speakers hedge more, which is not a new claim. Bloor and Bloor (1991), referencing Skelton (1988) mention how he observed that "'crude' unhedged writing is more typical of second or foreign language use than of native speaker use" (Bloor and Bloor 1991: 8) and that this is also true in their own experience. However, I am wary of generalising from such a relatively small sample – as I pointed out, some examiners use modals very frequently whereas others hardly at all – these differences could at least partly be due to the preferences of individual writers.

Self-mention followed the same overall patterns of usage as the modals – also in terms of variation among individual statements: again, 50 per cent of self-mention occurred in only 19 per cent of the statements.

Despite the range of variability between individual language users, the division between the domains is interesting, nonetheless. There are a couple of reasons why modal verb usage and self-mention seem to be more frequent in social sciences and humanities than in natural sciences. The first might be the nature of the domains themselves. As a humanist myself, I dislike repeating often used clichés attributed to the "soft" sciences, the term itself being perhaps slightly derogative. Still, it is tempting to see the correlation as a reflection of the fact that in social sciences and humanities there are perhaps less certainties, less binary relationships in terms of something being "true" or "false".

This is something Hyland and Tse (2004), among others, have also observed, and they note, in reference to hedges and self-mentions, that

> These figures generally reflect the greater role of explicit personal interpretation of research in the humanities and social sciences and the fact that dealing with human subjects and data is altogether more uncertain and allows for more variable outcomes. The writer is unable to draw to the same extent on convincing proofs, empirical demonstration, or trusted quantitative methods as in the hard fields, and must work harder to build up a relationship with readers, positioning them, persuading them, and including them in the argument to turn them from alternative interpretations. (Hyland and Tse 2004: 173)

Thus, also in evaluating research in the soft fields, the evaluator is perhaps more likely to highlight his or her role as an individual member of their scientific discipline, and so acknowledge that other opinions are also available. Another reason

is perhaps more practical: in natural sciences, the number of article-based theses tends to be larger, and thus a large portion of the theses has already been subjected to peer-review. Reviewers often focus on the parts that have not already been reviewed when giving criticism, and suggestions for further improvement are also less frequent.

Hyland (2002a) observed in his study of authorial identity that L2 student writers in Hong Kong actively avoided self-mention in relation to expert writers. While this may be due to their novice status, he argues that it might also be partly cultural, with the "individualistic ideology" in academic writing in English "both exposes the writer and reduces group solidarity, and as a result L2 students often view the use of I with misgivings" (Hyland 2002a: 1110).

However, in his 2005 book Metadiscourse, discussing the results of several different cross-cultural studies, he concludes that "[t]he role of culture in writing remains controversial (2005a: 136)" and says that within the practice of contrastive rhetoric, researchers have "largely assumed a received view of culture (Connor 2002), until recently unproblematically identifying cultures with national entities and reducing individuals to cultural types" which has resulted in emphasizing "predictable consensuality *within* cultures and differences *across* them" (ibid.: 115, original emphasis).

So, there seems to be more support in literature for different discourse practices across academic disciplines rather than across cultures defined by first language or a place of origin – perhaps discourse communities or communities of practise indeed are more appropriate concepts to look at when comparing language use, at least in international contexts such as academia.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Overview of recommendations

The 534 instances of recommendations follow the patterns of modal verbs and self-mention in general: frequencies are higher in social sciences and humanities and among ENL speakers. However, regarding recommendations, the difference between the domains is slightly higher ($p<0.0001$, G2: 39.04) and lower between ELF and

ENL (p<0,0001, G2: 26.44). The distribution among domains differs slightly from those of modals overall and self-mention; however, here again the highest frequency is to be found in behavioural sciences and lowest in medicine with a split between hard and soft disciplines. Distributions of recommendations are presented in figure 6 and tables 6 and 7 below.

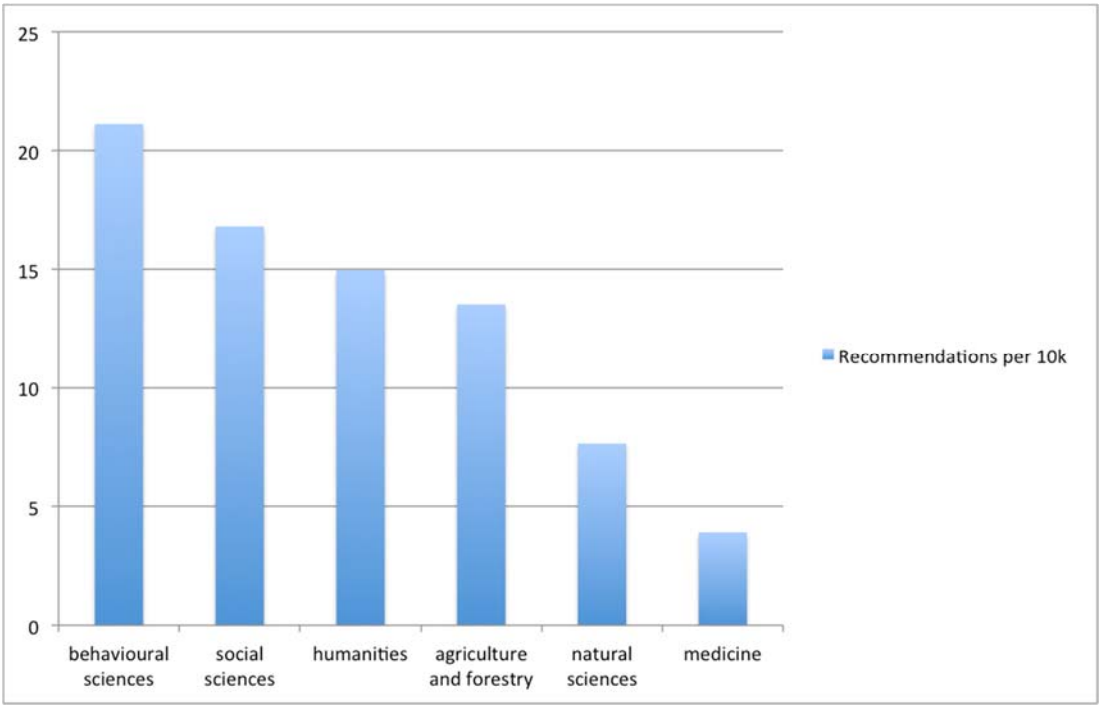

Figure 6. Distribution of recommendations by domain

As with overall modal usage, the differences between ELF and ENL speakers get narrower within domains. In natural sciences the difference ceases to be statistically significant (p > 0.05, G2: 3.10). Within social sciences, difference between ELF and ENL speakers remains statistically significant, and compares with modals overall (p < 0.001, G2: 13.51).

Table 6. Recommendation frequency in relation to first language (ELF/ENL) and domain (Sci/SSH)

	No. of recommendations	**Total words**	**Per 10k**
ELF	310	276015	11
ENL	224	126120	18
Sci	173	183679	9
SSH	361	218456	17

Table 7: Recommendation frequency between ELF and ENL speakers within domains (Sci/SSH). N= 534

Sci	**No. of recommendations**	**Total words**	**Per 10k**
ELF	125	143200	9
ENL	48	40479	12
SSH			
ELF	185	132815	14
ENL	176	85641	21

In terms of general trends in recommendation frequencies, I would say once more, that the most significant finding is the difference between the two domains, with social sciences and humanities utilising them much more frequently than natural sciences.

The following table presents noun + modal combinations in the recommendations-data. The five most used combinations are in bold.

Table 8. Noun and modal combinations in recommendations. N=534.

	CAN	**COULD**	**HAVE TO**	**MAY**	**MIGHT**	**MUST**	**OUGHT**	**SHOULD**	**WILL**	**WOULD**	**TOTAL**
AUTHOR		**21**	1	6	4			**18**	2	2	54
CANDIDATE		3		4	3	1		6		3	20
HE/SHE		7		1	8			12		1	29
I		3			1			1	1	**162**	168
IT		11		4	12			8		**137**	172
NAME		9		2	**16**			11	1	1	40
ONE	1	7		1	5			3		13	30
READER										3	3
WE				1	1		1			1	4
YOU	2	1		2				9			14
TOTAL	3	62	1	21	50	1	1	68	4	323	534

In general, and not surprisingly, examiners prefer to explicitly source the recommendation as their own opinion. Recommendations with *I would* were the most common in the data with 162 instances.

However, the second most common noun + modal combination in the data was *it would*, with 137 instances. This group was part of a larger group of so-called extraposed *it*-constructions, which, counting also other modals besides *would*, amount to 172 instances. This is remarkably similar to the use of 1st person pronoun *I* which occurs 168 times in the data.

Far behind the above two groups are suggestions which address the candidate in the third person (*author, candidate, he/she, <name>*) or second person (*you*). However, the candidate might be referred to in the recommendation in other ways besides in conjunction with a modal, for example:

(10) Nevertheless *I* **would** appreciate if she had a critical look at the above mentioned article and made use of some of the ideas reflected there. (18A, HUM)

Modals most often used in conjunction with a 2nd or 3rd person pronoun or a referring noun are *should, could*, and *might*. In general, examiners use *should* very selectively, and in those instances, they often use a framing device such as an evaluative that: *I would suggest to the candidate that he should…* or other hedges such as *I think, perhaps*, and so on.

Directly addressing the candidate was rare. Second person pronoun *you* appeared in the data only 9 times and in those cases hedges were also often used. General *one* was also used in reference to the candidate occasionally.

4.2.2 Types of recommendations

As the preliminary examiner's statement is a previously un-researched genre, I did not want to use any pre-existing categorisations for the recommendations in the data. Often repeating grammatical structures informed the first level of analysis, which was focused on the noun + modal combination used. In terms of the research objectives of this study, the interpersonal and intersubjective aspects of the recommendations provided further guiding principles for the analysis of specific recommendation types. Three main types of recommendations emerged from the

data. These are a) author-oriented recommendations, b) reader-oriented recommendations, and c) impersonal recommendations (extraposed *it*-structures). The impersonal recommendations most usually focus on the suggested action, but could be interpreted in many ways. The types are summarised in the table below.

Table 9. Recommendations by type.

RECOMMENDATION TYPE	NUMBER	%
Author-oriented	252	47
Reader-oriented	108	20
Impersonal (extraposed it)	174	33

The most common of these is what could be described as the **author-oriented recommendation** – a clear suggestion for action on the candidate's part (n: 252). This is the type of recommendation where *should* is used most frequently – these are thus things that the examiner feels are necessary or at least recommendable corrections or additions to the thesis. These can be very straightforward, such as the following, with the most obligating modal *should* (the second most common modal used in type author-oriented recommendations; n: 60):

(11) As a general standpoint, the *author* **should** always give a definition of acronyms straightaway (e.g., SECI). (204, SOC)

(12) However, <*NAME*> **should** show more consistency both in terms of the form and the content of the thesis. (107, SCI)

The third most used modal in these types of recommendations is *could* (n: 46), and suggestions are often hedged (hedges underlined):

(13) Methodological critique does become evident this way, but the *author* **could** equally well spell it out. (136, AGR)

(14) Perhaps the *author* **could** explicitly define the measure of real exchange rate used to help clarify my confusion. (209, SOC)

Author-oriented suggestions are also often framed as performatives – the evaluative *that*-clause is very common:

(15) *I* **would** recommend that <NAME> provide some additional signposting at the beginning of this chapter too, to explain why she's opted to include a detailed account of each text. (12B_eng, HUM)

(16) Also, *I* **would** suggest that she elaborate or speculate on why negative heterosis was observed. (178_eng, AGR)

(17) *I* **might** suggest that one full interview transcript (appropriately anonymised) be included with the dissertation to allow the reader to see the overall context of at least one interview. (231B_eng, AGR)

The *I would*-frame makes *would* (n:89) the most used modal in author-oriented suggestions. This performative frame might function as a hedge for the suggestion – it softens the force of the directive as it explicitly frames it as the examiner's personal opinion rather than as an objective statement. However, some of these performative frames can function as boosters, too, though this is not very common:

(18) Her written English moreover is very clear and never difficult to understand. But it is very clearly that of a non-native speaker, and *I* **would** strongly urge her to find a native speaker who can go through the text systematically to correct the minor, but frequent little errors that crop up. (208B_eng, SOC)

(19) Similarly on the issues of data quality, the soil samples it [sic] appear to have been collected with a Endleman type soil auger these can be prone to contamination and as no replicates were taken / analysed *I* **would** urge caution when using these results. (186_eng, AGR)

In addition to the *I would* – frame, hedging frames such as *I think* or *I believe* also occur in conjunction with author-oriented recommendations, though these were not quantified in my data, as they do not involve a modal. Framing the suggestions this way puts the source of the evaluation in the forefront, rather than the agent of the suggested action (the candidate). However, I consider these still to be author-oriented on a core level, as *suggesting,* as an act, is projected towards the addressee.

A perhaps less clear case are constructions where the examiner says what they themselves would do, or would have done (n: 21):

(20) In the abstract *I* **would** remove reference to 'Africa' – this is too broad with the different African countries having very diverse forests, cultures and

ensuing cultural-forest interactions and associated management structures. (186_eng, AGR)

(21) *I* **would** better explain and then contrast the two shocks originating from the financial sector. (209, SOC)

Despite no reference to the candidate, I consider these to still be more author-oriented, as they are very similar to examples such as (11)-(14) in their structure, and, much like adding a performative frame such as *I would suggest* they could be considered as a more polite way of saying "the author should". Interestingly, 12 of these are used by a single examiner in statement 209.

Finally, the softest kind of author-oriented recommendations mostly utilise modals *may* and *might*, and emphasise the candidate's own judgement, rather than obligation, thus protecting the candidate's negative face:

(22) Given this limitation, the *authors* **may** wish to add a word of caution in the newly drafted extensive outline. (56, MED)

(23) <*NAME*> **might** even consider discussing "Text Types" after her section on "Nomenclature". (12B_eng, HUM)

The second recommendation type is **a reader-oriented recommendation** (n:108) often a wish-like expression of what the examiner would like to read or to have read in the thesis. It is thus typically not very commanding and usually indicates that something could have been done in addition to what was already done. The focus here is more on the wishes and feelings of the reader of the text, most typically the examiner, but also occasionally, the assumed future audience, the "general reader". Most of the *I would* -constructions (n: 78) fall under this type.

(24) *I* **would** like to see a deeper integration of the results obtained in the two studies. (151B, SOC)

(25) However, the interested *reader* **would** have appreciated a description of the included items. (147, AGR)

In the example below, the examiner is acknowledging that his expectations might be due to a difference in academic cultures:

(26) In North America *we* **migh**t hope that a dissertation might explore more works that had not been previously commented upon, using sources that have not yet been touched. (264_eng)

However, a slightly stronger variation of this recommendation type concerns expectations rather than wishes, and indicates that something was lacking or not done in the way the examiner preferred. Here, the focus is still on the reader of the text, but the force towards the candidate is somewhat stronger:

(27) But even in a study focusing on a single case, *one* **could** imagine efforts to tabulate the responses of interviewees to key questions in a manner that adds a bit of rigour to a purely qualitative discussion of the issues. (150B_eng, SOC)

(28) *I* **would** have preferred to see better arguments for enhanced O+ escape rate for high Bx, than those presented at the end of the first paragraph on page 1439. (25A, SCI)

Interestingly, using *one* instead of the 1st person pronoun *I* was more common with verbs like *expect* – attributing the source of evaluation here to a general *one* leaves less room to alternative opinions, and at the same time, the distancing effect might make it more confortable for the examiner to get more critical:

(29) This being a thesis written in the subject area of Assyriology, *one* **can** reasonably expect her to check in person problematic passages in the cuneiform evidence. (250, HUM)

(30) Yet, given the amount of literature and the sheer size of the dissertation (586 pages), *one* **would** have expected a somewhat more critical approach; more analysis and commentary on the issues and arguments rather than focus on the information gathering itself. (159, SOC)

The **impersonal recommendations**, which consist of the so-called extraposed *it*-constructions (n:174) are the second most common type of recommendations in the data. In these types of recommendations, the source of the evaluation is not made explicit and the focus is most often on the perceived benefit or other evaluation of the suggested action. However, they are a highly varied group, and the structure allows the writer to form recommendations with many different emphases. In examples (31) and (32) below, one could interpret that the examiner is the one to whom the proposed discussion/explanation would have been interesting or "neat", or it could also mean a general readership, thus making it similar to reader-oriented suggestions:

(31) *It* **would** have been interesting to have a full discussion on why this technique was chosen over applying standard vegetation techniques, such as fixed area (ideally 1 hectare) plots. (186_eng, AGR)

(32) The presentation of the intangible product attributes is straightforward but at the same time *it* **would** have been neat to read some explanations about what type of intangible attributes that are becoming increasingly important in the forest products market of today. (147, AGR)

The following are quite strongly author-oriented – in (33) it is clear from the context already that the candidate has failed to do something that should have been obvious to him:

(33) Unfortunately, he never tells us how he reached his state of certainty on these matters -- and *it* **should** be obvious that a careful delineation of how the research set up his classifications should be part of every research plan. (253A HUM)

Similarly, example (34) also clearly suggests an action to be performed by the candidate:

(34) The chapter is quite complete, although *it* **might** be best to begin with personal pronouns, then nouns, then determiners, then more complex combinations. (244_eng, HUM)

Some *it*-constructions are similar to performatives:

(35) *It* **would** also be recommendable to check the consistency and accuracy of the concepts in the introduction […] (154, SOC)

(36) *It* **would** be advisable either to move this section forward or make the statement about the focus early on and to consider its implications for the text in the beginning part of the summary article. (155A, SOC)

The following could be characterised as work-oriented (note, though, the frame *In my view* in [38], which sources the evaluation):

(37) Therefore, *it* **would** serve Ms <NAME>'s general analysis of the royal women if she sharply distinguished between queen and king 's mother instead of combining the evidence in section 3.2.1. (250, HUM)

(38) In my view, *it* **would** have been a merit if it would have been included in the studies . (242, BEH)

These extraposed *it*-constructions are thus highly versatile as evaluative frames and allow the writer to emphasise different aspects of the proposition in various ways. This construction also adds a certain objective air to the proposition, though, at the same time, word choice for characterising these propositions does seem to go against the illusion of objectivity: *useful* and *helpful* are common collocates, for example, but *interesting*, as in example (31) above, is another common adjective here – and

also highly subjective in its nature. And, similarly to author-oriented recommendations, these can also be framed with an explicit attribution of the source, which usually serves as a hedging device, as in example (38) above shows.

One curious aspect of these wish-like recommendations is that occasionally they can, as well as indicate what the dissertation is lacking, also offer encouragement to the candidate. When the examiner expresses a desire to know more about a subject, either through reader-oriented recommendations or impersonal, extraposed *it*-constructions, the resulting effect can be complementary as well as critical:

(39) *It* **would** have been extremely interesting to hear the author 's tentative ideas on the applicability of the new concept in the reality of People 's Republic of China in 2000 's in the summary part. (131B, AGR)

(40) I imagine Mr. <NAME> is now to be considered one of the experts in the World [sic], and with this dissertation *I* **would** like him to provide authorative [sic] opinion on the subject. (43A, SCI)

One important aspect of the examiners' statements – at least in those which grant the permission to proceed to public defence – is the "welcoming" of the candidate to the academic community. Statements often contain congratulations, well-wishes, and encouragement to the candidate as well as criticism. These types of recommendations probably help to add collegiality to the evaluative situation.

4.2.3 Interim summary

The second aim of this thesis study was to investigate evaluative language of the preliminary examiners' statements more closely, with research questions being: "How are recommendations given in the examiners' statements? How direct or strong do they tend to be? What can be said about the interpersonal relationship between the examiner and the candidate?"

In general, the recommendations investigated in this study do not surprise – they are very much in line with what could be expected in terms of the genre. The fact that the candidate was rarely addressed in the 2nd person also reflects the nature of the communication – the candidate does not choose the examiners or is the one who usually corresponds with them directly. The examiners are usually careful to present recommendations as polite suggestions, and foregrounding themselves as the source of the evaluation leaves room for other opinions: for the candidate's, their

supervisors', and the Faculty Council members' own judgement. Hyland (2004: 57) observed the same strategy of "personal responsibility" being common in academic book reviews, and argued, that labelling criticism as a personal opinion allows writers to "adopt a less threatening authorial voice, repositioning themselves and their authority by reacting as an ordinary reader rather than an 'expert'" (ibid). Even in author-oriented recommendations, framing suggestions as performatives and thus foregrounding the source of the evaluation was a popular strategy among examiners.

This preference resulted in the prevalence of *I would* –constructions. They were generally used with a performative verb such as *suggest* or *recommend*, or with a verb expressing desire such as *like* or *prefer*. Biber (2006: 98) similarly noted the use of *I would* in expressing polite directives in spoken university registers. That the statements are very similar to spoken language in this respect is perhaps not surprising considering that the statements are, in essence, correspondence between individuals. The use of the first person pronoun in constructions that are common in polite spoken language could also indicate a desire to reduce the social distance between the parties involved.

The extraposed *it*-construction is in a way a direct opposite to the "I would-construction. This is perhaps what an archetypical "scientific way" of framing propositions is considered to be like: seemingly impersonal and objective. However, framing these with attributive hedges such as *I think* also occurred in the data. Still, it would be very interesting to do a closer analysis to determine whether the content of the recommendation itself influences the framing. On a purely speculative note, perhaps examiners choose to use self-mention in cases where they suspect the opinion really is a matter of taste and reserve some of the impersonal extraposed *it*-constructions for those recommendations that they themselves believe to be objectively beneficial for the candidate's work.

In contrast to Fortanet's (2008) study of evaluation in peer review reports, I found two additional constructions in the pre-examiner's statements that she did not mention in relation to peer reviews: The "reader-oriented construction" framing the suggested action as a wish or a desire on the examiner's part. It would indeed be odd to find these in peer review reports, as it would be pointless for the peer reviewer to express personal wishes which the author didn't necessarily have to fulfil in order for

the paper to be published. Another construction absent from peer review reports is the "*I would do X*-construction" – again, this would probably be confusing to authors coming from a peer reviewer of a journal, whereas in a pre-examiner's statement these constructions are easier to interpret as a polite suggestion.

The frequencies of recommendations between disciplines follow the bigger picture of modals overall. In addition to differences among disciplinary cultures discussed briefly above, the prevalence of recommendations in the soft disciplines and the relative scarcity of them in the hard disciplines might also be partly due to the differences in the instructions given to the examiners. The instructions provided on the webpage for the Faculty of Medicine, for example, are very short, and many of them are in the form of yes-or-no-questions: "Are the conclusions reliable and can the author contrast his or her own observations with previous research?" "Does the author display a command of the field and a familiarity with the literature?" Furthermore, nowhere is it indicated that the examiners should or even could suggest improvements. The Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences, similarly, have a readymade form with simple bullet points provided for examiners. In contrast, instructions for the examiners of Behavioural Science-theses are long and detailed, provide a link to additional information about the formal evaluation criteria, and mention recommendations twice: "The pre-examiners may demand that corrections and improvements be made to the manuscript before recommending that permission for a public defence be granted." "[…] the pre-examiners may make comments and detailed suggestions for corrections directly to the author." However, in the first case they are advised to contact the supervisor, and in the latter, the candidate, but still many choose to write their suggestions in the statement. Similarly, the instructions from the Faculty of Social Sciences state that "[i]n case a pre-examiner thinks that some amendments should be made before he or she could give a positive opinion on the manuscript, suggestions for improvement addressed directly to the author would be valued."

There is no marked difference between the types of recommendations preferred between disciplines. However, a weakness of this study is that only a select set of recommendations were investigated, which leaves out many more specific suggestions, such as the following example:

(41) *Basic terminology* **should** be explained and defined so that even readers who know little about generative theory will be able to follow the discussion. (228B, BEH)

So, it might be that in medicine, which only had 14 recommendations in the dataset investigated for this study, suggestions with non-human subjects are preferred over human subjects. On another note, there might be less criticism altogether in the hard science-statements: Hyland (2004) made an interesting observation when investigating the praise and criticism ratio in book reviews: he found out that reviews concerning hard science fields contained far more praise than those in the soft fields. He remarked that "[w]riters here sought to exploit the discursive space available to them to explore issues in some depth, anchoring the text in the concerns of the wider discipline and often expounding their own views at length" (Hyland 2004: 49-50). Perhaps this is the case also in the preliminary examiner's statements.

5 Conclusion

In general, it seems that evaluation in the preliminary examiners statements follows the discursive practices of their respective academic domains. The frequencies of modals, self-mention, and the recommendations investigated all seem to point towards an essential difference between the hard and soft disciplines. The impression one gets, both from the preliminary examiners' statements and previous literature on academic evaluation, is that the evaluative process of pre-examination in social sciences and humanities is much closer to a dialogue, a negotiation of ideas and viewpoints, whereas in natural sciences it is perhaps more about procedure, data and results rather than the actors who are doing the interpreting. This may explain the higher use of self-mention and modals in the soft disciplines.

Another reason for the differences is undoubtedly the different format of the theses themselves: article-based theses are much more common in the hard sciences. These often contain articles that have multiple co-authors and have already been published in peer-reviewed, scientific journals. This, together with the differences in instructions given to examiners help to explain the low frequency of recommendations in the hard science statements. However, one limitation of this study is that only recommendations with a personal pronoun or a noun referring to the candidate or the examiner were investigated – thus, passivised constructions with other nouns were not included in the sample. I am confident, however, that the frequencies of the recommendations investigated in this study reflect well the differences between the disciplines, as they also follow the overall frequencies of all modals in the corpus.

When examiners do give suggestions, they tend to be very careful and polite. Forceful directives are rare, and it seems they are only used when the examiner feels it is absolutely necessary. Using performative frames to self-source evaluation and expressing recommendations as personal wishes was very prevalent. The examiners thus seem to feel the need to position themselves clearly as "just" an individual member of the scientific community, an expert, but not necessarily an ultimate authority. At least concerning the sample analysed for this study, there were no differences in the use of particular recommendation types between disciplines. One would obviously have to look at all recommendations to get the complete picture.

Academic review genres in general are interesting in that they display how academia regulates itself. Fortanet points out that, in the peer review process for journals, "[b]lind'' and ''anonymous'' reviews are the types considered by many editors, readers and authors to provide the best guarantee of quality, since referees may feel freer to criticise the articles" (Fortanet 2008: 27). The preliminary examination process is very different since both parties are aware of each other and the examiners are often sought out through professional connections of the candidate's supervisors. Whether this means that examiners hold back criticism would be an interesting question to ask.

In terms of the genre and possible disciplinary differences within, a more in-depth study looking at several different stance markers or whole evaluative propositions would reveal more about the various evaluative resources used and the ways they work together to form a coherent whole. Furthermore, looking more closely at the context these recommendations appear in, as well as the overall structural features of the statements, would provide more information on how examiners build their arguments and how they structure their authorial identity.

This study focused on the "frame" of an evaluative proposition. Perhaps the next step would be to look at what is inside that frame: what kinds of aspects of the dissertations are considered assets and what are considered deficiencies, and how are they characterised? In addition to the interpersonal aspect of evaluation I have investigated in this study, the examiners' statements could offer a lot more interesting information about the maintaining of standards and the co-creation of knowledge in academia.

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