

*Kalaja P. & L. Nieminen (toim.) 2000. Kielikouluissa – kieli koulussa. AFinLAN vuosikirja 2000. Suomen soveltavan kielitieteen yhdistyksen julkaisuja no. 58. Jyväskylä. s. 347–365.*

## REACTION PAPER: WHAT? WHY? HOW?

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Most teaching of summary writing has been an attempt at “objectivity” and the fading of the writer’s voice and identity. Writers, however, interpret discourses they read or hear subjectively from their own starting points influenced by their knowledge of the world and socio-cultural frames of reference. Since the purpose of all study should be critical scrutiny of and reaction to texts and ideas to be learned, it is important to provide learners with opportunities for making their voices heard and identities displayed.

This article attempts to throw light on the concept of the reaction paper and on the ways in which it may be realized. First, the reaction paper is distinguished from other types of critical writing. Second, two samples of reaction papers are examined by distinguishing, on the one hand, speech acts generally characteristic of critical writing, and on the other, speech acts specific to the reaction paper.

**Keywords:** reaction paper, critical writing, speech act

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to address the genre of critical writing, in general, and of the reaction paper, in particular. As the title of this article suggests, I shall first make a distinction between different types of academic writing tasks and give a tentative definition for a reaction paper. Second, I shall consider the motivation for writing reaction papers, and third, display a few samples of the ways in

which students have tackled the assignment termed a reaction paper. Finally, I shall draw several conclusions from the samples discussed in this article.

## 2 WHAT IS A REACTION PAPER?

The **reaction paper** is a fairly new type of critical writing. It can be defined as a piece of reactive writing which is written as a response to one or multiple texts, by which I mean discourses or other events in the Hallidayan semiotic sense<sup>1</sup>. These texts may include lessons, projects, complete courses, films, to mention but a few. The same principle of a reaction paper also applies to the production of learning journals. In other words, the reaction paper supplies answers to such questions as what its writer did, why s/he did it, what was experienced in the process, how the writer benefited from it or what was the effect or result of his/her performing a particular learning activity. The reaction paper thus encapsulates previous action (whether verbal or nonverbal) and can accordingly be classified as a type of summary.

The reaction paper bears some resemblance to a **critical summary**, the latter being, however, more pointedly based and prompted by the source texts which it reports, evaluates and discusses. These three major speech acts<sup>2</sup> of reporting, evaluation and discussion and their subtypes were distinguished in my recent research (Stotesbury 1999), which identified and described various kinds of speech acts as manifestations of interpretation displayed in critical summaries and book reviews. My definition of a critical summary is the following:

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<sup>1</sup> I also subscribe to the distinction between text and discourse made by, e.g., Widdowson (1984: 100), that texts are realized as discourses in social contexts.

<sup>2</sup> The speech act was chosen as the analytical unit in this model since its illocutionary or communicative force expresses the intention the writer wishes to express in the newly created discourse (see Stotesbury 1999: 93ff).

The critical summary is a piece of discourse which gives the most important points of the source text(s), as judged by the summarizer with reference to the purpose and audience of the summary, examines the source text(s) critically, interprets the contents and/or evaluates the authors and/or the ideas expressed by them, and includes the summarizer's own view of the text(s) or of the ideas expressed in them (Stotesbury 1999: 23).

Another type of critical writing is called the **response paper**. This reflects and responds to a set question and its aim is to produce an academic essay or opinion paper. Response papers are commonly used, for example, in literary analysis. They may require a specific reading task, such as studying a short story, and be furnished with a set of quotations to help the writer to tackle the set question or proposed task.<sup>3</sup>

There are a great number of different types of summaries for special purposes. For example, Swales and Feak (1994: 105) draw a distinction between private (often only a sentence or two long) and public summaries, which are used for different study purposes. The latter group includes such concepts as assignment summary, used in the United States for graduate students to show that they have understood some material (the equivalent British term being literature review); comparative summary, which can also form "part of a longer paper, or a response to an examination question" (ibid.: 127) and critique meaning critical assessments which can be positive, negative or mixed (ibid.: 131). Critiques are further divided into reaction papers and reviews by Swales and Feak (1994: 148), who also claim that these are more personal and informal in style than other summaries. (Reviews in this special case refer to journal referees' assessments of manuscripts.) Slattery and Carlton's term (1993: 26–27) is response paper and they suggest that it should consist of "carefully summarizing an author's major points and thoughtfully responding to a few of them." Slattery and Carlton's definition differs from that suggested above for the response paper

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Dr Jopi Nyman for his example of the task specification for a response paper.

and rather approaches my definition of the critical summary. Mathews and Nowak (1983: 163) talk about a reaction paper and have used it (in the teaching of history and social sciences) to encourage students to react to a lesson. They have instructed their students to express their reactions in the following way: firstly, “opinions or ideas about ... ([the content of] a lesson)”; secondly, “agreement or disagreement with the key ideas expressed ...”, and thirdly, “a reasoned position from a defined point of view, possibly framed by an opening question.”

The reaction paper seems to differ from a critical summary in its focus on the ‘I’, the writer’s own identity. This makes it a useful mode of reporting on, e.g., different experiences gained in self-study. In his definition of genre Swales (1990: 54ff) reminds us that a genre name provides information on that particular genre.<sup>4</sup> On closer scrutiny the word *reaction* can be hyphenated as *re-action* and examined through its constituent parts: *action* and *re-*. The root emphasizes various activities that have gone into a self-study project, for example, what the writer of the reaction paper has done, perceived, and thought about, or how he or she has been able to apply the knowledge accumulated in the implementation of the self-study task. In turn, the prefix *re-*, through its meaning of ‘again’, suggests the reiteration or recounting of the various phases involved in the activities performed.

A template for a reaction paper could display, for example, the following kind of organisation:

- A reference to the source texts or events which the piece of writing is reacting to (e.g., a lesson or a course; hence, *I agree with the writer* is not a sufficient opening gambit).

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<sup>4</sup> I am not claiming any status of genre for the reaction paper but would rather regard it as a subgenre of both summarization and critical writing, not unlike the informative or critical summaries (see Stotesbury 1999: 104). Yet, as Swales argues (1990: 56), “genre-naming can equally be generative”; hence, the specification of a new writing task may give rise to a new genre. I am grateful to Anne Pitkänen-Huhta for drawing my attention to this point.

- The report of the topics or particular points that reactions will focus on (the same speech acts are applicable here as in critical summaries; i.e., plain reporting, interpretative reporting, evaluative reporting, evaluation proper, evaluative discussion and discussion, see section 4; in addition, two further speech act subtypes, reporting of action and reflective discussion, are used.
- The writer may also choose some points or aspects of the sources; it may not be necessary to cover the whole source text/event as in the case of an informative summary.
- The projection of 'I' is likely to be more common than in different types of summaries since the reaction paper should represent an enhanced dialogue with its sources.

### 3 WHY WRITE REACTION PAPERS?

The necessity to write reaction papers, for example, in the context of university language courses, is prompted by a variety of reasons. These include, first, that most writing takes place as a subjective reaction to some stimulus or previous text/discourse. Second, reactions to sources are made spontaneously both by non-experts and in particular by experts, thus there is no point in restricting students' writing and thinking processes, for example, to mere informative summaries at the expense of more creative and critical writing. It has been asserted that too much emphasis on "objectivity" in academic writing may curtail general creativity, a prerequisite to worthwhile research (Hilpelä 1990). Third, I argue that the most important task of university education should be the teaching of critical reading, thinking and writing. Hence, the writing of critical summaries and reaction papers could be increasingly used to reach these goals.

The teaching of critical approaches to discourse has been the target of a great deal of debate in the USA and elsewhere where there is a concern with teaching English to speakers of other languages. One participant in this debate is Atkinson (1997, 1998), who has claimed that critical thinking is a social practice rather than a separate skill which could be taught. Atkinson presents critical

thinking as an asset largely belonging to white, male, American discourse, which is usually unattainable by non-native students (cf. Davidson 1998, Gieve 1998 and Hawkins 1998). In a special-topic edition of the *TESOL Quarterly*, focusing on critical approaches in language teaching, Pennycook (1999) argues forcefully against Atkinson and other proponents of his view (see also, e.g., Benesch 1999). Pennycook penetrates even deeper in his analysis of critical approaches to TESOL by demanding transformative pedagogies and critical engagement with the questions of power and difference in discourses as well as critical theory as a problematization of the given.

Another benefit of reactive writing, such as reaction papers, is that it creates a ready opportunity for writers to project their own voice. In writing on the basis of previous texts, writers have a choice, as distinguished by Goffman (1981), between the roles of animator and author. A writer assuming the role of animator is faithful to the source texts, repeating its informative content by means of an “intralingual” translation or condensation of the subject-matter. The role of the author, in contrast, brings the writer’s own voice and interpretation to the source text. Similarly, Greene (1995) distinguishes writers either as reporters of knowledge (i.e., animators) or agents of change (i.e., authors). The latter create change, for example, in the writer’s attitude towards sources, which may give further rise to critical stances on discourse.

The writer’s identity has recently received a great deal of attention. One proponent of writer identity, Ivani (1998: 32) reminds us that “there is no such thing as ‘impersonal writing’”. She further asserts that “writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for selfhood, playing their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody.” Ivani distinguishes four aspects of writer identity. The first of these is the **autobiographical self**, which is shaped by prior social and discursal history (cf. Bourdieu’s habitus, which is a set of dispositions to behave in a certain way; see, e.g., Thompson

[1991: 12] in Bourdieu [1991]). The second aspect is the **discoursal self**, which refers to the impression which writers consciously or unconsciously convey of themselves in a particular text. The discoursal self is shaped by the social context and it is the only facet of discourse for which we can find actual evidence in writing (Ivani 1998: 29). The third aspect is the **self as author**, by which Ivani means the writer's voice in the sense of the writer's position, opinions and beliefs. The extreme choices at writers' disposal range from claiming authority and taking up a strong authorial stance in writing to attributing all ideas to other authorities. The establishing of authorial presence in writing is often problematic for non-expert writers who fear directing criticism to authorities and other authors (see, e.g., Greene 1995, Belcher 1995, Peritz 1993, Mathison 1996). Yet, demands for a critical approach to learning make it essential that students be provided with opportunities for practising writing critiques.

This relates to the fourth aspect of writer identity proposed by Ivani (1998: 24), which she labels **possibilities for self-hood**. These constrain actual people writing actual texts and, unlike the previous three aspects, they exist not in the writer but in their socio-cultural context. Accordingly, some people are more privileged than others since, for example, their institutions accord them more status than others. The relationship of teacher-as-evaluator vs. student-as-writer is bound to create constraints for students. Nevertheless, social identity may be multi-faceted and several identities may operate simultaneously. Emphasis on the writer's identity and strong authorial stance also relates to the question of the use of 'I' or the first person in academic writing. Tang and John (1999) have distinguished different phases as markers of growth in the writer's authorial power. These phases seem to be paralleled in the speech acts displaying interpretation. Thus, the acts of reporting correspond to self as recounter, which is the least powerful position in Tang and John's terminology. The acts of evaluation present the writer as opinion-holder and the acts of discussion as instigator, which indicates the highest degree of authorial power.

## 4 HOW ARE REACTION PAPERS WRITTEN?

I now intend to examine two reaction papers produced by Finnish university students as part of their English for Academic Purposes language courses. Both reaction papers were produced as reports of self-study projects in which students were free to choose any source materials relevant to their field of study. Neither student had been supplied with any actual template for the reaction paper; the task description was simply to provide a report on what was done and how the students had benefited from the texts they had read.<sup>5</sup>

I hope that the analysis of these student writings will to some extent answer the question of how to write a reaction paper. The following speech acts, two of them specific to reaction papers and six specific to critical summaries as well, were distinguished in the analysis:

### **Speech acts specific to a reaction paper:**

reporting of action:	what the writer did; e.g., I did three articles
reflective discussion:	what was the value of the action reported to the writer

### **Speech acts showing interpretation in critical summaries:**

plain reporting:	the writer refers to the source text without making any explicit mental, textual or contextual interpretation; e.g., ‘ <u>The author says that ...</u> ’
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interpretative reporting:	the writer makes inferences or clarifies the contents of the source text; e.g., ‘ <u>What is common to these three articles is ...</u> ’
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<sup>5</sup> The original instruction was as follows: Write A report on what you did, found and learned while doing your self-study; in other words, write a reaction paper (with your own views and evaluations included, not just an informative summary) of the articles (minimum: two articles), book(s) or other materials you chose for your project.

evaluative reporting:	the writer supplements an act of plain or interpretative reporting with an evaluation; it often has an introductory function; e.g., <u>'Compared to the previous text, this author's opinion is <b>even more modern.</b>'</u>
evaluation proper:	the writer evaluates the source text author's views or facts presented in the text (close involvement with the author; good - bad, right - wrong); e.g., <b>'The author has irrevocably fallen out of the wheels of progress.'</b>
evaluative discussion:	the writer evaluates the source text or the value of the ideas expressed in it; often with an anaphoric, conclusive function (detachment from the author); e.g., <i>'The text was very informative and well-constructed.'</i>
discussion proper:	the writer develops the topic of the source text further; e.g. <i>'My own view of the issue is the following: . . . .'</i>

The codes used in the analysis of the reaction papers (both of which are unedited) are as follows:

reporting of action:	CAPITALS
reflective discussion:	CAPITALS
neutral reporting:	<u>underlining</u>
interpretative reporting:	<u>double underlining</u>
evaluative reporting:	<u>underlining + boldface</u>
evaluation proper:	<b>boldface</b>
evaluative discussion:	<i><b>italicized boldface</b></i>
discussion proper:	<i>italics</i>

My analysis thus combines the acts of interpretation, which display the writer's subjective stances on the sources, and the two acts specific to the reaction paper, which are the main focus of this investigation. The other approach would have been to regard the reaction paper only in terms of its two specific and idiosyncratic speech acts of reported action and reflective discussion. In adopting the first approach I am proposing the general applicability of my analytical model of interpretation to other types of creative writing

than critical summaries and book reviews for which it was originally developed.

## 5 FULL ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST REACTION PAPER

### REACTION PAPER 1

“The dramatic year in Russia, according to the Newsweek”

(1) I READ THROUGH THIS YEARS NEWSWEEKS IN ORDER TO FIND AN INTERESTING THEME for my self-study project. (2) WHILE I WAS LOOKING THROUGH THESE MAGAZINES, it came obvious that there was basicly two larger topics available: Bill & Monica or the situation of Russia. (3) I CHOSE the latter one ....

(4) I am not familiar with English magazines and of course there were plenty of strange words in this particular magazine. (5) BUT I WAS SURPRISED HOW QUICKLY I GOT USED TO ITS LANGUAGE.

The first reaction paper is based on the browsing of seven (1998) issues of *Newsweek* magazines. It displays a great variety of speech acts denoting different degrees of interpretation. Interestingly, there is only one act of plain reporting in Sentence (2) ... *there was basicly two larger topics available: Bill & Monica or the situation of Russia*, while the acts of interpretative reporting are resorted to on six occasions. Moreover, the acts of reflective discussion are used six times by the writer (see, e.g., Sentence (5), above). In the present reaction paper the first three of these acts are no real indications of reaction; they rather report on the action taken during the self-study project. For this reason, they are labelled as reporting of action:

(6) This Russian situation has propably been in every possible newspaper in the world, BUT SOMEHOW I HAVE MANAGED NOT TO PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO THE SUBJECT, EVEN THOUGH I SHOULD HAVE. (7) So WHILE READING THESE ARTICLES I FINALLY STARTED TO LEARN who is who in the Russian politics. (8) IT WAS NEW TO ME THAT there is this small and carefully selected group of oligarchs who supported Yeltsin's 1996

campaign and who are now keeping him in power no matter what. (9) In other words, today's weak president Boris Yeltsin has become their puppet.

Sentence (6) above starts with a speculative act of interpretative reporting referring to the situation reported in the new texts. The second *but* clause in Sentence (6) displays a borderline case between an act of reflective discussion and one of evaluative discussion; the latter option is feasible because of its reference to the time before the self-study project. The final utterance in Sentence (6) *even though I should have* makes an anaphoric reference to sensible action in the past, typical of the acts of evaluative discussion in critical summaries which often present recommendations or suggest improvements to texts. Yet, in this analysis the utterance is placed in the category of reflective discussion, which clearly relates to the present assignment. Sentence (7), however, directly reports on the reader's response to the sources and is therefore a typical example of reflective discussion; in other words, it recounts the process starting in the student's mind as a reaction to the activity of reading the articles. Sentence (8) continues with an act of reflective discussion commenting on a newly learned fact:

(10) It was **intresting** to notice the difference between Finnish and American press culture. (11) *In Newsweek there is used these over-dramatic expressions and sometimes quite strange metaphors.* (12) I suppose Newsweek is considered as a serious and prestigious magazine but expressions like 'brain-dead communists' sound quite strange to my ear.

(13) WHILE READING THESE ARTICLES I FOUND A TINY HISTORIAN IN ME. (14) I STARTED TO SEE an opportunity for greatness in Russia. (15) *Russia would obviously need a strong leader, maybe someone like Peter the Great.*

Source: Issues of *Newsweek* of April 6, 27; July 13; September 7, 21, 28; October 12, 1998.

In Sentence (9), above, and at the beginning of Sentence (12) the writer engages in acts of interpretative reporting, and in Sentence

(10) and Sentence (12) she adds an evaluative stance to her interpretations; hence the acts of evaluative reporting. Sentence (11) and the *but* clause in Sentence (12) display acts of evaluative discussion, which means that the writer adopts a more detached stance on the source texts and assesses the general position of the magazine in the realm of journalism. The end of Sentence (12) seems to display an act of evaluation proper since the detached general remarks on the style and approach of the *Newsweek* discourse are made more personal by the writer's example concerning *brain-dead communists*, which shows that the writer is now personally involved while expressing her annoyance. The application of my model of interpretation to examples such as Sentence (11) and Sentence (12) may suggest to the reader that the model may be somewhat too detailed for this type of analysis. Applied to its original data (Stotesbury 1999: 185–191), however, there was a clear case for distinguishing between these two speech acts of evaluative writing.

Sentences (13)–(15) of the final paragraph contain two acts of reflective discussion summarizing what the end result of the learning experience consisted of for the writer. Sentence (13), making use of a modified popular slogan, frames the result of the self-study: the student started seeing the studied discourse through a true historian's spectacles. Sentence (14) gives the conclusion drawn by the writer and Sentence (15), in employing an act of evaluative discussion, makes the final comment in the form of a kind of suggestion.

## 6 PARTIAL ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND REACTION PAPER

The second reaction paper uses the same speech acts of reporting, evaluation and discussion as the first reaction paper did, but its initial and final paragraphs elaborate further on the reported action,

and focus more extensively on the reflective discussion than was the case in the first reaction paper:

#### REACTION PAPER 2

(1) I READ A BOOK which was written by Michael Billig AS A PART OF MY SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY STUDIES. (2) THE FIELD OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IS WIDE AND IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET AN OVERALL VIEW OF THE FIELD I HAD TO READ SEVERAL BOOKS TO INITIATE MYSELF INTO THE SUBJECT. (3) I DECIDED TO USE THIS BOOK AS A BASE OF MY SELF-STUDY PROJECT BECAUSE IT OPENED MY EYES IN A NEW WAY AND I REALLY THINK THAT I DID NOT JUST READ THIS BOOK, AS I USUALLY DO, BUT THAT READING THIS BOOK REQUIRED DEEPER PROCESSING AND UNDERSTANDING THROUGH LEARNING.

Hence, for example, Sentence (2) explains the necessity to read several books in order to become familiar with a field, although the reaction paper is written on the basis of only one book. Furthermore, the initial paragraph gives the first reactions to the learning experience, in the middle of Sentence (3) *it opened my eyes in a new way*, even if that remark is given as a justification for choosing that particular book. The first paragraph also throws light on the end result of the self-study, since it provides a summary statement or a lead for the whole piece of writing thus conforming with the typical rhetorical expectations of Anglo-American academic writing. Because of the lengthiness of the second reaction paper, in its following analysis I shall discuss the speech acts specific to a reaction paper only (indicated by capitals) and hope that the typographical signalling of the other speech acts, specific to critical summary, will by now be self-explanatory:

(4) The book, "Ideology and Opinions" is a study of rhetorical approach in social psychology. (5) In the beginning I HAD DIFFICULTIES TO EVEN UNDERSTAND what the concept "rhetorical" means in psychology. (6) IT IS A TOTALLY UNFAMILIAR CONCEPT TO ME SO I HAD TO LOOK THE EXPLANATION OF THE WORD FROM MY DICTIONARY of international words. (7) That was not enough because THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD REQUIRED TO READ THE WHOLE BOOK and to find out what the author of the book means by "rhetorical approach". (8) **I consider it as a defect in psychology that concepts are used in almost an arbitrary ways.** (9) Different scientists use the same concepts but mean different

things and even one single psychologist can use the same concept and refer to different things with it in different situations. (10) This view is not totally my own, it is a major issue of critic in the field of psychology, but **it really is easy to me to agree with** those who claim that there is a need for clarification with the usage of psychological concepts.

The second paragraph concentrates on the difficulties which the writer faced in this reading-writing encounter Sentences (5)–(7) and how she attempted to solve them by means of a dictionary but came to the conclusion that a true understanding of the term rhetorical would entail a reading of the whole book. The *but* clause in Sentence (10) ... *but it really is easy to me to agree with those who* ... displays another borderline case but one now between an act of evaluation proper and an act of reflective discussion. An instance such as *I agree* is a clear case of evaluation proper. Another instance such as *It is really easy for me* suggests reflection, however. Yet, it is not reflecting on any new phase of the learning process. Hence it might prompt a new subcategory of reflective evaluation in a more detailed analysis of reaction papers. At this stage, however, I would designate it as an act of evaluation proper even though it displays a clear contrast to Sentence (11) below, which might alternatively be determined as a case of evaluative discussion since its focus is on the text rather than in a more involved way, on the writer's person, as is the case in Sentence (10):

(11) **Michael Billig's book "Ideology and Opinions" does not suffer of inner inconstancies or mixed concepts but getting "into the book" and understanding the author's ideas of social psychology required quite much work to understand his, one could say revolutionary views of rhetorical approach in social psychology.** (12) I think it is understandable that connections between ancient orators and their rhetoric are not so easily connected to academic psychology. (13) There is a clear explanation and it is that academic, or mainstream psychology is mostly experimental and because it has had a dominant role in psychological literature, academic psychology is what one usually gets to read. (14) **The rhetorical approach seemed at first really odd, mystifious and indefinite, like pseudoscience.** (15) NOW, AFTER I HAVE READ THE WHOLE BOOK I AM REALLY GLAD THAT I DID NOT GIVE UP AND LOSE MY INTEREST BECAUSE OF THE BASIC CONCEPT THAT WAS TOO STRANGE AND DIFFICULT FOR ME. (16) **Michael Billig is an extraordinary critic, he**

sees the inconstancies and oddities of the former studies of social psychology, but still he remains open to criticism himself. (17) When he discerningly sees the lacks of former studies, he really has something to offer, which would make those studies better. (18) *It is frustrating to read* critics who have nothing to offer in order to make things better, but **Michael Billig is not the one to blame for this.** (19) His view of rhetorical psychology is a theory which remind us that thinking is in fact an inner argument and that when we think we in other words argue internally. (20) The author has several illustrating studies, part of them empirical studies, and with these studies he shows how our social life can be interpreted in ways of rhetorical psychology. (21) *Without those examples it would have been difficult to get a whole picture of Billig's ideas, but the examples were really good and this way to show his ideas was really clear and insuring.*

In Sentence (14) the writer displays an act of evaluation proper – her first reaction to the concept of rhetorical approach, which the book was about, although the evaluative act was disguised in the form of an impression. The following act in Sentence (15) reflects on her action and expresses her contentment with having read the book to its end, which solved the writer's major problem:

(22) THE BEST THING THAT I ACHIEVED BY READING THIS BOOK WAS THAT IT GAVE SEVERAL NEW POINT OF VIEWS THAT I HAVE NOT BEEN NOTICED IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY. (23) TO CRITICIZE IS A TALENT FOR ME AND IN THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY ONE CERTAINLY NEEDS THE ABILITY TO CRITICIZE. (24) *The field needs integration instead of rival schools and this integration cannot be made without examining all possible point of views.* (25) ***That is the best way to get closer to the truth and being one-sided is not a benefit to anyone, instead it is a sign of ignorance.*** (26) "IDEOLOGY AND OPINIONS" GAVE ME NEW INSIGHT TO THIS ISSUE, IT SHOWED ME IN WHAT WAYS FORMER STUDIES CAN BE QUESTIONED. (27) THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT NOW I AM ABLE TO ARGUE AND COMPLAIN, BUT TO WIDEN MY OWN KNOWLEDGE I NOW HAVE TOOLS TO QUESTION, CRITICIZE AND THEREFORE SPACE TO NEW THOUGHTS AND VIEWS. (28) I SEEK FOR WISDOM, BUT BEFORE THAT I HAVE TO QUESTION MY OWN VIEWS OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

This second reaction paper is more academic in style than the first, which is natural since its source discourse is an academic textbook of social psychology, while the first was based on articles in a popular news magazine. Apart from recapitulating on the value of reading the book in general, the final Sentences (26)–(28) underline

the necessity of questioning and being critical. Hence, the writer is not only reflecting on the actual benefits and results of reading the book, but also on how this self-study experience gave her tools which would be applicable to future learning events as well. This kind of final conclusion is the best recommendation for this mode of writing and sums up the value of the reaction paper for students' writing and even more particularly for their learning to be critical.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE ABOVE REACTION PAPERS

Although neither of these students was specifically instructed on how to write a reaction paper, the analysis above shows that both students interpreted a rather vague task in a way similar to my previous thoughts about what a reaction paper could be like. Thus these students, to a greater degree than their peers performing the same assignment, seemed to display an understanding of a critical approach to the texts to be studied. On the basis of these reaction papers it will be possible to provide more detailed suggestions for future students' writing practice. Nevertheless, in the case of reaction papers students should not be guided too much in their writing since this may have adverse effects on their authorial power and freedom to react. Thus, critical writing, in whatever format and under whatever heading it is to be implemented, should not be prescriptive but give the writer a free hand to react to sources critically, that is, even to question the very assignment.

The two new speech acts specific to reaction papers introduced in this article, **reporting of action** and **reflective discussion**, naturally appear to have some similarities with my earlier findings. When I previously examined different intertextual levels in students' summaries (Stotesbury 1994), I noted that the highest or newest level of intertextuality consisted of questions directed to the teacher reading the summary. In the Bakhtinian interpretation (supplied then), I suggested that this move was one intended by the

summarizer to inform the superaddressee (Bakhtin's term, which I have used in a somewhat different sense), the actual, rather than intended, audience of the summary in the person of the teacher or evaluator. The speech act of reporting of action has a similar function, that is, what the writer/student did and why, so that the reader/teacher would be informed. The speech act of reflective discussion, however, is basically directed at the writer him/herself. E.M. Forster (1968; quoted in Biggs [1988: 205]) has remarked that he first has to write about something before he knows what he thinks about it. In the same way, the speech act of reflective discussion typical of the reaction paper clarifies the thoughts of writers and possibly makes them reflect on the source materials more profoundly and critically than in such pieces of writing as informative or even critical summaries. On the surface, this speech act may also be directed at the recipient of the piece of writing, but it seems that in reaction papers the emphasis is clearly on self-reflection and the value experienced by the writer.

To conclude, Bazerman (1992: 19) has pointed to another value in reactive writing, arguing that "real intellectual exchange begins when we *react* to what we read. The writer's words touch our minds; soon we will have something to say in reply. The reader becomes a writer". Although I have used this quotation before to argue the case for critical summaries, it seems to be even more appropriate for reaction papers. Hence, opportunities for enhanced reactions will pave the way for enhanced intellectual exchanges in discourse.

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