To boldly proceed

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The Jazz is strong with this one: Presentation and positioning of knowers in performance student texts

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Abstract

Jazz is frequently depicted as only accessible to 'ideal knowers', suggesting a hierarchical knower structure (Maton 2007, forthcoming). This paper uses various frameworks from Systemic Functional Linguistics including transitivity and appraisal theory (Hood, 2010; Martin & White, 2005) in combination with Specialisation from Legitimation Code Theory (Lamont & Maton, 2008, 2010; Maton, 2009, 2010) to investigate the representation of the writer, the reader, musicians and other musical knowers in the research projects of jazz honours performance students.

The study has found that student writers construct their own authority as sensing knowers. They also position the reader as an equally musically and analytically literate participant. Musicians are validated as legitimate knowers and as worthy of research through their own exceptional qualities and through alignment with high status jazz musicians and key institutions and locations. This paper offers some insight into the structuring of knowers in the study of jazz, and the key linguistic resources for their depiction, suggesting further avenues for study of the discipline of music.

> "What is jazz? Man, if you have to ask you'll never know."
>
> Louis Armstrong

1   You must learn the ways of Jazz: Jazz in tertiary education

Jazz is frequently portrayed in popular culture as being only understandable by the sort of people who understand jazz. This circularity creates an impression of exclusivity, wherein the key measurement for power, legitimacy and success is having the appropriate disposition and the right sort of musicality. Jazz education, however, aims to produce musical knowers by enabling students to acquire experience and exposing them to significant works and artists. How do these two values – musicality and musicianship – shape the field of jazz and its actors, and how do students integrate or balance musicality and musicianship in their own research and writing?

Each discipline has a way of structuring knowledge, of evaluating knowers and of positioning people on the light or the dark side. The writing in each discipline reflects this. And success for a student, in part, involves being able to appropriately convey these priorities, or at least challenge them in acceptable ways. In order to investigate jazz studies, this paper focuses on the presentation and positioning of knowers in a corpus of six 5000-word research projects from honours students of jazz performance, taking one text as a case study, from a student we shall call 'Skywalker'.

Building on Bernstein's work on knowledge structures wherein knowledge is organised in hierarchical or horizontal structures (see for example Bernstein, 1999), Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Maton, 2000, 2007, 2009, 2010) suggests that knower structures are equally present. The specialisation codes of legitimation (or Specialisation) from LCT describe educational knowledge as consisting of epistemic relations (ER) between knowledge and the world, and social relations between knowledge and an author (Maton, 2000, p. 154). Each

represents a continuum of strength, which mapped on a Cartesian plane produces four specialisation codes: knowledge code (ER+ SR-), knower code (ER- SR+), elite code (ER+ SR+) and relativist code (ER- SR-). Lamont and Maton (2008, 2010) write that "Understanding the basis of attitudes and practices among learners, teachers and music education researchers towards music in formal education is crucial for enabling widening participation and the future success of a music curriculum" (2010, p. 63). They observed that the study of music in the UK starts in primary school with a knower code, emphasising musical dispositions and personal expression, changes to a knowledge code in lower secondary school, requiring the demonstration of musical knowledge and skills, and concludes with an elite code in upper secondary, emphasising both dispositions and skills. This demonstrates the shifting values in music education and the insight that the framework provides. They call for further study into "constructions of achievement within higher levels of music such as undergraduate degrees and conservatoires" (Lamont & Maton, 2008, p. 280); this research attempts to answer that call. LCT also incorporates the notion of 'gaze', which Bernstein describes as necessary for recognising legitimacy in the field (1999). Maton (2010) further identifies types of gazes, including born, social, cultivated and trained gazes. In the context of jazz studies, having the appropriate gaze could also be described as having the 'ear' for music or a 'feel' for the rhythm. This paper will concentrate on the social relations present in the student texts and will use a systemic functional linguistic (SFL) analyses and interview data to support the observations.

Specialisation from LCT suggests useful questions for investigating the discourse of a discipline. Drawing on Hood (2010, p. 177), this paper aims to address the following questions: How does the student present themselves as a knower in their writing? How are musical knowers evaluated? What is given prominence: the sociological positioning of knowers or explicit skills and sets of procedures for exploring music? Transitivity and attitude analyses from SFL are used to investigate the knowers. The study of participant types reveals that the students depict both themselves and their reader as sensing knowers, while material processes relating to analysis are attributed to the student's research, study or paper. The attitude analysis reveals that musicians are justified for research for being highly skilled (positive judgement capacity) and highly unique (positive judgement normality). They are further legitimised by association with esteemed institutions, bands and musicians.

The knower code suggested by the epigraph is evidenced in the students' research projects, both in how they present themselves as a knower, and how they position and evaluate the focal musicians of their study. Social relations are variously strengthened by shifting between emphasis on experience, training and exposure to music, which for the students indicates they have the appropriate 'gaze' to interpret jazz, and emphasis on the musical virtuosity and innate talent of the focal musicians of the study. The observations from the corpus will be further substantiated with evidence from Skywalker's research project about a young and relatively unknown musician. This provides the opportunity to examine the linguistic resources the student uses to legitimise the musician, establish his jazz credentials, and place him clearly on the light side of jazz.

2   The Jazz is with you, young student, but you are not an academic musician yet: Students as knowers in their texts

The university jazz program is oriented to producing jazz knowers; how students of this course represent themselves in their writing reflects on how they see themselves as knowers, on how legitimate they believe their opinions to be and on what grounds their observations and opinions are validated. The participating students were practising musicians, performing and teaching regularly, which contributed to their sense of authority.

The way the students present themselves in the corpus varies between explicit first person pronouns, third person references and implied presence through passive constructions or possessive pronouns. Transitivity analysis reveals that they represent themselves primarily as sensers of mental processes and secondarily as actors (see table 1).

Participant	Example	Number
Senser	Here <u>we</u> **see** a very common progression in jazz standards	41
Behaver	As <u>I</u> **listened** to Mason's solos over and over again	8
Sayer	<u>the author</u> **would suggest** that the rhythms be taken as a guide	3
Actor	<u>I</u> **have analysed** transcriptions of Allan's solos	19
Other	It is vital that <u>one</u> **has** complete command of one's instrument	5

Table 1: Participant types of student writers

As there is such a clear majority of sensers, the subtypes of mental processes are significant. 25 of 41 sensers relate to mental processes of cognition, [1], and a further 10 are sensers of mental processes of perception, [2].

> *[1] As <u>the author</u> **deems** compositional elements important to improvisation, so too are lyrical elements through their association with composition.*

> *[2] <u>I</u> **witnessed** first hand what a powerful and unique performer he is.*

This suggests that the students have the appropriate gaze to make observations, evaluate and form opinions on music. This was reinforced during interviews; Skywalker described the basis for his authority to criticise his fellow trombonists:

> *I have been playing trombone for seven years, played piano for 11, have listened to countless recordings of trombone players and listened to many trombone students. I would argue that I did have the authority to say that trombonists are less technically able in general.*

His use of judgement to evaluate musicians will be examined below. Other students similarly attributed the validity of their opinions and observations to their experience. This indicates that their gaze is acquired through their exposure to significant others – through their experience with the instrument, through performance, and through listening to and studying others' performances.

The majority use of cognitive mental processes also includes mood adjuncts such as 'I believe' and 'I think'. For example,

> *In the excerpt <u>I believe</u> that Carter used his index and middle fingers to strike the string.*

Halliday defines the mood adjuncts as examples of interpersonal grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 626-630) which might alternatively be realised as an adjunct such as 'possibly'. They make it clear that the students are expressing their own opinions; that it is their judgement based on their own experience of the music which underlies these knowledge claims.

Four of the six texts refer to the reader through imperative command ("Note the use of intervals…"), through direct reference ("you can see that Carter's bass line…") or through inclusive reference ("if we were to analyse…"). The reader is similarly constructed as a

sensing knower (13 of 22), but primarily with mental processes of perception. This demonstrates that the students expected their audience to be equally musically and analytically literate. However they did not expect the reader to have the same degree of specialisation; evidence for this gap in specialised knowledge is found in the imperative commands of perception, and in the explanations of instrument-specific technique.

Material processes are attributed in almost equal number to the research itself as to the student writers, with 17 of 31 references to the text positioning it as the actor of a material process [1]. Alternatively the research provides a circumstance of location for evidence and activity [2]. In these instances, the product, that is the study, is foregrounded over the producers, that is the students (Hood, 2010, p. 197).

> *[1] <u>This study will dissect and analyse</u> the improvisations of bass trumpeter and trombonist Elliot Mason.*
>
> *[2] <u>Throughout this research</u> I have looked at a series of different tools which Carter uses to create his bass lines.*

The students thus present themselves with authority as musicians, at times making it clear that the knowledge claims are based on their own perception and understanding of the music, their own experience as musicians and their opinions.

3 The Jazz runs strong in my family: Associations of legitimation

Five of the six research projects in the corpus investigated and characterised an exemplary musician in order to enable emulation. The musicians are presented in the introduction and justified as worthy of research through ascribed evaluation and through associations of legitimation. Musicality and musicianship were again key concepts in positioning the musicians as legitimate knowers.

The analysis of expressions of judgement in the introductions to the research projects reveals that the major resources used related to normality and capacity. That is to say that the musicians are valued for being both very special and highly capable. Across the corpus, there were 69 instances of judgement of the focal or secondary musicians, with 39 relating to capacity, 28 relating to normality and two to tenacity. Judgements of normality centre around two foci: prominence and individuality. Terms relating to prominence include 'greatest', 'famous' and 'established', while those relating to individuality include 'unique', 'virtuoso' and 'prodigy'. These terms present the musicians as being remarkable due to inherent qualities, often phrased as categorical, declarative statements. Not all evaluations were made by the students themselves, but by selecting overtly evaluative quotes from other musical knowers, they supported and legitimised their own evaluations. Judgements of capacity focus on the musician's proficiency on the instrument. They include superlative terms such as being a 'master'. Although terms of capacity relate to the skills the musicians have, these skills themselves may be presented as attributes of the musician, for example, "[each solo] is executed with unfathomably virtuosic technique" or "Elliot Mason can only be described as a musical prodigy". This differentiates between the acquisition of skill and being skilful.

The latter example begins Skywalker's text, and strongly sets the musician on the light side. Skywalker's introduction makes the greatest use of judgement in the corpus, with at least thirty more instances of judgement in the introduction. As in the corpus, judgements of normality and capacity are used to position the focal musician; there are nine instances of judgement: normality and 23 of judgement: capacity. Skywalker's use of judgements of capacity centres on technique ("makes use of large intervallic leaps within phrases…", "developed his technique and understanding of harmony" "advanced improvisational

techniques") and generalised proficiency. Proficiency is expressed through nouns and noun groups; Mason is described as a technician, an experienced commercial player, an accomplished improviser and an innovator. The descriptions of his talent and mastery are significantly presented as nominal groups, thus as facts with assumed consensus. They can occur as the actor of a material process, with Mason as the beneficiary:

> *Mason's command of the trombone allows him to perform on it as comfortably as he does on the bass trumpet.*

Mason is thus depicted as the possessor of technique. Given that the aim of the text is to enable emulation through analysis, this suggests that technique is something which can be acquired by others, not an entirely unattainable quality of the musician.

Mason is also presented as a born knower, worthy of research due to both exceptional talent and exemplary training and experience. His exceptional talent is emphasised through the musical pedigree of his family, and his success in competition and recognition at a young age. His attendance of the renowned Berklee College of Music provides his training credentials. His experience is underscored by association with celebrated jazz musicians and groups, such as the Maynard Ferguson Big Bop Nouveau, and broadened by association with popular musicians, such as Bette Midler and Jessica Simpson.

Emphasis shifts between musicianship and musicality in Skywalker's text. At times, the importance of both is significantly emphasised:

> *This <u>command</u> [judg: cap] of <u>advanced</u> [judg: cap] improvisational techniques coupled with a <u>strong sense of musicality</u> [judg: cap] makes him an <u>impressive</u> [app: reac: imp] musician to behold and one of the most <u>formidable</u> [app: reac: imp] trombonists/bass trumpeters in the world today. Further still, he <u>manages</u> [judg: cap] to have a completely <u>unique</u> [judg: norm] musical voice.*

This example primarily uses judgements of capacity and includes marked use of appreciation to evaluate Mason as a musician. The tension between emphasising these two values is clear in the isolated attempts to restore the balance, such as in the quote below:

> *Regardless of the instruments he plays, and perhaps most [grad: force: int] <u>importantly</u> [app: val], Mason is an <u>exceptionally</u> [judg: norm; grad: force: int] <u>musical player</u> [judg: cap], not just [grad: force: int] an <u>impressive</u> [judg: norm] <u>technician</u> [judg: cap].*

This example pairs judgements of normality with judgements of capacity, providing intensification to the latter.

Skywalker's preference for evaluations of capacity suggests that this is the most important basis for justifying an unknown musician as worthy of research. That is, capacity is the precursor to greatness, although uniqueness is also valued. Mason is introduced according to his innate qualities and biographical validity. This is further supported with his training and judgements of capacity which detail some specific skills but generally emphasise Mason's capability. Thus Mason is legitimised according to social relations rather than epistemological relations, suggesting a knower code is used in Skywalker's text.

4   May the Jazz be with you: Conclusion

Understanding how knowers are positioned and evaluated in texts reflects the organisational structures of the discipline. Specialisation from LCT in collaboration with systemic functional analyses provide a useful and suggestive framework for the understanding of the field of jazz. Together they highlight the importance of social relations and knowers in the discipline of jazz and the parameters by which they are legitimised. Students represent

themselves as sensers whose understanding and perception underlies their knowledge claims. They present themselves as having the right gaze, by virtue of their experience both as musicians and students of jazz, to interpret and appreciate the work of the musicians they are studying. Those musicians are evaluated as being unique and skilled. They are variously depicted as being worthy of research through their experience and through their innate musicality. The value of their experience is augmented through associations whose legitimacy in jazz culture is established. The evaluation and positioning of the focal musicians also suggests that musical value is attributed to people with jazz experience and jazz dispositions.

This research demonstrates that jazz performance students must acquire the right gaze through exposure to significant works by significant musicians, in addition to their experience playing their instrument and performing. This is significant for a range of creative disciplines which produce practitioners who translate creative, practical experience into texts in order to disseminate and further knowledge of the field.

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