

Authorial stance evolution across academic development: The case of James Martin

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Abstract

Stance, the way writers position themselves in a text to convey judgements and commitments through hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention, has been a focus of applied linguistics for over two decades. However, the diachronic variation of stance in individual writers remains largely unexplored. This study investigates how stance features have changed over three distinct 10-year periods in the professional career of James Martin, a renowned systemic-functional linguist. We compiled a corpus from 30 of Martin's research articles and employed a novel method termed "autoreflexive discourse triangulation" to account for observed changes alongside his developmental trajectory. Results reveal significant shifts in Martin's use of stance features over time, reflecting his evolving authorial voice and academic status. The frequency of boosters increased, while hedges and certain types of attitude markers decreased. Self-mention patterns also showed notable changes, aligning with Martin's growing authority in the field. This study contributes to our understanding of individuals' stance development over time and offers insights that could inform novice writers' stance-taking strategies and EAP teaching practices. The findings underscore the dynamic nature of academic writing development and suggest the need for a more nuanced, career-stage appropriate approach to stance instruction in EAP contexts.

Keywords: Stance, research writing, diachronic variation, authorial voice, career progression.

Resumen

La evolución del posicionamiento autorial en la trayectoria académica: el caso de James Martin

El posicionamiento autorial, entendido como la forma en que los escritores se posicionan en un texto para expresar juicios y compromisos mediante atenuadores, intensificadores, marcadores de actitud y autorreferencias, ha sido objeto de interés en la lingüística aplicada durante más de dos décadas. Sin embargo, la variación diacrónica del posicionamiento en autores individuales continúa siendo un aspecto poco explorado. Este estudio analiza cómo han cambiado los rasgos de posicionamiento en tres periodos diferenciados de diez años dentro de la trayectoria profesional de James Martin, reconocido lingüista sistémico-funcional. Para ello, se compiló un corpus compuesto de 30 artículos de investigación de Martin y se empleó un método novedoso, denominado “triangulación discursiva autorreflexiva”, con el fin de interpretar los cambios observados en relación con su desarrollo académico. Los resultados muestran cambios significativos en el uso que Martin hace de los recursos de posicionamiento a lo largo del tiempo, reflejo de la evolución de su voz autorial y de su estatus académico. La frecuencia de los intensificadores aumentó, mientras que disminuyó el uso de atenuadores y de ciertos tipos de marcadores de actitud. Los patrones de autorreferencia también experimentaron cambios notables, en consonancia con la creciente autoridad de Martin en el campo. Este estudio contribuye a comprender mejor el desarrollo de la postura autorial individual a lo largo del tiempo y ofrece aportaciones útiles para orientar las estrategias de posicionamiento de escritores noveles y la enseñanza del inglés con fines académicos. Los hallazgos ponen de relieve el carácter dinámico del desarrollo de la escritura académica y apuntan a la necesidad de adoptar, en contextos de enseñanza del inglés académico, un enfoque de la instrucción sobre el posicionamiento más matizado y adaptado a las distintas etapas de la carrera académica.

Palabras clave: Posicionamiento, escritura académica, variación diacrónica, voz autorial, desarrollo profesional.

1. Introduction

Academic writing is widely recognised as a rhetorical and socially situated practice in which writers do more than present information. They make claims, respond to the expectations of readers, and position themselves in relation to both knowledge and audience (Gong et al., 2023; Hyland, 2004; Jiang, 2015). Central to this rhetorical work is the expression of stance, namely the ways writers express judgments, indicate commitment, and project a textual presence (Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2005). Through these resources, they not only convey meanings but also establish credibility and signal their relationship to what is being argued (e.g., Hyland & Jiang, 2016;

Qiu & Ma, 2019). As scholars develop professionally, their use of stance is shaped not only by disciplinary expectations but also by a changing sense of authorial identity and a growing awareness of language as a rhetorical resource (Dong et al., 2024; Hyland, 2008).

While stance has been extensively studied across genres, disciplines, and L1/L2 backgrounds (e.g., Hyland & Jiang, 2016; Jiang, 2015; Liu et al., 2023), most research adopts a synchronic, corpus-based perspective. Diachronic studies of individual writers remain rare, largely because it is uneasy to account for changes in topic, genre and disciplinary positioning across a writer's career (Hyland & Jiang, 2026; Wu & Paltridge, 2021). However, such work is crucial to our understanding of how rhetorical preferences evolve, how voice is shaped across different stages of professional life, and how writers reposition themselves as their scholarly roles change. Without such insights, accounts of stance risk remaining too general to capture its longer-term, writer-specific character and writing instruction may rely on the generalizations rather than developmental realities.

Against this background, the present study explores how stance develops over time in the published research writing of James R. Martin, a leading figure in systemic functional linguistics (SFL). Martin provides an exceptional case for a diachronic analysis of this kind. From his early academic career in the 1990s to his later prominence in the field after decades, he has made a sustained contribution to research on interpersonal meaning and shaped important lines of inquiry in applied linguistics and discourse studies (Liu et al., 2023). His work on appraisal and evaluation is especially relevant here because it offers useful resources for interpreting stance and interpersonal meaning in his own writing (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005). This makes it possible to consider how academic voice is shaped not only by career development but also by a writer's own theoretically informed understanding of language. Although a case of this kind limits broad generalisation, it does allow for a more detailed account of how professional development and rhetorical choice may become closely intertwined.

Therefore, our study draws on a corpus of 30 single-authored articles by Martin published over three decades (1990s, 2000s, and 2010s) to analyse his stance features. We augment this analysis with what we term autoreflexive discourse triangulation (ADT), a method that uses the author's own theoretical writings as an interpretive lens for the quantitative findings. This dual approach enables us to investigate whether changes in Martin's

rhetorical style over time reflect broader developmental patterns, deliberate stylistic choices grounded in theory, or both. In doing so, we aim to contribute to the study of academic identity formation, discourse competence across the academic lifespan, and pedagogical approaches that foster strategic and reflexive stance-taking in academic writing.

2. Authorial stance and writing in the discipline

Stance is the ways writers rhetorically control the level of personality and the degree of commitment to their propositional content. Hyland defines it in this way:

This can be seen as an attitudinal dimension and includes features which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions and commitments. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement. (Hyland, 2005, p. 176)

Stance therefore concerns the level of certainty that writers invest in their argument and the extent to which they overtly project themselves in the interaction. A range of conceptions have been developed to delve into its linguistic realizations. Some elaborate on its local instantiations by looking at *hedges* (Hyland, 1998) and *affect* (Dueñas, 2010) etc., while others include more systemic frameworks for analysis, such as *appraisal* (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005) and *evaluation* (Hunston & Thompson, 2000).

Despite a diversity of approaches, they are all based on the assumption that writing is a social construction and seek to unveil the ways writers emerge from the text and bring the underlying interaction to the surface at specific points of writing. Recent work has also drawn on a distinction between writers' personal feelings and attitudes, and those with regard to the truth value of a proposition (Kiesling, 2022). Stance is thus understood to incorporate three closely related discoursal components: the writer's attitude towards the status of knowledge (epistemic stance), towards the subject matter at hand (attitudinal stance), and towards the putative reader (interactional stance) (cf. Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2005).

Following Biber (2006) and Hyland (2005), therefore, we see stance as the writer's expression of epistemic assessment, personal attitudes and self-presence by means of *hedges* and *boosters*, *attitude markers* and *self-mentions*:

- **Hedges** reflect writers' discretion in moderating their commitment to assertions, allowing propositions to be framed as tentative rather than absolute (e.g., *possible, may, in general*).
- **Boosters** express writers' conviction in his or her argument, removing potential doubt about statements and precluding any further negotiation. (e.g., *clearly, demonstrate, always*).
- **Attitude markers** suggest writers' affective instead of epistemic attitude to propositions as is reflected by the use of hedges and boosters, conveying interest, surprise, importance, doubt and so on. (e.g., *remarkably, interesting, unfortunately*).
- **Self-mention** refers to the use of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives to communicate conceptual, emotional, and relational information, highlighting the role of author in the text.

Together, these linguistic resources help writers to project an authorial stance to their materials and readers, articulating their positions with integrity, credibility and involvement. They are key features of arguments in academic contexts and reveal the fact that writers need to position themselves in ways that show consideration for their relationship with both the content and the reader.

A growing body of research has demonstrated the importance of stance in various academic genres, including three-minute theses (Qiu & Jiang, 2021), undergraduate essays (Jiang & Hyland, 2026), postgraduate dissertations (Hyland, 2004), and research papers (Gong et al., 2023). Additionally, the variation in stance-taking between students at different stages of higher education (Qiu & Ma, 2019), of different L1 backgrounds (Jiang 2015), and between student and expert writers (Dong et al., 2024) has also garnered attention. Cross-disciplinary variation is a burgeoning area of study, focusing mainly on soft and hard fields (Hyland, 2005) and across different research strands of a field (Hyland & Jiang, 2022).

Of greater relevance to the current study is the increasing awareness that stance choices can evolve over time with shifting context. Hyland and Jiang (2018), for example, have tracked the opposing trends of stance use across soft and hard knowledge domains. Over the past 50 years, writers in hard fields such as biology and electrical engineering have increased their stance deployment with the growing need to promote their research, while soft field practitioners have shifted towards a less visible stance, relying more heavily

on methodological data. In applied linguistics, Qiu and Ma (2019) compared texts written by master, doctor and expert writer groups, seeking to illuminate writers' stance development through "academic enculturation". Unfortunately, as Wu and Paltridge (2021) point out, the ethnic cultural heterogeneity within and across the writer groups poses challenges in analysing other factors related to stance making, such as native rhetorical transfer, linguistic proficiency, and writing context.

What is needed, then, are more controlled investigations of how stance develops within the writing of particular academics across relatively stable contexts. One example is Dressen-Hammouda's (2014) longitudinal analysis of the changing disciplinary voice of geology writers over the decade following their doctoral dissertations. More recently, Hyland and Jiang (2026) examined the changing use of metadiscourse in John Swales's single-authored published articles across four decades and argued that his later writing became increasingly reflexive, interactive, and reader-engaging, helping to construct a more collegial and dialogic authorial persona. While that study offers a persuasive account of rhetorical development, its interpretation is necessarily based on the analysts' reading of the texts. It draws little on Swales's own explicit reflections on interpersonal meaning or rhetorical choice, and therefore leaves open the question of how far such changes were accompanied by metalinguistic self-awareness.

Such studies on diachronic writing practices are limited in number and most adopt analyst' perspectives on writing development. There is therefore value in examining how stance changes in the writing of a single scholar over an extended period, while also considering the writer's own understanding of rhetorical language use. Such an approach may offer a fuller account of how scholarly voice develops and of the factors that shape that development. To address this gap, the present study traces diachronic change in the stance practices of James Martin across three decades of research writing, from the earlier stage of his academic career to his later position as a leading figure in the field.

3. Data and analysis

3.1. Data collection

To track the changes of Martin's stance-making practice, we created three corpora representative of his writing in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s, which

we believe comprise three critical periods in his career development. Martin's professional trajectory saw him progress from lecturer in 1990 to professor in 2000. The subsequent decade marked a period of increasing success, characterised by a growing number of influential research works and publications after the millennium, including *Appraisal in English* and *Genre Relations*. This period also coincided with a significant increase in citations of Martin's work. Figure 1 illustrates the number of citations his work received from 1990 to 2010, as recorded on *Google Scholar*. Consequently, the years 1990, 2000, and 2010 broadly demarcate three key stages in his career development.

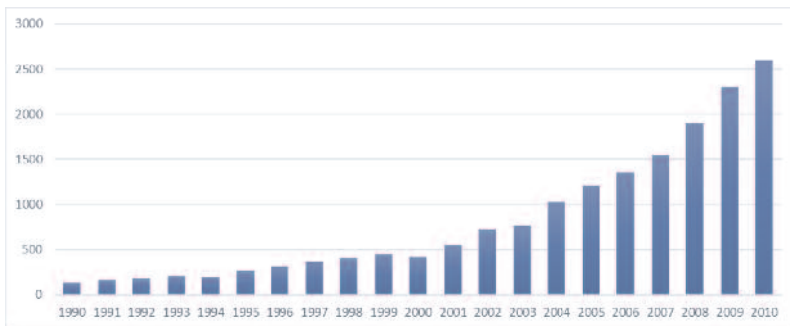


Figure 1. The number of citations to Martin's publications from 1990-2010 in Google Scholar.

We collected 10 research articles published at each time point, selecting only single-authored papers to ensure consistency in stance-making practice. This criterion was essential to avoid confounding effects of collaborative writing, which can significantly influence authorial voice and stance choices (Hyland & Jiang, 2018). The papers are listed in Appendix. When building the corpora, we excluded exemplar texts, references, appendixes, and blocks of cited sentences or paragraphs so that only Martin's original discourse was included. Altogether the corpora contained 162,230 words. As shown in Table 1, the average length of Martin's articles has decreased markedly since the 2000s.

Period	1990s	2000s	2010s	Overall
Total words	58113	52232	51885	162230

Table 1. The corpus characteristics.

3.2. Consideration of topic variability

A critical methodological consideration is the potential influence of research topic on stance choices, independent of career progression. As shown in Appendix, topical distribution is relatively consistent across decades, though some variation exists. The 1990s corpus shows stronger emphasis on theoretical SFL work, while the 2000s includes more discourse analytical studies. The 2010s demonstrates increased focus on pedagogical applications of genre theory. These topical shifts may afford differing degrees of evaluative, affective, and self-referential stance. While the solo-authored focus controls for voice consistency, we recognise that variation in rhetorical demands across topics and genres is a potential confounding factor, and we return to this issue in the Discussion.

3.3. Analysis of stance features

Our primary analytical framework for stance draws on Hyland's (2005) model, which identifies four main categories: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions. These categories span epistemic, affective, and self-representational stance. We used *AntConc* (Anthony, 2022) to concordance pre-identified stance markers drawn from Hyland's published lists. Each concordance was manually checked to ensure it functioned as stance expression and exclude extraneous ones. To achieve inter-rater reliability, an in-depth discussion was held concerning what counts as stance markers. Subsequently, both authors independently coded 20% of the data, and reached an inter-rater reliability of 98.5% before resolving disagreements. Given this satisfactory level of coding agreement, the first author coded the remaining data. Once all concordances were read and coded, the features in each category and period were calculated and normalised to per 10,000 words to allow comparison across the three corpora. To determine statistical significances, a log-likelihood (*LL*) test was conducted using Rayson's loglikelihood spreadsheet, with effect size (*%DIFF*) also considered (Gabrielatos, 2018).

3.4. Autoreflexive discourse triangulation

To complement our corpus analysis of Martin's stance marker usage over his 30-year career, we applied an interpretive technique we term *autoreflexive discourse triangulation* (ADT). This approach complements the corpus analysis by incorporating Martin's own theoretical writings on appraisal, engagement,

and evaluation as an insider perspective on stance. The ‘autoreflexive’ aspect emphasises that we are examining the writer’s published reflections on the very linguistic features we are studying in his writing, while ‘discourse triangulation’ refers to the process of using these reflections to provide an additional interpretive angle on our discourse analysis of his research articles. Therefore, rather than triangulation in a strict empirical sense (i.e., combining independent data sources for validation), ADT operates as a qualitative interpretive lens. It draws on the premise that Martin, as both subject and theorist, offers a unique opportunity to analyse the alignment between rhetorical practice and metalinguistic reflection.

In practical terms, ADT involved a document analysis of Martin’s published work on language and discourse in order to interpret and contextualise the findings from the corpus study of his research articles. The procedure consisted of three broad stages. First, we identified and collected Martin’s major publications concerned with language, discourse, appraisal, and evaluation. Second, we conducted a close reading of *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*, which is not only his most highly cited work but also one of his most sustained discussions of interpersonal meaning in language use. Third, we extracted those parts of his theoretical writing that speak directly to the rhetorical purposes and social effects of stance-related resources, and used these views to enrich our interpretation of the corpus results.

Hence, these texts were not treated as data in the same sense as the corpus, but as reflective materials that could shed light on Martin’s possible rhetorical intention and strategic awareness. This approach is particularly useful when direct access to the author is not possible or when retrospective self-reporting may be limited in reliable or practical terms (cf. Lynch & Mah, 2018). Therefore, ADT allows us to examine whether some of the linguistic changes observed over time may be related to rhetorical choices that are, at least in part, consistent with Martin’s own evolving understanding of discourse.

4. Results and discussion

We identified 3,372 instances of stance in the corpus, averaging 207.9 cases per 10,000 words. This frequency is remarkably lower than the average reported for applied linguistics Hyland and Jiang (2016). As noted earlier,

Martin’s sustained engagement with research on interpersonal meaning may have afforded him a keen awareness of interactional resources, which may in turn have influenced his restrained use of stance features. The results also suggest a declining trend in Martin’s use of stance expressions over the course of his career. As shown in Table 2, the frequency of stance choices dropped significantly from 237.0 cases per 10,000 words in the 1990s to 189.5 cases in the 2010s ($LL = 29.0$, $\%DIFF = 25.1$, $p < 0.001$).

	1990s	2000s	2010s
Hedges	748 (128.7)	401 (76.8)	288 (55.5)
Boosters	458 (78.8)	419 (80.2)	468 (90.2)
Attitude markers	155 (26.7)	129 (24.7)	102 (19.7)
Self-mention	16 (2.8)	63 (12.1)	125 (24.1)
Total	1377 (237.0)	1012 (193.8)	983 (189.5)

Table 2. Distribution of stance features over time (raw numbers and per 10000 words).

This downward trend is surprising given the literature which reports that experienced writers tend to employ more rhetorical resources for explicit academic persuasion (Dong et al., 2024; Hyland & Jiang, 2026; Qiu & Ma, 2019). In Martin’s case, we observe a decrease in stance expressions as he addresses and argues for propositional positions with an increasingly prominent professional status. Furthermore, a closer examination of the data reveals that different stance features have not changed uniformly. Table 2 illustrates that hedges and attitude markers decreased markedly over the years by 56.9% and 26.3% respectively, whilst the use of self-mention and boosters exhibited substantial increases, registering the largest and smallest changes of 77.5% and 14.5% respectively.

It is also noted that different from the general pattern of stance choices in applied linguistics (Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Jiang, 2018), boosters have been more frequent than hedges, attitude markers and self-mention in Martin’s repertoire since the 2000s. This marks a distinctive stylistic practice of Martin, who appears to express strong assertiveness in his statements, as exemplified in (1) and (2), and suggests that the invested confidence in the argument is important to affect how his message is received and the ways readers react to a text.

- (1) This is **certainly** an improvement on purely compositional accounts which treat interpersonal meanings as deep immediate constituents of the unit. (2000s)
- (2) Identity is **always** already conditioned by register and genre, so that who we are depends on the roles we play in a given situation. (2010s)

The changed stance-making practice reveals the rhetorical decision Martin has made to shape the readers' understanding and emotional response to his texts, thus influencing the overall reception and impact of the message. We will discuss the changes in more detail below in terms of evidentiality, affect and self presence respectively.

4.1. Evidentiality: expressing certain and uncertainty of knowledge

Evidentiality refers to the writer's attitude towards the reliability of knowledge. It indicates the degree of evidential qualification established through linguistic expressions of certainty, doubt, exactness, veracity, or limitation (Hyland, 2005). This epistemic aspect of stance is primarily realised by hedges and boosters, features which tend to dominate the occurrences of evaluation in research writing (Dong et al., 2024; Hyland & Jiang, 2016). They serve not only as strategic means of communication but also as effective rhetorical devices adopted to suggest authors' reservation or certainty about their claims, expressing humility and respect for alternative views from potential audience, or restricting discursive space for further negotiation (Hyland, 1998). Both options signal overt textual interaction that projects a writer's epistemic stance.

The diachronic distribution of epistemic stance provides further insight into this rhetorical option when different types of hedges and boosters are considered. In line with a range of previous research (Hinkel, 2005; Salager-Meyer, 1994), we distinguished three broad types of hedges: downtoners, rounders, and plausibility hedges.

- **Downtoners** are primarily adverbs used to mitigate the certainty of a statement (e.g., *mainly*, *in general*, *quite*).
- **Rounders** are employed to signal lack of precision and indicate an (often numerical) approximation (e.g., *about*, *almost*, *roughly*).
- **Plausibility hedges** are predominantly modals and lexical verbs, used to suggest that an argument is based on reasonable assumptions rather than evidence (e.g., *could*, *may*, *suggest*).

Table 3 shows that overall hedges fell by 56.9% from 128.7 to 55.5 cases per 10,000 words. This change is primarily attributable to a significant 75.0% decrease in plausibility hedges ($LL = 225.6$, $\%DIFF = 300.2$, $p < 0.001$), although these continued to dominate the frequencies across the three periods. Overall, the reduced use of plausibility hedges suggests Martin’s inclination to move from modulation of propositional strength towards disregarding the limitations of claims. Thus, Martin demonstrates fewer reservations about the exactitude and viability of statements which were frequent in his early works (3 and 4), tending to express a more direct and engaging tone.

- (3) This problem **could** be solved by recognizing a simultaneous logical dependency structure such as that reviewed in 12.1. above. (1990s)
- (4) It **might** therefore be argued that where this meaning potential is not automatically available, it needs to be taught. It **might** also be argued that it needs to be taught explicitly and critically. (1990s)

	1990s	2000s	2010s
Downtoners	214 (36.8)	180 (34.5)	171 (33.0)
Rounders	32 (5.5)	8 (1.5)	5 (1.0)
Plausibility hedges	502 (86.4)	213 (40.8)	112 (21.6)
Total	748 (128.7)	401 (76.8)	288 (55.5)

Table 3. Distribution of hedges over time (raw numbers and per 10000 words).

Interestingly, although dominating the early periods, plausibility hedges were exceeded by downtoners in 2010s. Downtoners function to increase the legitimacy of an argument by reducing or moderating the intensity of how it is uttered and are mainly used by Martin to add accuracy to statements (5) or ward off criticism on fallibility (6).

- (5) Analysis of body language is a new region in SFL-based multimodal discourse analysis, although it is **relatively** established in other disciplines such as cognitive science (e.g., Kendon 2004; McNeill 2005). (2010s)
- (6) In linguistics, L1 and L2 are **generally** used to distinguish between a speaker’s native tongue (L1) and a second language (L2). (2010s)

The changed use of these two rhetorical devices suggests a transition from expressing uncertainty about claims to carefully moderating well-founded

assertions. By reducing expressions of doubt and focusing on precise modulation, Martin projects increased confidence and expertise, potentially enhancing his credibility with readers. From this rhetorical shift, we may see a more assured communicator with a deep understanding of his subject matter, likely strengthening his position and influence within his field.

In addition, rounders typically give an idea of the accuracy associated with the figures being presented. Since Martin's research is principally more concerned with theoretical constructs than empirical, numerical rounders are generally infrequent.

In contrast to hedges, boosters help present claims with assurance, "setting the caution and self-effacement suggested by hedges against assertion and involvement" (Hyland, 2005, p. 179). Broadly echoing the rhetorical use of hedges, boosters can perform one of three functions (Hinkel, 2005; Salager-Meyer, 1994):

- **Intensity boosters** amplify the emotive intensity of an argument (e.g., *indeed, in particular, really*)
- **Extremity boosters** highlight the upper edge of a continuum (e.g., *most, never, always*)
- **Certainty boosters** express the author's epistemic conviction (e.g., *definitely, show, prove*)

	1990s	2000s	2010s
Intensity boosters	242 (41.6)	165 (31.5)	142 (27.3)
Extremity boosters	48 (8.3)	42 (8.1)	42 (8.1)
Certainty boosters	168 (28.9)	212 (40.6)	284 (54.8)
Total	458 (78.8)	419 (80.2)	468 (90.2)

Table 4. Distribution of boosters over time (raw numbers and per 10000 words).

Table 4 illustrates a slight increase in the frequency of boosters over the past 30 years, with a significant rise in the use of certainty boosters ($LL = 44.9$, $\%DIFF = 47.3$, $p < 0.0001$). Martin utilises these boosters to convey his epistemic convictions (7 and 8). Thus by expressing a clear stance towards propositional certainty, Martin increasingly conveys an authoritative voice as an established academic, projecting an image of credibility, truth and conviction in his perspectives.

- (7) This **demonstrates** one respect in which grammatical descriptions in SFL are functional - since they distinguish between function and class. (2010s)
- (8) One of the main reasons I was doing this **of course** was to make room in SFL for my work on discourse semantics, which I intended to explore from the perspectives of system and structure on a stratum underlying lexico-grammar. (2010s)

This change may also reflect the cumulative credence gained through the rapid development of systemic linguistic theories. The strong propositional conviction expressed in the above examples is bolstered by the growing body of knowledge in the field.

Moreover, coupled with the decreased use of downtoners, the increase in certainty boosters may indicate Martin's growing confidence in weighing his own knowledge claims against the expectations and attitudes of readers. This is a useful way to build academic persuasion and collegiality with community members in the career progression towards an established scholar. Undeniably, Martin's research gained significant momentum after the turn of the millennium, with extensive ground-breaking works that continue to be highly cited to this day.

The disciplinary voice Martin has developed is also evident in his controlled use of intensity and extremity boosters. These boosting devices thus add affective colour to claims, albeit by elevating the tone rather than explicitly projecting an emotional self. It has become less common to see Martin convey a strongly involved attitude or engage readers emotionally rather than intellectually (9 and 10).

- (9) We cannot even be sure that we are looking at one unified set of phenomena; but this is **always** a problem with the deepest level of abstraction in any formal model. (1990s)
- (10) At the extreme language in action end of the action/reflection mode scale there is **really** no difference between field and genre as far as text structure is concerned. (1990s)

In the 2010s, Martin exhibited a trend towards considerably less marking of epistemic stance, demonstrating greater circumspection in explicitly expressing a stance and particularly in amplifying the emotive strength of an argument. This shift may reflect the evolving rhetorical requirements of an

established scholar, moving from emotional appeal to a greater reliance on epistemic conviction when constructing arguments. Such a transition can be more effectively realised through the use of certainty boosters.

4.2. Affect: showing assessment, significance and emotion

In contrast to epistemic stance, the writer's affective attitude is revealed through assessments and personal perspectives, expressed by commenting on the issue being discussed or the communication itself (Hyland & Jiang, 2018; Jiang & Hyland, 2026). Attitude is most explicitly signalled by attitude markers (Hyland, 2005), such as attitude verbs (e.g., *agree*, *expect*), sentence adverbs (e.g., *unfortunately*, *interestingly*), and adjectives (e.g., *essential*, *unusual*).

Affective expressions in academic writing are often not straightforward or polarized (Hyland, 2004), implicitly *invoked* rather than openly *inscribed* (Martin & White, 2005), so they indicate the writer's deliberate manoeuvring of personal stance through positive or negative connotations. Such emotional appeals are likely to generate similar sentiments in readers (11 and 12), drawing them into "a conspiracy of agreement" (Hyland, 2005, p. 180), and emphasise Martin's feelings rather than evaluating a claim or situation. However, the field of linguistics tends to build arguments more on data-supported demonstration of evidence than on personal emotive stance (Hyland & Jiang, 2016). Consequently, the normed frequency of attitude markers significantly dropped from 26.7 cases to 19.7 cases per 10,000 words ($LL = 5.83$, $\%DIFF = 35.68$, $p < 0.05$).

- (11) Saying that language realises register means both that language determines register and that register determines language; **unfortunately** it is not possible in English to say both things at once. (1990s)
- (12) One **interesting** effect of projecting metafunctions onto context in a solitary way is that teleology is backgrounded as a contextual variable. (1990s)

This downturn seems somewhat surprising, as one might expect that a writer ascending the academic ladder would be inclined to take a clearer stance, employing a wide range of evaluative resources to negotiate space in the competitive publishing arena. Martin, however, did not appear to follow this expected trajectory, but showed a different pattern of attitudinal expressions.

Drawing on Mur Dueñas (2010), we distinguished three types of attitude markers based on their evaluative value:

- **Assessment** centres on acuity, efficacy, novelty, validity and quality (e.g., *appropriate, striking, dramatic*)
- **Significance** comments on the relevance and importance of the subject matter (e.g., *important, essential, significant*)
- **Emotion** concerns personal and emotional judgements (e.g., *surprising, curious, unfortunate*)

According to this taxonomy, we categorised each attitude marker and found that the nuanced exposition of personal attitudes changed in distinct ways. As shown in Table 5, attitudinal expressions of significance and emotion decreased significantly by 64.7% and 77.6% respectively, but the assessment type dominated Martin’s attitudinal choices, showing an increasing of 52.0% ($LL = 5.73$, $\%DIFF = 34.21$, $p < 0.05$).

	1990s	2000s	2010s
Assessment	56 (9.6)	66 (12.6)	76 (14.6)
Significance	54 (9.3)	37 (7.1)	17 (3.3)
Emotion	45 (7.7)	26 (5.0)	9 (1.7)
Total	155 (26.7)	129 (24.7)	102 (19.7)

Table 5. Distribution of attitude markers over time (raw numbers and per 10000 words).

The assessment type of attitude markers allows the writer to evaluate the novelty, efficacy or quality of the research results, a characteristic essential to research in soft disciplines where the construction of knowledge relies on adopting a more engaged and prominent stance on issues (Hyland 2012; Jiang & Hyland, 2026). As shown in (13) and (14), Martin comments positively on the effect of grammatical representation through the assessment type, arguing for the interactional value of grammatical choices and genre-based pedagogy. This stance expression is crucial in evoking a shared response from readers regarding his contributions to the field.

- (13) The **dramatic** retelling of the past events in the present tense identifies students with Pliny as a knower in history. (2010s)

- (14) In story genres phases can be introduced within stages to develop setting, sensual imagery, counterexpectation and evaluation as **appropriate**. (2010s)

The assessment type is similar to what Martin referred to as judgement of either esteem or sanction (Martin, 2000). Such an evaluation, in Martin's view, "is more often codified in writing", concerning "institutionalised feelings, which take us out of our everyday common sense world into the uncommon sense worlds of shared community values" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 45). Therefore, he believes that "sharing values in this area is critical to the formation of social networks" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 52). All these perceptions suggest an increased use of this type of stance expression over the progression of Martin's career and scholarly status.

A remarking fall was seen in the use of significance and emotion attitude markers ($LL = 16.30$, $\%DIFF = 183.60$; $LL = 22.29$, $\%DIFF = 346.41$, $p < 0.001$). These refer explicitly to the writer's affective feelings rather than a reasoned assessment of a claim or situation (Hyland & Jiang, 2016), thus projecting a clear personalising stance.

In summary, we observed a marked decrease in the use of attitude markers by Martin in what he wrote over his career development. This indicates that he refrained from expressing a clear and personal affective voice although these emotive markers can potentially trigger shared personal resonance within the audience, cultivating a more dialectical exchange.

4.3. Self presence: building plausibility and credibility

Besides epistemic and attitudinal stance, writers can control the level of interaction with readers through the rhetorical use of self-mention pronouns and possessive adjectives (Hyland, 2005). Self-mention signifies the degree to which writers intervene in their texts to present propositional, affective, and interpersonal information, thereby projecting a more visible or detached interactional stance. Writers in the soft knowledge fields rely more heavily on self-mention expressions than those in hard sciences, taking a clear personal standing and distinguish their work from that of others (Jiang & Hyland, 2020).

However, as shown in Table 2 above, the normed frequency of self-mention used by Martin over the years is generally lower than that of the field of applied linguistics, which was reported to be around 70.0 cases per 10,000

words (Hyland & Jiang, 2016). This difference may suggest the rhetorical awareness Martin has developed through his sustained research into interpersonal meaning of language, moderating the extent to which he steps into the texts and offers the authorial perspective on knowledge contribution.

It is more noteworthy, though, that contrary to the falling trend in linguistics found by Hyland and Jiang (2016), the use of self-mention increased significantly in Martin's academic texts from 2.8 cases to 24.1 cases per 10,000 words ($LL = 108.53$, $\%DIFF = 88.57$, $p < 0.0001$). This indicates Martin's intention to present a more visible stance by choosing to intervene in his writing (15 and 16). This authorial presence puts a personal slant on knowledge contribution and may influence readers' attitudes towards the argument Martin constructs. Martin intensified the use of such a rhetorical strategy, crafting a clear disciplinary voice alongside his professional development from lecturer to leading expert in the field.

- (15) In this paper **I** draw on this metafunctional cartography to reconsider the knowledge construed in vertical discourse from the perspectives of ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. (2010s)
- (16) What concerns **me** most in arguing for constructive research is to undo an apparently pathological disjunction in 20th century social science and humanities research. (2000s)

In addition, we found that Martin's self-mention broadly falls into three functional categories: confining claims, enhancing plausibility and promoting credibility. The first category is typically used within larger formulaic expressions to limit the strength and universality of his claim to the personal realm. This represents both an epistemic and interpersonal positioning strategy to construct genuine and acceptable arguments:

- (17) ...and *from what I can tell*, this dialogue has had a productive impact on genre-based literacy programs around the world. (2010s)
- (18) *From my perspective* the media's treatment of this issue quite irresponsibly uninformed. (2000s)

The second category refers to the way self-mention aims to concretise his propositions through exclusive personal relationships (19), working experiences (20), and knowledge contributions (21). These highly personal accounts inject a certain liveliness and enthusiasm into the otherwise matter-

of-fact presentation of research subjects. By using authentic personal stories rather than selected examples, Martin creates a vivid impression on readers, persuading them with a high degree of originality, contribution, and personal involvement.

- (19) Here are some examples of *my* own children talking about language as they learn it in the year or two before they began school. (2010s)
- (20) *I* can still recall (during *my* halcyon days as a grammaticality adjudicator) that when Haj Ross came to town *I* would rank clauses confidently along a 7 point scale of grammaticality... (1990s)
- (21) Maton's challenge has led *me* to rework our understanding of both context dependency and disciplinarity from the perspective of all three metafunctions not just one. (2010s)

Moreover, Martin often seeks to promote a sense of scholarly credibility by presenting himself in texts. Constructing a persuasive argument for the audience is central to both the writer's immediate authority in the paper and wider reputation in the discipline (Hyland, 2012). To achieve this, Martin expresses reverence for multiple perspectives while providing personal justification for his opinions (22 and 23). This personal voice helps to address readers directly, endorsing his points of view and fostering an interpersonal optimism of persuasion.

- (22) One thing that concerned *me* about Robert's exemplifications was that they didn't take us beyond the clause to deal with discourse semantic dependencies. (1990s)
- (23) *I* need to stress in saying this that *I* am not trying to privilege axiology over ideology, but ultimately to promote the complementarity of these perspectives. (2000s)

Table 6 shows that the last two functional use of first-person markers increased remarkably, with normed frequencies growing by 228.3% and 737.5% respectively ($LL = 29.58$, $\%DIFF = 95.80$, $p < 0.001$; $LL = 87.50$, $\%DIFF = 88.06$, $p < 0.001$). However, the first category had a slight rise. This suggests that Martin increasingly uses first person markers to project a persona with a constructive purpose. Along his trajectory of establishing disciplinary status, Martin appears inclined to strongly identify himself with particular arguments and to gain credit for his idiosyncratic perspective.

	1990s	2000s	2010s
Confining claims	8 (1.4)	10 (2.0)	16 (3.1)
Enhancing plausibility	5 (0.8)	21 (4.0)	35 (6.7)
Promoting credibility	3 (0.6)	32 (6.1)	74 (14.3)
Total	16 (2.8)	63 (12.1)	125 (24.1)

Table 6. Distribution of self-mention over time (raw numbers and per 10000 words).

Personal reference, therefore, provides a clear interpretative frame for a given statement, enabling Martin to underscore his individual input to the field whilst seeking consensus for his propositions. Such personal presence plays an important role in “constituting an overt intervention into the text by the authorial voice – an interpolation of the authorial presence so as to assert or insist upon the value or warrantability of the proposition” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 128).

We further found that Martin’s rhetorical investment in presenting a discursual self is more pronounced in certain articles. A notable example is the paper in which he argues for the research value of his proposed positive discourse analysis (24). The frequent use of first-person expressions in the concluding section of this paper reflects not only his efforts to promote the legitimacy of the ‘positivity’ in discourse analysis but also his attempts to present himself as a radical thinker urging the advancement of language study and world understanding.

(24) Where are our critical theorists today *I* wondered? Probably back in their studies analysing John Howard’ s speeches was *my* best guess. Doing what *I* would do in *my* lectures that week, as exemplified above. *I* doubt *I* was far wrong. This got *me* thinking about design, and what we need to know to contribute positively to change, and where we need to look for it, and what kinds of tools we need to look with. (2000s)

Overall, Martin’s writing conveys a strong sense of authorial presence and intellectual agency. Rather than presenting research as detached from the researcher, he writes in ways that make his own perspective, experience, and scholarly investment more visible. This more assertive and self-aware stance appears to be closely tied to his increasing influence within the discipline, as his work came to occupy a more central position in linguistic research.

4.4. Autoreflexive reflections: Interpreting change from Martin's perspectives on stance

To make sense of the changing stance patterns in Martin's writing, it is helpful to read the corpus findings alongside his own discussions of appraisal, evaluation, and interpersonal meaning, especially in *The Language of Evaluation* (Martin & White, 2005). These writings offer insight into how Martin himself understood the rhetorical and social significance of evaluative language. Seen in this light, the shifts identified in the corpus may reflect not only professional development, but also a growing alignment between his rhetorical practice and his explicit theorisation of stance.

Martin considers stance as fundamentally interpersonal. As he puts it, it “operates rhetorically to construct relations of alignment and rapport between the writer/speaker and actual or potential respondents”. This view helps explain why authorial voice becomes more marked in his later writing. For Martin, writing is never simply the presentation of ideas. It also involves anticipating readers whose responses may differ from those intended by the writer. He acknowledges this possibility when he notes that “there will always be people around who respond to a text in other ways... a range of readings is being facilitated, if not encouraged”. From this perspective, stance becomes a way of guiding interpretation while also negotiating the possibility of divergent uptake.

This is especially relevant to the increase in boosters, particularly markers of certainty, in Martin's later work. He describes such resources as construing the writer as “maximally committed to the value position being advanced”. In our data, their greater prominence suggests a stronger willingness to express positions explicitly and firmly. This is not simply a matter of greater seniority or confidence. It may also reflect a more deliberate commitment to the idea that scholarly authority should be rhetorically enacted rather than left implicit (Gong et al., 2023; Hyland, 2012). His selective use of intensity and extremity boosters points in the same direction. These are not scattered emphatic choices, but seem to function as means of drawing readers towards a shared evaluative orientation.

At the same time, the decline in plausibility hedges also aligns with Martin's theoretical views. He argues that hedging may “contract the dialogic space” when it is overused, limiting rather than enabling productive engagement. In this context, his reduced reliance on modalised qualification appears meaningful. It is consistent with his observation that such forms may work

“towards excluding certain dialogic alternatives from any subsequent communicative interaction or at least towards constraining the scope of these alternatives in the colloquy as it henceforth unfolds”. What we see, then, is not a simple movement from caution to confidence, but a shift towards a more controlled and decisive way of managing disciplinary dialogue.

This does not mean, however, that Martin’s later writing becomes uniformly forceful. His continued use of downtoners suggests a more nuanced rhetorical balance. As he notes, these forms may “indicate a lessening of the speaker/writer’s investment in the value position and hence to offer a conciliatory gesture directed towards maintaining solidarity with those who hold contrary views”. In other words, mitigation remains important, but it appears to serve a strategic rather than habitual function. In the later texts, downtoners seem less like signs of uncertainty than devices for tempering commitment where relational alignment matters.

A similar pattern can be seen in the affective dimension of stance. Martin distinguishes between inscribed attitude, which is more openly personal and emotional, and the more socially ratified or institutionalised forms of evaluation that are often preferred in academic discourse. The corpus data broadly reflect this distinction. Emotional attitude markers become less common, while more assessment-oriented evaluations become more prominent. This pattern is in line with his argument that writers often rely on “institutionalised feelings, which take us out of our everyday common sense world into the uncommon sense worlds of shared community values”. What is being foregrounded here is not personal feeling as such, but evaluation grounded in disciplinary norms and recognisable communal judgements.

The increase in self-mention offers perhaps the most direct point of contact between Martin’s perception and his writing practice. In the later texts, he refers to himself more explicitly, draws more explicitly on personal scholarly experience, and intervenes more visibly in the argument. This is consistent with his view that first-person expressions “constitute an overt intervention into the text by the authorial voice – an interpolation of the authorial presence so as to assert or insist upon the value or warrantability of the proposition”. In this sense, self-mention is not just a marker of presence. It is part of how disciplinary agency is enacted in writing.

Taken together, these correspondences suggest that the development of Martin’s stance should not be attributed only to career progression. It seems,

rather, to reflect an ongoing relationship between writing practice and rhetorical awareness. We are not suggesting that each stance choice was consciously made from his theoretical perspectives. Even so, the convergence between what Martin wrote about evaluation and how he increasingly wrote as a scholar is too striking to ignore. His later authorial identity appears to have been shaped not only by participation in disciplinary discourse, but also by sustained reflection on its interpersonal workings.

These observations are interpretive rather than evidential in a strict sense. They do not give us direct access to Martin's intentions, nor are they meant to prove the corpus findings. They help us situate those findings within a richer account of scholarly development, one in which stance can be seen as both socially learned and reflexively managed. From this perspective, the autoreflexive triangulation adopted here shows how theoretical commitments may inform not only what scholars say about language, but also how they come to write within their field.

5. Discussion

The analysis points to a clear shift in Martin's stance practices over the course of three decades. Most notably, his writing shows less hedging and less overtly emotional evaluation, alongside greater use of certainty boosters and more explicit self-mention. These changes are substantial, but their interpretation is not straightforward. At least two factors seem relevant here. One is the kind of development often associated with a long and successful academic career. The other is Martin's unusual degree of rhetorical awareness, especially his explicit theorisation of evaluation, interpersonal meaning, and authorial positioning. In Martin's case, these two dimensions are unlikely to be separable in any simple way.

5.1. Career progression

One plausible explanation is that the changes reflect a familiar pattern of disciplinary development. Research on academic writing has often suggested that, as scholars become more established, they tend to write with greater authority, firmer commitment, and a more visible authorial presence (Hyland & Jiang, 2026; Qiu & Ma, 2019). Martin's trajectory in this study provides further evidential support to this argument. The movement from more tentative qualification to stronger certainty marking, and from a less visible

to a more explicit authorial voice, indicates that the rhetorical confidence accompanies seniority and professional recognition. The rise in assessment-oriented attitude markers also appears compatible with this account, insofar as it points to a stronger investment in disciplinary rather than personal modes of evaluation.

This interpretation gains some support from the timing of the changes. Martin's decline in hedging broadly coincided with his promotion to professor in 2000, while the sharper increase in self-mention appears alongside his growing prominence as a major figure in SFL during the 2000s and 2010s. We should, of course, be cautious not to treat such temporal correspondences as causal proof. Even so, they suggest that the evolution of his stance may, at least in part, be related to changing institutional position, disciplinary authority, and the rhetorical freedoms that come with them.

5.2. Metalinguistic awareness

At the same time, Martin is not simply a senior academic writer whose style changed with experience. He is also a scholar who has written extensively and influentially about interpersonal meaning itself. This makes his case rather different from the developmental accounts usually offered in the literature. As a leading theorist of appraisal and evaluation, Martin had a particularly sophisticated understanding of the interpersonal consequences of linguistic choice. It is therefore reasonable to assume that his stance practices were shaped not only by accumulated experience, but also by a heightened awareness of how particular rhetorical options position both writer and reader.

The autoreflexive discourse triangulation presented above reveals notable correspondences between Martin's explicit theoretical claims and the patterns observed in his writing. His reduced use of hedging, for instance, concurs with his concern that such devices may "contract dialogic space", while his increased self-mention underpins his view of authorial presence as an "overt intervention" that helps establish the persuasiveness of a proposition. These parallels do not allow us to infer intention in any direct sense. However, they do make it difficult to see the observed changes as merely incidental or entirely unconscious. In Martin's case, rhetorical practice seems at least partly informed by sustained reflection on the interpersonal work of language.

5.3. Towards an integrated account

For this reason, it is viable to see career progression and rhetorical awareness not as rival explanations, but as mutually reinforcing ones. Martin's development as a writer appears to reflect both. Like other experienced scholars, he seems to have grown more assertive, more explicit, and more willing to claim rhetorical space. But in his case, that development may also have been shaped and sharpened by theoretical knowledge of how stance works in discourse. His expertise did not replace the gradual effects of disciplinary socialisation. Rather, it may have made those effects more self-aware, more strategic, and more rhetorically controlled.

Seen in this way, Martin's writing offers a particularly revealing case of how explicit understanding of interpersonal language may interact with long-term scholarly development. Not every academic has this level of reflexive insight into stance, and it would be unwise to generalise too far from a single, highly distinctive figure. Nevertheless, the case suggests that rhetorical awareness can do more than describe writing practice after the fact. Under some conditions, it may also help shape that behaviour, enabling writers to manage commitment, presence, and alignment with greater deliberateness. Martin's trajectory therefore speaks not only to individual development, but also to the broader possibility that explicit knowledge about stance may enrich academic writing as a professional practice.

6. Conclusion

This study has traced the diachronic development of stance in James Martin's published research writing over a period of three decades, focusing on changes in hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. Taken together, the findings point to a clear rhetorical shift. In his later work, Martin writes with greater epistemic confidence and a more explicit authorial presence, while relying less on tentative qualification and overtly affective evaluation. The overall pattern is one of a stronger, more publicly asserted scholarly voice.

Importantly, this development appears to reflect more than career advancement alone. Read in relation to Martin's own theoretical work, the changes also suggest a high degree of metalinguistic awareness of stance as a socially and rhetorically meaningful resource. The correspondences between the corpus patterns and his discussions of evaluation, alignment,

and authorial presence indicate that stance in this case is not merely a matter of style. It is also bound up with scholarly self-positioning and with an explicit understanding of how interpersonal meanings are made in writing.

Methodologically, the study has proposed what we term autoreflexive discourse triangulation, or ADT, as a way of enriching corpus-based interpretation through the writer's own theoretical reflections. In the present case, this approach has allowed us to move beyond a purely descriptive account of change and towards a more situated interpretation of how stance may develop over an academic career. Because the study is based on a single author, it does not aim at broad representativeness. In spite of this, it opens a useful line of inquiry into the relationship between rhetorical development and reflexive awareness of language.

The pedagogical implications of the study should be understood with some care. Martin's trajectory should not be treated as a model to be imitated, nor do the findings suggest that particular stance features can be taught as a formula for academic success. Their value lies, rather, in drawing attention to the developmental nature of stance and to its close relation to scholarly identity, disciplinary authority, and rhetorical judgement. From this perspective, writing pedagogy may benefit less from teaching isolated stance markers than from fostering students' awareness of how such resources position them in relation to knowledge, readers, and disciplinary communities.

For novice writers, this means approaching stance not simply as a checklist of linguistic features, but as part of learning how to participate in academic discourse. Pedagogic work might therefore involve examining how stance operates across stages of an argument, discussing how writers negotiate readers, and encouraging reflection on the relation between rhetorical choice and disciplinary expectation. As students develop, they may become more able to see that their choices do not simply express identity but also help shape it. Such an approach is especially important in contexts where learners are working across linguistic, disciplinary, or cultural boundaries and cannot rely on simplified assumptions about what counts as an appropriate academic voice.

The study also points to the value of more reflexive classroom practices. Students can be invited to compare their own drafts with published texts, identify and annotate stance features, and reflect on what these choices imply about writer positioning. Other productive activities may include small-scale

corpus exploration of student writing, peer discussion focused on stance, and explicit attention to how rhetorical choices vary across disciplinary settings and stages of academic development. The aim is not to prescribe uniform strategies, but to help writers develop the interpretive and rhetorical resources needed to make informed choices in context.

More broadly, the findings reinforce the view that academic writing is a socially situated practice in which rhetorical options are shaped by both individual agency and disciplinary conditions. Stance is part of this process. It develops over time, and its meanings are inseparable from changing relationships to expertise, community, and authority. This is why stance instruction is best understood as developmental rather than prescriptive, and why sensitivity to context remains central, particularly for international scholars entering unfamiliar discourse communities.

In the end, Martin's case offers a distinctive window on the evolution of scholarly voice across a long academic career. His exceptional metalinguistic awareness makes him an unusual but illuminating subject, one whose writing shows how explicit knowledge of interpersonal language may inform rhetorical practice. At the same time, that very distinctiveness limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised. What the study offers, then, is not a universal account of writer development, but a nuanced example of how scholarly identity may be gradually shaped through sustained engagement with disciplinary discourse and through increasing awareness of the rhetorical possibilities of language.

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Appendix. James Martin Corpora

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